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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

The U.S. and The UK's War on the Afghan Opium Industry

**A Critical Evaluation of Anglo-American Counter Narcotics Policies in Afghanistan
2001-2011**

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Award date:
2015

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**THE U.S. AND THE UK'S WAR ON
THE AFGHAN OPIUM INDUSTRY:
A Critical Evaluation of Anglo-American Counter Narcotics
Policies in Afghanistan 2001-2011**

Philip Andrew Berry

JUNE 2015

University of Dundee



CONTENTS

MAPS	5-8
GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS	9
CHAPTER ONE: Introduction	12
CHAPTER TWO: Afghanistan's Historical Legacy And The Growth And Persistence Of The Drug Problem	38
CHAPTER THREE: September 11 And Its Consequences For The Anglo-American Relationship (2001-2002)	78
CHAPTER FOUR: Early Anglo-American Counter Narcotics Policy In Afghanistan (2002-2005)	112
CHAPTER FIVE: Allies At War: The Zenith Of Anglo-American Tension Over Aerial Eradication And The UK Struggles With Its Twin Mission (2006-2008)	163
CHAPTER SIX: A Re-Evaluation Of The Afghan Conflict And Counter Narcotics Strategy Under The Obama Administration And Re-Defined Anglo-American Relations (2009-2011)	219
CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusion	270
BIBLIOGRAPHY	288

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Alan Dobson. His help, patience and friendship throughout this study have been a truly rewarding experience. I will be forever grateful for his supervision and his unwavering commitment to see this study through to completion, when many would not have. That commitment is testament to his academic credentials and his personal character. This study would not be what it is today without his valuable contribution. I would also like to extend my appreciation to everyone in the Politics Department at the University of Dundee.

I would like to thank all of the interviewee's who participated in this research. Without their generous contribution, this research would not have been possible. Several interviewees deserve special thanks for giving up hours of their time to speak with me on more than one occasion. In particular, British official's (5) and (10) have contributed greatly to this research.

I would like to thank my parents for their support throughout this research and the entirety of my academic career. Their support both financial and otherwise has aided me greatly.

Finally, I would like to thank my partner Sasha for her unfaltering love, support and encouragement throughout this study. At times, I have placed an inordinate burden on her, particularly as the research progressed and the finish line appeared far in the distance. I am grateful for her multitudes of comments on (literally) every word I have written and the opportunity to discuss (at length) my ideas. I am very thankful I have been able to share this research and experience with her.

DECLARATION

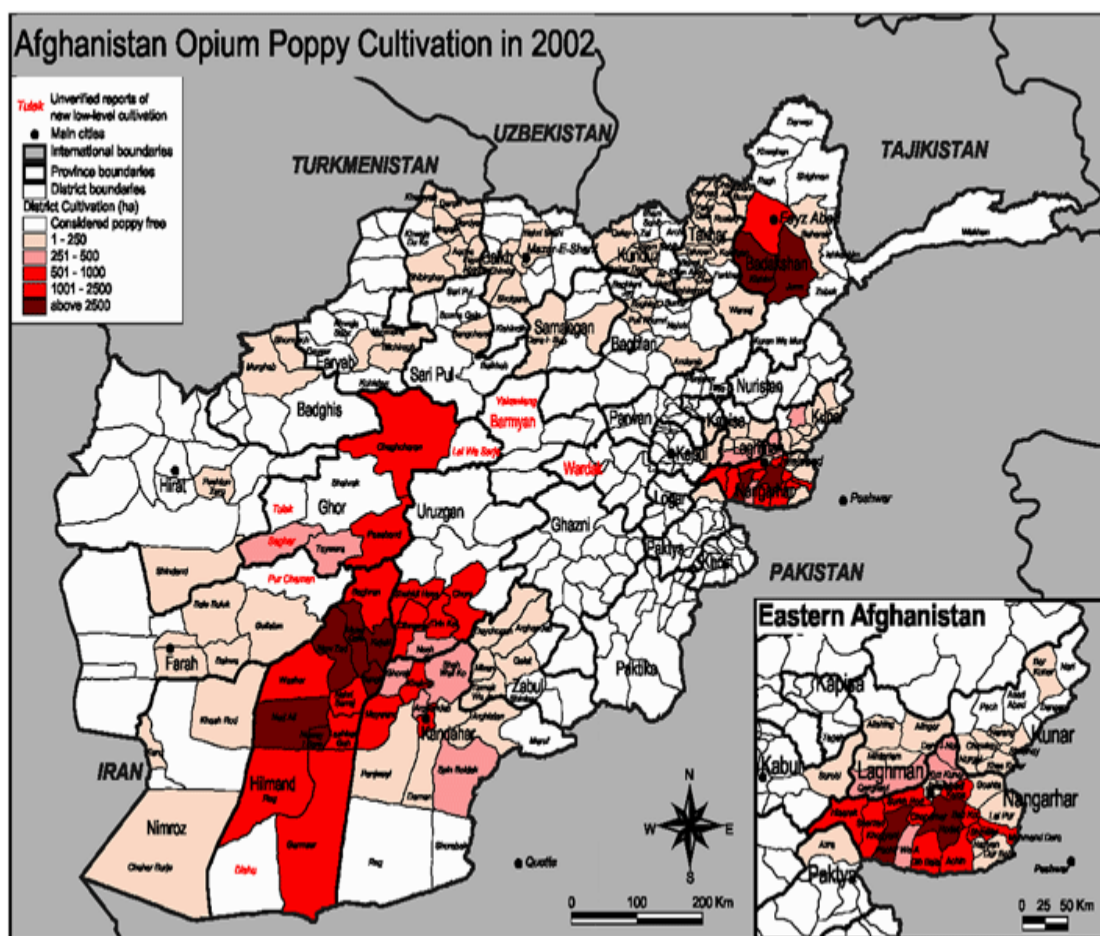
I declare that I am the author of this thesis and that, unless otherwise stated, all references cited have been consulted by me. The work of which this thesis is a record is original. It has not previously been accepted for a higher degree.

SIGNED:

DATE: 30 June 2015

Philip Andrew Berry

MAP A – Afghanistan Opium Poppy Cultivation 2002



Source: Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) (available at <http://www.irinnews.org/images/indepth/Opium/pc2002.gif>)

MAP D – Helmand Province 2010



Source: BBC News (available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/8503428.stm)

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

ADIDU: Afghanistan Drugs Interdepartmental Unit

AEF: Afghanistan Eradication Force

AIA: Afghan Interim Authority

ANA: Afghan National Army

ASNF: Afghan Special Narcotics Force

ANP: Afghan National Police

ANSF: Afghan National Security Forces

BEDT: British Embassy Drugs Team

CEPC: Central Eradication Planning Cell

CJTF: Criminal Justice Task Force

CIA: United States Central Intelligence Agency

CNP-A: Counter-Narcotics Police of Afghanistan

CPEF: Afghan Central Poppy Eradication Force

DEA: Drug Enforcement Administration

DFID: United Kingdom Department for International Development

DOD: United States Department of Defence

DOJ: United States Department of Justice

DOS: United States Department of State

FARC: Revolutionary Armed Forces Colombia

FAST: Foreign Advisory Support Teams

FCO: United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office

GLE: Governor-Led Eradication

GOIRA: Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

GPI: Good Performers Initiative

HMG: Her Majesty's Government

INL: Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement affairs

ISAF: International Security Assistance Force

MCN: Afghanistan Ministry of Counternarcotics

MI6: United Kingdom Secret Intelligence Service

MOD: United Kingdom Ministry of Defence

MOI: Afghanistan Ministry of Interior

MOJ: Afghanistan Ministry of Justice

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NDCS: National Drug Control Strategy

NIU: National Interdiction Unit

NSC: United States National Security Council

ONDCP: United States Office of National Drug Control Policy

PEP: Poppy Elimination Programme

PRT: Provincial Reconstruction Team

SBS: United Kingdom Special Boat Service

UK: United Kingdom

UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

U.S.: United States of America

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written on Anglo-American relations during the most recent Afghan conflict and indeed on the counter narcotics¹ strategies employed by the international community to address opium cultivation since 2001. However, less focus has been dedicated to Anglo-American relations over counter narcotics policies in Afghanistan and the interaction between the partners during the policy-making process. This work provides the first detailed analysis of Anglo-American counter narcotics strategies in Afghanistan and their impact on the special relationship between 2001-2011. Drawing on in-depth interviews with policy practitioners from both sides of the Atlantic, this work traces the complex and at times fraught relationships between British and American policies towards the Afghan drugs trade and the wider objectives and challenges within the international reconstruction of Afghanistan. Charting policy formulation and implementation, this work reveals the competitive cooperation² that characterised Anglo-American prosecution of their counter narcotics strategies and assesses both the degree of bilateral coordination achieved and the extent to which the UK and U.S. synergised their drugs policies with the overall state building project in Afghanistan.

In explaining the key hinge points of policy formulation and implementation a bureaucratic battleground of shifting alliances and conflicting priorities emerge, within the Anglo-American alliance. Complicating matters further, neither

¹ The oxford dictionary defines counter narcotics as ‘measures or activities designed to prevent the use or distribution of illegal narcotic drugs’. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/counternarcotics>. Counter narcotics expert Vanda Felbab-Brown goes further, ‘counter narcotics policies frequently seek to accomplish...the reduction of social harms associated with production, trafficking, and use, such as drug-related violence, corruption, drug-caused mortality, and disease spread’. Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Counternarcotics Policy Overview: Global Trends & Strategies*, (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, October 2008). That is to say, counter narcotics policies encompass a variety of supply-side and demand-side strategies. Supply reduction policies are centered on restricting consumption by either diminishing the volume of narcotics available and inflating prices to decrease demand. The three most prominent supply reduction strategies are: eradication, interdiction, and alternative livelihoods. Demand-side strategies are centered on demand reduction, which focuses on law enforcement, treatment, prevention and harm reduction. Ibid. For the purpose of this study, counter narcotics will denote supply-side strategies (eradication, interdiction, and alternative livelihoods) employed by the United States, United Kingdom and Afghan government’s to prevent the cultivation, distribution and trafficking of illegal narcotics. Notwithstanding, the aforementioned governments did include demand-side strategies in their fight against illegal narcotics but the demand-side strategies were relegated in significance to concentrate on supply-side strategies.

² David Reynolds, *Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937-41: a study in competitive co-operation*, (London, 1981).

government - as is often the case with the policy formulating process - was a unitary actor; instead each government was divided between competing departments pushing their own policies. An important strand of the policy making process in the context of this study is: how individual agencies³ have been able to influence the decision making process to suit their own agendas, whilst at the same time nullifying rival policies. Various actors, on both sides of the Atlantic, emerged as champions of particular policy positions and almost became synonymous with the policies that they advocated. Some actors were more successful than others in winning the policy debate and implementing their strategies. That was due to a variety of reasons including; the actors positions within government, how much support they were able to generate for their policies within government and the wider Anglo-American alliance, and how compatible they were with the international and provincial contexts at the time.

It would be inappropriate to conduct this research by examining counter narcotics policies in a vacuum divorced from the larger strategic priorities of the conflict, owing to the interrelationship between the counter narcotics agenda and the broader military, political and reconstruction landscape. Moreover, the success or failure of the counter narcotics agenda was often used as an indicator of the success or failure of the broader state building programme in Afghanistan.⁴ Counter narcotics as a strategic priority in the Afghan campaign fluctuated up and down the policy agenda throughout the ten-year period this study covers. Periods of increased counter narcotics activity occurred when the aggregated statistics associated with opium cultivation reached record levels, for example in 2004 and 2007. During these periods, the existing counter narcotics policies of the United States and United Kingdom came under criticism from various international actors, which influenced the policy debate in two important ways. Firstly, the entire Afghan state building project was called into question – as high levels of opium cultivation demonstrated (rightly or wrongly) a lack of state and international control over the levers of government.⁵ Secondly, it bolstered the arguments of those advocating an aggressive approach to counter narcotics and made reducing the overall level of opium

³ David Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand: How Drugs and Drugs Policy Shaped Statebuilding in Afghanistan* (Unpublished: 2014), p. 89.

⁴ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*.

⁵ Ibid.

cultivation an immediate political objective. Whilst the strategies advocated by the United States and United Kingdom covered the full spectrum of policy positions present in the international drug control system; broadly speaking, four main positions were advocated in Afghanistan. Law enforcement efforts - predominately but not exclusively – that focus on the physical destruction of the crop, to reduce the total land dedicated to opium cultivation, whilst deterring farmers from engaging in future opium cultivation; targeting the next level up from farmers: drug traffickers - in later years that had ties to the insurgency - through interdiction missions; a focus on rural development to transition farmers away from opium cultivation by providing alternative income streams;⁶ and finally a policy that offered elements of the ‘carrot and the stick’. To fully understand and chart the trajectory of counter narcotics policy formulation and implementation, it is vital to analyse the way in which the Anglo-American allies viewed the problems posed by the Afghan drugs trade, the level of significance they placed on addressing the opium business and more broadly the way in which both allies conceived their respective roles in the post-Taliban Afghanistan.

The way in which the U.S. administration of President George W. Bush originally conceived its mission in Afghanistan was conditioned by a number of factors. Firstly, the administration considered intervention in Afghanistan as the first step in a global ‘war on terror’; under this premise, the United States counterterrorism role in Afghanistan would end immediately after the Taliban and al-Qaeda were defeated. This would be followed by a transition to phase two of the operations: Iraq. Secondly, the Bush administration was ideologically opposed to becoming involved in anything that resembled nation building – let alone counter narcotics. Moreover, the United States drew upon Afghanistan’s history of repelling foreign invaders and cautioned against being drawn into a long and costly war – in the same way the Soviets had been. The administration’s narrow focus, would not only impact upon the United States role in post-Taliban Afghanistan but also upon the United Kingdom’s role. The United Kingdom’s foreign policy was conditioned by Tony Blair’s belief that a close alliance with the U.S. in the ‘war on terror’ would enhance the UK’s international prestige. Additionally, UK foreign policy was also influenced by Tony Blair’s belief in the moral rightness of intervention and concept of international

⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

community; these values and ambitions resulted in the UK volunteering to fight the Afghan drugs trade.

Prior to and during the intervention, several lessons from Afghanistan's past were ignored or misjudged: namely, the continued presence of a weak Afghan central state, a society and economy devastated by decades of war and the difficulty of governance. At no point in history had the Afghan government managed to extend its authority throughout its entire territory, instead it relied on bargaining with local power brokers and patronage as a way of attempting to impose its rule on the tribal areas. Inextricably connected to a weak central state, poor economy and twenty years of conflict was Afghanistan's reliance on the opium industry. The scale of the problem posed by the entrenchment and extent of the drug industry was also ignored and in fact the Taliban's ban that effectively halted opium cultivation the previous year⁷ convinced some within the British government (and international community) that the drug industry could be halted. All of these factors would hinder the effective implementation of successful counter narcotics policies in the post-Taliban era.

The coalition's quick military victory over the Taliban and al-Qaeda left several issues unresolved. Foremost among them was the post-Taliban reconfiguration of Afghanistan and what involvement, if any, the international community would take in confronting the Afghan opium business. Both issues highlighted a divergence of attitudes in the Anglo-American relationship as the UK and U.S. conceived their respective roles in Afghanistan through different prisms. With the Pentagon shaping policy and their attention focused on Iraq, the United States distanced itself from any significant involvement in the counterdrug mission during the initial years of the conflict. The United Kingdom, on the other hand, had

⁷ The Taliban's ban was effective in halting opium production throughout the majority of Afghanistan and gained international recognition as 'successful'. It was judged 'successful' because it significantly reduced the amount of hectares dedicated to poppy cultivation and became seen measure by which other bans would be assessed. Martin Jelsma, 'Learning lessons from the Taliban opium ban', *International Journal of Drug Policy*, No. 16, (March 2005), pp. 98-103. However, for a ban to be considered 'successful', it needs to be conducted in such a way that is both sustainable and takes into account the economic wellbeing of farming communities. A more accurate label of the Taliban's ban is 'effective', that is because, whilst the ban reduced opium cultivation it was not sustainable nor did it address the economic needs of the farmers. The lack of appreciation from Western actors between what constituted a successful or effective ban persisted throughout the Afghan conflict (2001-2014).

entered the Afghan conflict with a different set of objectives and guiding philosophies and viewed counter narcotics as an important and central mission.

Not all departments within the UK government were as convinced as the Prime Minister and his advisors that victory against the drug industry would be achievable – in the short or long term. Nevertheless, the UK designed and implemented the first international counter narcotics policy in Afghanistan and shortly after volunteered to become the lead international nation in the fight against the drug industry. The initial enthusiasm demonstrated by the PM and his advisors was shaped by a misunderstanding of the true nature of the drug industry⁸ and an overly optimistic view on how quickly the UK could defeat it. Complicating matters further was a fledgling central state that could not exert its reach into the provinces, and the fact that the United States dispensed patronage to drug-connected warlords as part of its military strategy.⁹

Unsurprisingly, the UK struggled to contain the drug industry and by 2004 opium cultivation had reached record levels, resulting in questions over the UK counter narcotics efforts and overall state building project in Afghanistan. Relations between the United States and United Kingdom deteriorated badly as the State Department criticised the UK's approach as weak and ineffective and championed a 'Colombian style' solution to the Afghan drugs industry. This period marked the beginning of diplomatic warfare in the Anglo-American alliance over counter narcotics policies. The policy landscape became even more complicated as the Pentagon deliberately derailed the State Department's attempts to introduce aggressive anti-drugs policies. A complex counter narcotics picture emerged which saw the American government split along departmental lines, with the Pentagon disinterested in counter narcotics whilst the State Department championed an aggressive eradication policy - which was based on a policy the U.S had utilised in Colombia. Somewhere in between the State and Defense Departments were officials from the White House and U.S. Embassy in Kabul. A diplomatic battleground ensued as all actors sought to control U.S. involvement in counter narcotics. The UK

⁸ Author Interview with Academic (2), 19 March 2013.

⁹ David Bewley-Taylor, 'Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime in Afghanistan: Corruption, Insecurity and the Challenges of Transition', *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 158, No. 6, (December 2013), p. 10.

government was not always united on the best course of action over counter narcotics either but did not experience the same level of internal friction as their American counterparts. The British experienced more external friction from the State Department as they exerted pressure for the UK to agree to more aggressive strategies. The Afghan government sided with the British over the issue and remained firmly opposed to the introduction of aerial eradication, which epitomised the most aggressive of all strategies.

Another factor complicating Anglo-American counter narcotics policies was the United Kingdom's move into Helmand - as part of the NATO's expansion southwards. Despite stating counter narcotics as a subsidiary reason for assuming responsibility for the province, in reality, an under-resourced British government struggled to maintain their twin mission of stabilisation and counter narcotics. The move into Helmand led to an increase of friction both internally and externally. Internal disputes opened in the UK government as the military were concerned about the effects counter narcotics policies would have on the safety of their troops. Externally, the British government remained under pressure from the State Department and White House over counter narcotics; however, as long as U.S. government remained divided over the issue the State Department was unable to implement a 'Colombian style' policy.

A number of factors coalesced in the 2007/08 planting season that gave the State Department and White House their best opportunity to implement aerial eradication. The autumn of 2007 marked a period of intensive diplomatic action in the Anglo-American alliance as the State Department and White House launched their most aggressive campaign to convince the UK and Afghan governments to agree to aerial eradication. The period was, without doubt, the most fractious period between the allies over counter narcotics as the State Department and White House battled the British, Afghans and Pentagon over the issue.

The Anglo-American relationship modified as the Obama administration assumed office. At the strategic level, the relationship was primarily conducted through both countries Special Representatives Richard Holbrooke and Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, with the President and Prime Minister being less personally invested

in the conflict than their predecessors. American policy in Afghanistan underwent revision as the Obama administration reassessed both strategy and resources. The review impacted both the broader strategic goals for Afghanistan and the counter narcotics campaign. There were also significant changes in the Anglo-American counter narcotics relationship as the United States altered their policies as part of the strategic review process. Whilst disagreement did not vanish completely from the Anglo-American counter narcotics relationship the bitter diplomatic exchanges experienced under the Bush administration dissipated. The period (2009-11) saw a sustained reduction in the levels of opium cultivation, but what was not automatically apparent was if this were the result of a successful counter narcotics strategy, external factors or a combination of both. The British also undertook a review of their priorities and commitments to the conflict as the stabilisation of Helmand became the UK's foremost objective in Afghanistan and United States forces flooded into Helmand.

Significant media and academic space has been dedicated to explaining the relationship between the Afghan drug industry and Taliban, however, it is not the purpose of this study to identify the true nature of the drug-insurgent nexus further than general observations. This is because the relationship between the insurgency and drug industry is complex and varies from region to region and the labelling of actors as 'drug traffickers', 'Taliban', 'insurgent', 'anti-government element', or 'government official' does not necessarily accurately describe the complexity of the situation.¹⁰ That is to say, one can be both a drug trafficker and policeman simultaneously. As Mike Martin comments: 'many officials joined the government, particularly the police...so that they could protect their roles in the opium trade'.¹¹ Likewise, it is not the purpose of this study to identify the true nature of the 'insurgency' or 'Taliban'.¹² The terms, 'insurgency', 'Taliban' and 'anti-government elements' will be used interchangeably throughout this work.

Research Assumptions and Questions

¹⁰ Mike Martin, *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict* (London, 2014), p. 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 246.

¹² For an in-depth account of the changing and misunderstood nature of the insurgency in Helmand province see: Mike Martin, *An Intimate War*.

Questions:

After identifying several gaps in the counter narcotics literature in Afghanistan, several questions have been identified through which to focus this study. The central question this study aims to address is:

1. Why and how were Anglo-American counter narcotics policies formulated and implemented; and what was the policy-making process that underpinned them?

There are a number of subsidiary research questions, which follow on from the central research question:

2. How were the counter narcotics strategies assessed as successful or otherwise by the actors involved?
3. What was the relationship between counter narcotics and the United States' and United Kingdom's broader missions in Afghanistan?
4. How did the policymaking process and counter narcotics more broadly alter, enhance or strain Anglo-American relations?

Research Assumptions

In undertaking this research a number of assumptions were developed. Firstly, that the decisions underpinning counter narcotics policies have been constrained or shaped by the broader strategic objectives for Afghanistan and counter narcotics has at times been used as a measure of success or failure in the state building project.¹³ Moreover, the policymaking process for both the United Kingdom and United States, at every juncture of the conflict, has been shaped by individual agency and consensus in both governments over policy has been elusive – more so for the U.S. than UK government. It is assumed that counter narcotics as a strategic priority, received a greater degree of attention from the United Kingdom government than from the U.S. government. This was in part, due to the reluctance of the Pentagon to become

¹³ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*.

involved in counter narcotics activity and the level of influence the Defense Department exerted over policy formulation. The UK's focus, on counter narcotics stemmed from the high quantities of Afghan heroin found on UK streets and a belief – in the initial years of the conflict – that success in counter narcotics was achievable.

The research assumes that the Anglo-American relationship over counter narcotics was a genuine partnership, with broad consensus on goals and objectives. However, the United Kingdom spent much of the relationship attempting to dilute their American (State Department's) counterpart's policies, in particular on the subject of eradication and attempted to offer a more 'balanced' approach to counter narcotics. This however, was made more difficult when the aggregated statistics associated with opium cultivation reached record levels, which bolstered the arguments of those demanding the implementation of aggressive eradication policies and pushed counter narcotics up the policy agenda. Furthermore, it made a reduction in opium cultivation an immediate political objective. Finally, it is assumed that the Anglo-American relationship over counter narcotics policy formulation and implementation reflected the broader relationship during the conflict: friction in places but characterised by respect and cooperation.

Methodology

In order to address the fundamental question of the research, the study has adopted a historical approach in which to evaluate the empirical evidence. The aim of the study is to generate new knowledge by reconstructing Anglo-American counter narcotics policies in Afghanistan and the decision-making processes that underpinned them. This is not a study that seeks to assess or evaluate types of policy making *per se*. In other words, this study is not assessing the effectiveness of policymaking in the United Kingdom or United States or combined Anglo-American cooperative policymaking. This is not a study of policy making in the abstract. This is empirical work based on historical reconstruction of the policies that were *actually* made in London and Washington and the way the two countries interacted in deploying and revising policies in Afghanistan and how this impacted on the broader Anglo-American relationship. To repeat, this is not specifically a thesis to evaluate different types of policies, but this study is logically a pre-requisite for such an analysis. Until

it is clearly and compellingly determined what actually happened in terms of developing and deploying policies, what is there to evaluate?

This is a traditional qualitative historical reconstruction of policy making and implementation with critical appraisals. It is based on primary sources of an oral documentary kind, which are in the public domain, autobiographical and biographical studies, diaries and interviews supplemented by a wealth of secondary published sources.

As a contemporary history study, the 'gold standard' of documentary evidence would have been government generated evidence produced at the time, for example, a government memorandum, a cabinet paper or memorandum of conversation that was made at the time in a policy meeting. That is not to say that this evidence is without bias but it is difficult to challenge to the accuracy of the evidence. Unfortunately, the methodological limitation of this contemporary history study includes restrictive access to contemporary government documents. Therefore, in a sense, the study has been conducted utilizing limited research tools. The next best available evidence was oral evidence from central actors involved in the counter narcotics policy formulation and implementation process within Afghanistan. Whilst oral testimony is not the 'gold standard' of historical evidence, expert opinion is of great value to any research and provides a first-hand account of the events from those involved.

Key actors within this field were identified through systemically searching numerous sources, such as: House of Commons Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons Committee Reports, State Department and INL reports, United States Congressional Committee Reports, UNODC reports, International Security Assistance Force reports, WikiLeaks Cables, political biographies, notable monographs, Politics and International Relations and History journal articles, quality newspaper articles, internet searches and referrals from other interviewees. Once key individuals were identified, contact was attempted through their LinkedIn profiles or email address to arrange an interview.

The primary research is centered on 37 research interviews with distinguished experts on Afghanistan and policy practitioners who were directly involved in the counter narcotics policymaking or implementation process. Because these sources were senior government, intergovernmental, military and diplomatic officials it has

not been possible to assign explicit authorship of the citations in this study. The interviewees came from a range of political, diplomatic, military and academic backgrounds, including: The United Kingdom Foreign Office, the United Kingdom Embassy in Kabul, the United Kingdom Afghan Drugs Interdepartmental Unit, the United Kingdom Department of Health, The United Kingdom Armed Forces, the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team, the United States Department of State, the United States Department of Defense, the United States Embassy in Kabul, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, The United States Armed Forces, the International Security Assistance Force, the United Nations Office on Drugs Crime and various Academic Institutions. The interviews have been anonymised to offer protection to those who are currently still serving in the aforementioned governments and organisations. All interviewees are categorised by nationality/organisation/affiliation and represented by a reference code.

However, this method of evidence gathering presented several difficulties. Testimony elicited from interviews, by its very nature, is retrospective and that can present key methodological challenges. Recall bias can be introduced as interviewees may recall events inaccurately or may be deliberately deceptive with a view to justifying their own motives and actions. Therefore, it is vital to attain corroboration from at least two sources to verify the information as accurate. As such all interview material garnered from key actors has been cross-referenced for corroboration with at least two other interview materials, or documentary sources. Where direct corroboration was not possible then best judgment has been used on the basis of levels of compatibility with the major lines of interpretation based on other sources.

Another methodological challenge has been access to key actors due to a lack of contact details or actors being unresponsive after initial contact. This lack of access was particularly pronounced with Afghan governmental figures. Numerous Afghan actors were contacted over a three-year period through a variety of methods but most refused to respond. This lack of access to Afghan actors (and more generally to all actors identified) was detrimental to the research, in as much, as primary evidence could not be collected from the Afghan perspective to provide a unique interpretation of the complex British, American and Afghan policymaking triangle. This was of particular importance because – even though the main thrust of the study is an examination of Anglo-American counter narcotics policies - the Afghan's were not

passive actors within the policymaking process and did hold sway over key decisions. Thus, with an absence of primary evidence from Afghan actors a full appreciation of the decision-making process was problematic. To circumvent this lack of primary evidence, information was gathered from WikiLeaks cables or secondary sources.

Structure

This study follows a chronological structure to provide a clear development of the policymaking process in the order that the events occurred. There will, however, be issues organised thematically to provide analytical depth. The study is structured into seven chapters, including the introduction.

The chosen period under study (2001-2011) was selected for several reasons. In the embryonic phase of research, the period under consideration was from 2003-2013 in order to evaluate the successfulness of the United Kingdom's stated timeframe to eliminate the cultivation and production of opium from Afghanistan. However, it would have been erroneous not to study the initial two years (2001-2002) of the conflict given the importance of that period to early British counter narcotics efforts. Furthermore, the period served to highlight the commitment of both the United Kingdom and United States to the overall reconstruction of Afghanistan and by extension counter narcotics policies. The decision was then taken to conclude the chosen period of study in 2011 for one important reason. By 2007, there was a realization by the British government that their initial timeframe to eliminate opium cultivation and production (2003-2013) was forlorn and that there was an acceptance to abandon the initial timeframe as it would take a generation for a successful counter narcotics programme to prosper. Consequently, United Kingdom relinquished their role as G8 'partner nation' to the UNODC in 2011. A subsidiary factor for terminating the study in 2011 was by the summer of that year, the Obama administration's 'surge' of troops was ending. This was significant to the study because the 'surge' policy helped to create in the conditions in which a reduction in opium cultivation could be maintained. Therefore, once the 'surge' policy began to end, any gains that the international community had made on counter narcotics over the previous two years diminished.

The study seeks to address the formulation and implementation of Anglo-American counter narcotics policies and the relationship between the allies during this process. However, to assess this effectively counter narcotics policies cannot be examined in a vacuum. Instead, the study provides an examination of broader Anglo-American relations throughout the duration of the study period (2001-2011). Several motivations have guided this research decision. Firstly, counter narcotics policy was inextricably intertwined with the overall military and reconstruction agenda, and as such, these agendas have impacted and shaped counter narcotics policy. Two examples illustrate this assertion; the reluctance of the United States to tackle the opium industry during the initial years of the intervention – due to a lack of resources, connection to drug-linked warlords and the belief this was not *their* problem - resulted in counter narcotics being relegated to a second order concern. On the other hand, after the Pentagon recognized a link between the insurgency and drug industry after 2008, counter narcotics interdiction missions were elevated as a key policy and incorporated into the overall military agenda. Given the synergy of these agendas it is important to examine both counter narcotics within the broader reconstruction and conflict framework.

Likewise, any discussion of Anglo-American counter narcotics policies needs to be framed within a larger discussion of broader Anglo-American relations. Firstly, if the study requires an examination of broader policies to effectively evaluate counter narcotics policy, it is logical that the broader policies are examined through an Anglo-American relations approach. Secondly, broader Anglo-American relations provide a model on which to evaluate the counter narcotics relationship. The partnership was genuine, although not equal; the United Kingdom's key aim was to influence American policy, although at times, this was not always achieved. American policymakers could not dictate policy to the British in absolute terms, as the British were engaged actors in the process. Both allies, broadly speaking, agreed on the larger direction of strategy. British and American officials maintained close contact, especially 'on the ground'. On the other hand, the policymaking process was competitive and prone to infighting. Disagreement was commonplace over means and methods. The implementation of policy suffered as a result of this division and lack of coherence. A key difference in the approach of the partners is highlighted: the American military, much in the same way as the American drug agencies, were

aggressive in their approach and favored strong action that would send a signal of intent; the UK, however, provided a more balanced approach opting to operate with political consent of the Afghans.

Furthermore, not only can the wider relationship provide context for Anglo-American counter narcotics policies, the counter narcotics relationship serves to provide a useful indication of the health of the overall partnership. That being said, a key difference between the broader military and counter narcotics relationship is evident. The United States was the dominant policy practitioner and international ‘lead nation’ on military affairs and, consequently British influence was limited. However, by virtue of the fact that the UK held international ‘lead nation’ on counter narcotics they were – in theory at least – the dominant actor on counter narcotics issues. Despite having ‘lead nation’ status the U.S still held considerable – but not dominant – sway over the policies. Therefore, on military affairs the United States was the dominant actor but on counter narcotics in theory at least the roles were reversed. This led to complications.

Historiography/Literature Review

Whilst academic literature, newspapers articles and media sources are plentiful on counter narcotics in Afghanistan, there is however, a paucity of research dedicated to evaluating Anglo-American counter narcotics policies. The key academic texts already devoted to counter narcotics in Afghanistan are drawn from a variety of multidisciplinary fields such as: history, geography, anthropology, politics and development.

David Mansfield’s¹⁴ work provides the seminal account of opium cultivation in Afghanistan and subsequent counter narcotics strategies, employed by both internal and external actors, over the past 20 years. David Mansfield is considered by many¹⁵ to be the pre-eminent expert on counter narcotics by occupying a unique position as an academic field researcher and former counter narcotics official. The study

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The vast majority of interviewees who kindly participated in this research indicated that Dr. David Mansfield’s knowledge of the Afghan opium industry was unsurpassed.

questions the validity of the conventional wisdom regarding the opium industry and challenges several accepted 'truths', and preconceived policy positions, which have been used by the international community to justify counter narcotics policy standpoints. Building on twenty years of consecutive fieldwork in rural communities, the study focuses on the conditions in which opium bans are employed and maintained, the complex and varied affects on rural communities and the affect the bans have had on the international community's state building and counter narcotics agendas. The empirical research is centered on four cases studies in which, opium bans were implemented by the Taliban and the Karzai governments (Helmand, 2000/01, Nangarhar 2004/05, Nangarhar 2007/08 and Helmand 2008/11). The work charts the unique domestic, international, political and economic conditions, in which, each ban was imposed and the unique response by each rural community.

A key thread of the work explores the historical weakness of the central state and its relationship with the rural population. This relationship is pivotal to the ability of national and international actors to implement counter narcotics strategies. The work positions opium bans not simply as a function of state coercion imposed on rural communities but a bargaining process that is subject to fluctuating socio-economic and geographical conditions involving a variety of actors from a wide range of 'local, sub national, national and international actors', with diverse agendas.¹⁶ In this regard, far from the perceived wisdom, farmers are not passive actors but are involved in complex negotiations with rural elites and the state and can affect the breakdown of a ban. Complicating matters, bans are subject to external influences and are often shaped by the political agenda of the international community. Just as opium cultivation provides diverse benefits to diverse communities, the negative (and positive) effects of opium bans are not uniform across all districts and regions

Working for the UNODC and UK government (as a civil servant then consultant) has given Mansfield an opportunity to witness first-hand and participate in the counter narcotics policy formulating process. This is of particular importance in framing both British and American approaches to the illegal narcotics trade, especially the issue of forced eradication. The position Mansfield adopts - as detailed

¹⁶ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 27.

later in this study - is of the State Department's desire to pursue an ultra aggressive stance towards eradication with the aim of implementing a Colombian style eradication programme. Again, crossover references occur when Mansfield concludes that the counter narcotics agenda was heavily shaped by the metrics of opium cultivation. As the levels of opium cultivation increased so did the call by many within the U.S. administration to introduce more aggressive policies; namely aerial eradication (2004 and 2007). This resulted in discord in the upper echelons of the Anglo-American alliance. The work of the present thesis builds on Mansfield's work but extends the analysis of the friction, he identifies with particular emphasis on how this issue played out in the UK government.

In addition to the new empirical research Mansfield generated before 2009, his work after the Obama administration assumed office is also important. He found that the new administration's 'surge' in Helmand province, amongst an array of other factors contributed to the successful reduction of opium cultivation.

Considered a pre-eminent expert on opium cultivation, Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy¹⁷ traces the history of opium cultivation in Asia, specifically in the Golden Triangle region – Burma, Laos and Thailand – and Golden Crescent region– Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. The well thought-out and intelligent research seeks to assess the political economy of illicit drugs and more importantly why drug suppression strategies, particularly those associated with American's 'war on drugs' have failed.

As part of his historical analysis, Chouvy points to the symbolic relationship between opium cultivation and warfare and concludes that warfare exacerbates opium cultivation as: 'opium production never thrives better than when war and poverty overlap'.¹⁸ He further argues, that opium farmers are not motivated by financial gain but to negate the desperate socio-economic conditions they occupy. This key argument is significant as it contradicts the position taken by many within the State Department and UNODC that farmers engaged in opium cultivation through *greed not need*.

¹⁷ Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, *Opium: Uncovering the Politics of the Poppy* (London, 2009).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.xiv.

The work overlaps with this study through Chouvy's examination of the United States, 'war on drugs' and their utilization of forced eradication as a key weapon in their counter narcotics arsenal. Chouvy criticizes this policy's effectiveness and productivity in creating sustainable reductions in opium cultivation unless used as one tool in a comprehensive package to address the economic necessities of opium cultivation. Additionally, Chouvy identifies the American insistence on eradication irrespective of whether or not alternative development strategies are in place. Implicit in this view is that drug cultivation is illegal; therefore, it must be treated as a law enforcement issue and punished accordingly. That policy preference took priority over critically examining the reasons forcing farmers to grow opium and reserving punishment for those who continued to grow opium when alternative livelihoods were present. This strand of narrative is important as this study demonstrates in a way other authors have not. In broad terms it was the difference between the United States and United Kingdom's approach to eradication.

Furthermore, another issue, which is of great significance to this research, is the way in which the United States transplanted officials and an aggressive quasi-military approach to opium cultivation from Colombia. Chouvy correctly notes that policies derived from this were prevented from being adopted because of stiff resistance from the Afghan government and Pentagon. However, his research fails to demonstrate the role that the United Kingdom played in countering the United States push for aerial eradication. There were years of friction in the Anglo-American alliance over this issue. Additionally, there is scant reference to the United Kingdom's role as G8 'lead nation' on counter narcotics or their interaction as one of the chief counter narcotics policymakers.

Chouvy's work seeks to move beyond such broad analysis of the opium industry in Afghanistan and the prevalence of the State Department's master narrative of drug-insurgency nexus by unpicking at great length, terms that have spread into common usage perpetuated by the media and to some extent American drug officials but lack clear indication of their real meaning. For example, Chouvy questions rather than accepts the term 'narco-terrorist' in the context of Afghanistan. While Chouvy argues that a financial link between the insurgency and drug traffickers exists – after

all in a permissive conflict zone it is only logical to assume that illegal proceeds fund an insurgency – he avoids sweeping generalizations regarding how much money the Taliban derive from the drug industry or indeed any convergence between the insurgency and drug traffickers as one organization.¹⁹ The work of the present thesis develops these themes and positions them within the broader framework of the State Department’s experience in Colombia.

Vanda Felbab-Brown’s study seeks to explore and understand the relationship between the insurgency and drug trade in Afghanistan. A counter narcotics expert, she provides solid analysis that does not sensationalize the topic but provides a new understanding of the relationship between poppy growers and the insurgency.²⁰ In her explanation of this relationship, Felbab-Brown highlights an insurgency sympathetic to the population’s needs – far from claiming the insurgency enforced poppy farmers to cultivate poppy, she highlighted that in fact the insurgency helped to protect poppy fields to win the support from the local population. Furthermore, the work moves beyond the frequently reported assertions that the Taliban were funded by the opium industry to detail that drugs contributed only one aspect of the Taliban’s funding structure and other funding sources provided substantial revenues.

This ‘false theory’ that the Taliban derive substantial funds from the drugs trade has served as a basis of counter narcotics strategies aimed to bankrupt the Taliban through cutting off their source of drug money. The main method employed to achieve this object is the implementation of forced eradication. However, Felbab-Brown, argues convincingly that not only are the insurgents not bankrupted – because of their multiple income streams– political capital is lost between the state and population at the same time as political capital increases with the population and insurgents. Felbab-Brown offers an alternative policy choice: the abandonment of eradication for interdiction of major drug traffickers or what she calls a ‘*laissez-faire*’ approach to drug cultivation.

The work provides, a detailed account of the implementation of the first counter narcotics policy within post-Taliban Afghanistan – compensated eradication.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.122.

²⁰ Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs* (Washington, 2010).

However, the account primarily focuses on the failing of the scheme during the implementation phase – due to corruption, mismanagement, poor implementation and popular unrest. The analysis would have been strengthened from a discussion of policymaking process, which led to the implementation of the scheme; such as who suggested the scheme, why was it suggested, what other options were explored and the internal friction over the scheme. The lack of detail is symptomatic of a broader omission of thorough analysis of the British as key actors. Furthermore, there is a lack of detail covering Anglo-American friction over aerial eradication from 2004-2008, with the bulk of the material on this topic relegated to a footnote, something this thesis corrects.

A key aim of Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles work is to provide a better understanding of the British policymaking process in Afghanistan.²¹ The work provides an important primary account of the formulation and implementation of British policies in Afghanistan. Whilst the book examines British involvement in its broadest sense, given the importance of counter narcotics policies within that there is excellent material on Anglo-American counter narcotics policies and the interaction with American officials over this subject. Recounting one of his first briefings with the Embassy's senior intelligence official Ambassador Cowper-Coles reveals he was instructed that his most important task was not the cultivation of a good relationship with President Karzai but 'your key relationship will be with the American Ambassador. He matters most to us'.²² This statement provides further context to what the British government considered their most important priority during the conflict: chiefly maintaining the 'special relationship'. Ambassador Cowper-Coles first interaction with his American counter part, Ambassador William Wood, set the scene for his first year in office, pressure to accede to U.S. demands over the opium industry. Ambassador Wood, a veteran of America's campaign against drugs in Colombia wanted to replicate the approach in Afghanistan and expected '[Cowper-Coles] to swing HMG behind such an approach'.²³ The meeting encapsulated the growing pressure State Department officials placed on the British government to

²¹ Sherard Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul: The Inside Story of the West's Afghanistan's Campaign*, (London, 2011)

²² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

agree to aerial eradication. The three years that this was a live issue represented the zenith of Anglo-American discord.

Of great significance is the revelation that at the height of tensions over aerial spraying the Prime Minister's office attempted to direct the Kabul Embassy to some form of aerial eradication, 'as the debate raged back and forth, with pressure from 10 Downing Street for us to agree to some spraying'.²⁴ Interestingly, this information contradicts the hitherto theory that all members of the British government were opposed to aerial eradication. Two key issues emerge from this: firstly, that the material on the British counter narcotics policymaking process is underdeveloped and requires further examination to detail its complexities. Secondly - and perhaps obviously - that the British government was not a unitary actor over counter narcotics but mirrored the U.S. government where individual agency and competition – albeit to a lesser extent – was prevalent in policy formulation.

The work touches on the changing nature of the Anglo-American counter narcotics relationship under the Obama administration, but fails to provide sufficient detail to elicit a full understanding of the relationship. However, a broader overview of Anglo-American relations can be gleaned from Cowper-Coles wider relationship with Richard Holbrooke. From the account the Ambassador had great difficulty influencing Holbrooke's thinking or the direction of American policy. This reflected a greater problem of the British government failing to influence the Obama administration despite having access to decision makers and the decision making process. The present thesis provides a broader and more compelling account of these inter-allied problems.

In addition to the fine, though incomplete, scholarship discussed above, there are also a number of studies that have acquired considerable credibility, but need to be either critically deconstructed or substantially amended by new scholarship.

Gretchen Peters' work provides an account of the intertwined relationship between the Afghan insurgency and drug industry and argues that both are now

²⁴ Ibid., p. 84.

inseparable.²⁵ The first chapter of the book titled: ‘The New Axis of Evil’, a play on the Bush administration’s list of ‘rogue nations’ (that aided terrorism and sought weapons of mass destruction) seems quite fitting because it contains as much critical analysis as the Bush administration’s list of ‘rogue nations’. The main thrust of the book contends that the Taliban, al-Qaeda and drug traffickers are synonymous with each other and work in conjunction to transport drugs and weapons throughout the country and beyond. Peters cites several anecdotal examples to demonstrate the links and casual relationship between the two organizations, ‘the two circumstances are co-dependent: the insurgency is exploding precisely because the opium trade is booming’.²⁶

This overly simplistic view is confused. It is correct that there is evidence to suggest that the Taliban and insurgency participate in the drugs trade but the true nature of the relationship is unclear. The insurgency does not have a uniform relationship with the drugs industry throughout Afghanistan; instead it is a localized phenomenon with different commanders involved to varying extents. For example, some commanders may only take a percentage of drugs that pass through their province whereas others may be directly involved in the drugs trade. Although conceding these are only estimates and as such robust conclusions cannot be drawn, Peters presents anecdotal evidence that drugs are a significant source of funding for the insurgency and make up 70 per cent of their revenue.²⁷ Building on this assertion Peters connects drug money and terrorism throughout Europe, ‘there is a blurring of distinction between terrorist and criminal. They may not share the same values...but they are fellow travellers in the underworld, locked in an increasingly symbiotic relationship’.²⁸

The work’s central argument is that the ‘Taliban has undergone a metamorphosis’ into an Afghan version of FARC because of their reliance on drug money and replacing ideology and war aims with drug concerns, ‘today’s battles are more often diversionary attacks to protect big drug shipments, rather than campaigns

²⁵ Gretchen Peters, *Seeds of Terror: How Heroin is Bankrolling the Taliban and al Qaeda* (Oxford, 2009).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

for strategic territorial gain'.²⁹ Peters suggests one key way to defeating the Taliban is to cut off drug funds. This argument feeds into the narrative developed by the right-wing drug warrior's in the State Department who claim that parallels between the Afghan and Colombian drug-terrorist nexus exist. And the only way to defeat this nexus is exporting the hard-line Colombian model of aerial eradication. This view is not grounded in evidence and fundamentally fails to appreciate the complexities of the situation in Afghanistan and lacks comparators between the two countries. There are other inconsistencies with Peters' analysis of the drug-insurgency-population relationship. The work claims that the insurgency threatens the rural population to cultivate opium poppy.³⁰ However, this claim has no material substance or evidence to support it and does not acknowledge the political capital the insurgency gains by supporting poppy growers against the state.

Rajiv Chandrasekaran's work, as the title suggests, focuses on the United States' involvement in Helmand province (once dubbed 'Little America' because of American development in the province during the 1950s) under the Obama administration.³¹ The work provides a worthwhile account of the policymaking process and divisions within the administration over President Obama's new strategies for Afghanistan.

The work does provide details of Anglo-American friction after the influx of American troops to Helmand after 2009. It examines the discord over the changing balance of power as U.S. Marines made up the largest segment of coalition troops in the province. It also notes differences in military strategies, resource management and willingness of both parties to contribute to the war effort. Chandrasekaran concludes that 'the surge' was successful in the areas that it was able to deploy large numbers of troops, for example, Helmand province. However, the gains made in the south were negated by deterioration in other parts of the country that did not have an influx of troops.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

³¹ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, *Little America: The War Within the War for Afghanistan* (London, 2012).

Less convincingly, the work charts the change of counter narcotics strategies under the new administration and the instrumental role Special Representative Holbrooke played in the formulation and implementation of these. A substantial section is dedicated to the increase in agricultural assistance advocated by Holbrooke and the positive and negative impact that had on rural society. Chandrasekaran is critical of many of USAID initiatives seeing them as ill conceived and poorly implemented and not reflecting the complexities of the drivers of opium cultivation. He concludes the projects, on the most part, were a waste of money, where the guiding principle was to throw as much money as possible at the problem³² regardless if they benefited society and distorted local economies. The work comments on Holbrooke's opposition to widespread eradication and its subsequent defunding as a central element of U.S. strategy. However, the work fails to detail the policymaking process that underpinned this decision or how this was received in the U.S. government or wider Anglo-American alliance. This deserved more attention considering the divisive nature of eradication as a policy option over the previous four years.

The work of David MacDonald provides an excellent overview of the prevalence of illegal narcotic cultivation and consumption in Afghanistan.³³ MacDonald, a former UNDOC official and demand reduction specialist spent several years in Afghanistan and produced what was to date the most informative book on illegal narcotics. At the date of publication, few monographs on drug cultivation and consumption were available and in his work MacDonald seeks to address the dearth of reliable information on drug cultivation and consumption but on Afghanistan. He argues that myth and rumor are used as a substitute for empirical evidence. This, according to MacDonald, has hampered the formulation of effective policies in the post-2001 era. The book aims move pass these unreliable forms of evidence and shed light on, what is, a taboo subject in a conservative Muslim country.

A section of the book is dedicated to the historical role of illegal narcotics, which MacDonald uses as a way to inform the current prevalence of narcotics in

³² Ibid., p. 108.

³³ David Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan: opium, outlaws and scorpion tales* (London, 2007).

Afghan society. The book briefly charts the history of opium from the time of Alexander the Great to second half of the twentieth century. Then MacDonald explores the impact those decades of continuous conflict - from the time of the Soviet intervention to the current Western intervention post-2001 - has had on the growth of the opium industry. The work covers a variety of topics related to the opium industry in Afghanistan including; warlords and drug traffickers involved in the opium industry, the policies pursued by the western governments post-2001 to curb the illegal narcotics business and an examination of the drivers that encourage farmers to plant opium poppy.

A central thrust of the book examines the impact drug use has had on Afghan society and the plight of drug users in Afghanistan; from its use as traditional medicine to the impoverished communities in the north who used opium as a coping strategy against the harsh realities of life to an explosion in drug use by those affected by decades of conflict and economic hardship. Whilst this work on drug use and demand-side policies is commendable, it is often the forgotten element of the U.S.'s and UK's counter narcotics campaign in Afghanistan. Other than general observations, the book lacks any detailed analysis of the counter narcotics policies or the policymaking process that underpinned post-2001.

In summation, the key limitations of the existing literature are that it does not address the Anglo-American counter narcotics relationship in sufficient detail, nor does it provide an adequate account of British counter narcotics policies.

In regards to contribution to the counter narcotics literature in Afghanistan, this study provides new insight and generates new knowledge of Anglo-American counter narcotics policies, the frictions they occasioned and the decision-making process that underpinned them. An integral part of that explanatory analysis is also a more comprehensive account of the details of the development of British narcotics policies. Building on the limited work of previous scholars, filling the gap in the literature about British counter narcotics policies was a weighty endeavour for two reasons. Foremost, the United Kingdom led the international community's fight against illegal narcotics in Afghanistan from 2001-2011 and as such, the limited academic literature dedicated to their role as G8 'lead nation' requires expansion. The

decision-making process that underpinned key policies remained under-researched; namely, compensated eradication (2002); the decision-making process that led to the UK being appointed ‘G8 lead nation’ (2002); and the transition of the UK’s role a ‘partner nation’ to the UNODC (2011). Furthermore, the study provides unique coverage of Anglo-American discord over aerial eradication (2004-2008). This issue has been covered by many academic and media reports over course of the conflict; however, no research has provided in-depth analysis of events from policy makers on both sides of the Atlantic within the context of their wider special relationship.

Not only does this work provide an important contribution to the existing counter narcotics literature and has broadened the scope of enquiry regarding Anglo-American counter narcotics strategies and the decision-making process that underpinned them. More generally, the study is an important document of one of the defining events of the 21st century: the conflict in Afghanistan. The work provides important context to what was the United States longest military engagement and a war that cost the U.S. taxpayer in excess of \$1 trillion.³⁴ Moreover, the work details the involvement of the second largest contributor of troops to the conflict, the United Kingdom. The Afghan conflict had significant financial - at least £37 billion³⁵ and human costs for the UK with 454 British personnel dead.³⁶

³⁴ Dyer, Geoff and Sorvino, Chloe, ‘\$1tn cost of longest US war hastens retreat from military intervention’, *The Financial Times*, 14 December 2014.

³⁵ Norton-Taylor, Richard, ‘Afghanistan war has cost Britain more than £37bn, new book claims’, *The Guardian*, 30 May 2013.

³⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/fields-of-operation/afghanistan>.

CHAPTER TWO

Afghanistan's Historical Legacy And the Growth and Persistence of the Drug Problem

INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan's recent historical context provided the Bush administration with a blueprint on which to base its intervention, namely, and above all, operating a light-footprint approach in order to avoid the mistakes the Soviet Union committed – the most damning of which was being drawn into a long and costly war. The U.S. did not wish to repeat its own Vietnam experience. Unfortunately, as the U.S. discovered, the light-footprint approach in and of itself carried its own dangers. Dangers that might have been avoided but the Bush administration failed to learn other valuable lessons from Afghanistan's history³⁷ such as difficulties arising in the absence of a central state, the indigenous problems of governance and the importance of local politics and power structures – making Afghanistan one of the most complex and divided political systems in the world. What successive interventions, from the British in the nineteenth to the Soviet Union's in the twentieth century, had demonstrated was: the key to success in Afghanistan lay not in military victory but in achieving a political victory of governability and that would not necessarily be achieved by a light-footprint approach.³⁸ Achieving this was complicated by the Afghan state's historically fragmented nature, its ethnic and tribal diversity, and its inability to extend its writ throughout the country, a fact that exacerbated a long-standing tension between the centre and periphery.³⁹ Inextricably tied to the failure of the state to extend its authority into the provinces and its economic weakness was the embedded nature of the opium industry in Afghanistan. Opium cultivation there has a long history but it was not until the virtual disintegration of the state in the latter decades of the twentieth century that it would become entrenched and an important factor in the Afghan economy.

It is the aim of this chapter to draw upon Afghanistan's political past to illustrate the unique political and social conditions, which culminated in a weak central state and the rudimentary nature of governance in the twentieth century. An examination of the continuous warfare that took place in the latter half of the

³⁷ Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, *Afghanistan: How the West Lost its Way* (New Haven, 2011) p. 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁹ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 131.

twentieth century will be considered, in order to evaluate the impact of the Soviet intervention, the civil war and the Taliban period on the further erosion of the state and its economic viability. The chapter will also assess the history of opium production in Afghanistan, in particular by examining the factors that led Afghanistan to become a major opium producing country, the relationship between the consolidation of the opium industry and a weak central state, and the impact of thirty years of war and economic stagnation. The section will conclude with an assessment of the Taliban's relationship with the opium industry and the opium ban it imposed in 2000. All of the above-mentioned factors not only proved problematic for the light-footprint approach but also made any Anglo-American attempts at state building an extremely precarious and difficult proposition -- and in particular constrained American and British efforts to implement successful counter narcotics policies.

THE LEGACY OF A WEAK CENTRAL STATE

The beginnings of what was to become modern day Afghanistan can be traced back to the emergence of the Durrani Empire in the second half of the 18th century with its leader Ahmad Shah as the first monarch of the Afghan people.⁴⁰ Although the Durrani Empire collapsed in 1818 Ahmad Shah's descendants remained in power, in one form or another, for the next two hundred years.⁴¹ Shah's successors were in a precarious position, as civil war was a recurrent theme after his death and they had to sustain an imperial governmental organisation on a minimal tax structure.⁴² During the 1800s Afghanistan became the frontline between a military standoff between the two competing imperialist empires of Britain and Russia, which led Afghanistan to become a buffer zone separating the British Indian Empire in the east and the Russian held Central Asian lands to the north. Christened the 'Great Game' both empires sought to exert and maintain influence in Afghanistan for the best part of the nineteenth century culminating in the British invasion of Afghanistan during the wars of 1839-42 and 1878-80.

⁴⁰ Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* (London, 2004), p. 19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴² Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, pp. 12-13.

Assuming power in 1880, Amir Abdur Rahman launched a modernising policy, which would attempt to unite Afghanistan and consolidate the authority of the royal family. In order to achieve his goals, Abdur Rahman restructured the military apparatus relying on foreign technological advancements and brutally quashed opposition, killing an estimated 120,000 Afghans.⁴³ One of the most repressed sections of Afghan society under his rule were ethnic minorities, with extensive forced resettlement schemes implemented often against non-Pashtun minorities in the centre and north of Afghanistan. Abdur's modernising campaign, which included the creation of several manufacturing plants, failed to have the required impact because of the lack of capability and resource-weakness of the state.⁴⁴ It was during Amir Abdur Rahman's tenure that the Afghan state would be permanently destabilised by Britain's imperial interests and that would have implications that would weaken Afghan governments' attempts to create a viable state right down to the present.

The second Anglo-Afghan war, launched after British envoy Sir Neville Chamberlain was refused entry to Afghanistan, resulted in British India gaining control over Afghan fiscal, defence and foreign policies; and the demarcation of the 'Durand Line' established in 1893. The Durand Line, named after British Indian Foreign Secretary, Sir Mortimer Durand, demarcated the border between Afghanistan and British India⁴⁵ (later to become the Afghan-Pakistan border). In an attempt to prevent the Russian and British empires from meeting territorially, the British created the Wakhan corridor, a long narrow piece of land in north-eastern Afghanistan that would act as a buffer between the two empires. It was with this premise in mind that the Durand line was formed.⁴⁶ The land running along eastern Afghanistan was not the 'result of local physical, ethnic and political realities'⁴⁷ but an artificial construction which divided Pashtun tribes into two and to this day is a source of tension between Afghanistan and Pakistan and has allowed anti-government elements to destabilise the Afghan and Pakistan states. The porous border has provided both Afghan refugees and anti-government elements, since the Soviet intervention, access to sanctuary in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and in many

⁴³ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, p. 28.

⁴⁶ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p.14.

⁴⁷ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 21.

cases has proven to be the training ground for future insurgents.⁴⁸ The majority of Pashtuns within the region still fail to recognise the border. The century old border dispute typifies the complex ethnic situation in Afghanistan as Husain Haqqani Pakistan's ambassador to Washington explains: 'Pashtuns consider it their own land even though there is also a loyalty to the respective states along with a desire to freely move back and forth.'⁴⁹ Author David MacDonald concludes: 'this situation has undoubtedly facilitated the development of the cross-border drug trafficking network based on close tribal and family ties, as well as seasonal migration over the borders'.⁵⁰

The development of a unified central Afghan state was also constrained by its ethnic diversity, which magnified its ungovernable complexion, led to the reoccurrence of internal conflict and made it difficult for the state to establish control over the entire country.⁵¹ To fully comprehend the Afghan 'political system' it is important to appreciate the delicate ethnic and tribal dimension that governs it. The Afghan political landscape is characterised by fluctuating alliances between ethnicities and tribes that can alter through ethnic or tribal acquisition or loss of power. This multifaceted network of alliances has been present for centuries in Afghanistan and still persists today. Ethnic groups who have been excluded from the formal power structures of the Afghan central or provincial governments are easily incorporated into anti-government elements. For example this goes on to the extent that anti-government elements will identify the grievances of various ethnic or tribal groups and give them positions of authority within their own organisations to cement their loyalty. The ethnic and tribal composition of Afghanistan is complex, with groups being broken down at the national, provincial and village level. At the village level, interdependent alliances provide *quid-pro-quo* social services that the Afghan state has been unable to provide and all this makes the formation of a modern state more difficult. As Tim Bird and Alex Marshall explain:

Each tribe represents a complex social network of mutual assistance,
which is then further subdivided down to the village level by the notion

⁴⁸ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 15.

⁴⁹ Bajoria, Jayshree, 'The Troubled Afghan-Pakistani Border', *Council on Foreign Relations*, March 20, 2009.

⁵⁰ David Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan: Opium, outlaws and scorpion tales* (London, 2007), p. 154.

⁵¹ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 16.

of *qawn*, a group founded on kinship and patron-client relationships. *Qawn*, networks form dense, informal clusters to provide the social security net that the Afghan state itself never has, via financial loans for start-up investments and small-scale initial running costs. These loans, even in the modern period, are just as liable to be secured by the marrying-off of a daughter in a strategic alliance, or the provision of a young male foot soldier for a local warlord, as by entering into a formal business agreement. During the 1980s, Afghan rural society became effectively atomised by war and forced migration, increasing the relevance of the *qawn* as a local survival strategy. In Afghanistan, therefore, the *qawn* constituted not so much a local substitute for the western notion of ‘civil society’ as its complete negation, effectively a product of de-modernization.⁵²

Prior to the Abdur Rahman’s reign Afghan statehood was not a concrete idea, as the British observer Mountstuart commented in 1809, the ‘people have no name for their country’.⁵³ Even to this day, many Afghans will place loyalty to their tribe above that to the national government. ‘When questioned about their origin or ethnicity, most Afghans will respond that they are Pashtun, Tajik, Uzbek, Haraza, or from some other ethnic tribe found in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries; they do not think of themselves as Afghan’.⁵⁴ Abdur Rahman’s state-building mission had a distinctly tribal, i.e. Pashtun nature to it, which was opposed to Afghanistan’s other ethnic groups. In that sense, for the geographical area of Afghanistan, it cannot really be regarded as ‘state building’. Afghanistan’s most populated and powerful ethnic bloc is the Pashtuns – from which the Taliban and former President Karzai both hail (Hamid Karzai was appointed head of Afghanistan’s first post-Taliban Interim Administration in December 2001, then elected President of Afghanistan from 2004-2014), they are Sunni Muslims which adhere to ‘strict warrior traditions brought together in an unwritten code of honour, the Pashtunwali – blood feud, right and duty of asylum, defence of the honour of the women of one’s tribal subsection’.⁵⁵ The Afghan-

⁵² Ibid., pp. 16-17.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁴ Young, Dennis, O., ‘Overcoming the Obstacles to Establishing a Democratic State in Afghanistan’, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, (October 2007), p. 8.

⁵⁵ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 21.

Pakistan border separates the Pashtuns with approximately 10 million in Afghanistan and 16 million in Pakistan – where they are located in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Balochistan. Consequently, the Pashtuns and Baluchis of Afghanistan's east and south share more in terms of cultural, language and ethnicity with those in Pakistan and the Indian sub-continent compared with Tajiks, Turkmen or Uzbeks of northern Afghanistan. Who in turn can trace their cultural heritage to Central Asia, with the Hazaras of central Afghanistan sharing cultural ties with Iran in the west.⁵⁶ It is extremely difficult to ascertain an accurate view of the Afghan ethnic landscape but a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimate put the Afghan population in 2010 at 29,121,286 of which 42 per cent are Pashtun, 27 per cent are Tajik, 9 per cent are Hazara, 9 per cent Uzbek, 4 per cent Aimak, 3 per cent Turkmen, 2 per cent Baloch and 4 per cent 'other'.⁵⁷ The sheer diversity of ethnicities in Afghanistan prevents political and cultural cohesion, which in turn severely impedes the establishment of a strong central state. Instead, Afghanistan is fragmented into a collection of small autonomous fiefdoms under the command of local tribal elders or more recently regional warlords with these exclusivist policies thwarting a developed national identity. The only time Afghan factions have united under one banner has been to repel foreign invaders. However, generally speaking even these efforts subsequently disintegrated because of ethnic rivalries.

In addition to all these issues the forty-year reign of King Zahir Shah marked a further significant shift that exacerbated the problems in Afghan politics. It led to polarisation and a configuration of conflict, which led directly to the Soviet intervention in 1979. During the ten-year period 1963-1973, Zahir attempted to introduce a diluted form of democracy to Afghanistan and introduced a constitution in 1964. This modernisation and development process enacted a series of reforms aimed at the 'democratisation of politics, liberalisation of social and economic life and rationalisation of foreign relations'.⁵⁸ The Afghan state was, however, critically weakened by its economic impotence. With a paltry tax system - 'tax-gathering accounted for less than 2 per cent of domestic revenues' - and heavily dependent on foreign aid for much of the twentieth century the Afghan state was financially

⁵⁶ UNODC, 'The Opium Economy in Afghanistan: An International Problem', (New York: United Nations 2003) p. 82.

⁵⁷ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 18.

⁵⁸ Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, p. 133.

unviable⁵⁹ – a legacy that would confront the international forces after 2001. As the competing powers in the Cold War vied for influence in Central and South Asia, Afghanistan was able to capitalise on its non-aligned status by turning to both the United States and Soviet Union for development aid.⁶⁰

King Zahir's 'experiment with democracy' proved largely unsuccessful and he was ousted from power in a bloodless coup in 1973, by his cousin and former Prime Minister Mohammad Sardar Daoud Khan. Daoud proclaimed Afghanistan a republic and, 'declared a state of emergency, disbanded parliament and suspended the 1964 constitution'.⁶¹ This period saw the augmentation of ideological extremism among the urban elite on both the left and right as a growing trend of young educated Afghans gravitated towards the radical and violently opposed politics of communism and Islamism. Kabul University and the Kabul Polytechnic became a breeding ground for a new generation of politically aware Afghans and many students became politicised by the view that 'political Islam' was a 'revolutionary ideology of political and social transformation, and demanded reformation of Afghanistan along Islamic lines'.⁶² The core of the young Islamic students at the time would later form the core of the anti-Soviet resistance. Islamists stood in direct opposition to the growing influence posed by the communists. The communist doctrine appealed to many Afghans disillusioned with the 'ugly face of feudalism',⁶³ which protected the rich and discriminated against the poor and specifically they were angered by Daoud's brutal regime that employed repressive measures against opponents of the government. 'Communism offered a vision of a new, revolutionary Afghanistan that would be modern and just'.⁶⁴

Daoud's new republic proved unsuccessful and led to growing disillusionment and dissent among segments of the Afghan populace. While political extremism grew among urban Afghans, Mansfield contends that 'in rural Afghanistan the change of

⁵⁹ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p.19.

⁶⁰ For example, the United States funded the Helmand Valley Project in the late 1940s and early 1950s – an unsuccessful scheme designed to modernise Helmand province's agricultural sector. The Soviet Union funded improvements in the army, education and transport systems.

⁶¹ Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, p. 173.

⁶² *Ibid.* p. 165.

⁶³ Joel, Hafvenstein, *Opium Season: a year on the Afghan frontier* (Guilford, 2007), p. 17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 18.

power was largely irrelevant. The Musahiban dynasty continued. It was simply one cousin deposing another; an Afghan tradition'.⁶⁵ However, Daoud's regime failed on several levels to convert the country to his 'vision of a nationalist, modern, secular, neutral Afghanistan'.⁶⁶ Coupled with poor leadership, Daoud's reforms failed to promote economic recovery or subdue rising political instability thus causing political opposition from communists and Islamists alike. By refusing to tolerate opposition in any form Daoud alienated movements from the right and left. In an attempt to dilute Afghanistan's Soviet associations at home and abroad Daoud sought to distance himself from the Soviet Union and remove his leftist supporters from positions of power.⁶⁷

During 1977-1978 several significant Afghans were murdered at the hands of Daoud's government. Then, in 1978, Daoud's police murdered the influential member of the pro-Soviet People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), Mir Akbar Khyber. The PDPA's hierarchy feared it was only a matter of time before Daoud would eliminate all of his communist opponents and launched a communist inspired coup ousting Daoud from power and later murdering him with his family. PDPA leaders Nur Muhammad Taraki and Babrak Karmal installed a Marxist government, which signalled the end of more than 200 years of almost uninterrupted rule by the family of Zahir Shah and Mohammad Daoud.⁶⁸ The PDPA, however, was weak and internally divided and relied upon help from the Kremlin to cement their power.⁶⁹

CONTINUOUS CONFLICT: The Soviet Intervention (1979-1989) and the Warlord Period (1992-1996)

The newly installed communist government set about extending their authority through a reign of terror. Resolute in their quest to be the first government to extend authority throughout Afghanistan 'they launched a brief, but devastating campaign of land redistribution, resettlement, revised family law, and debt cancellation'.⁷⁰ The government faced armed opposition in 24 out of 28 provinces along with the growing

⁶⁵ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 124.

⁶⁶ Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, p. 184.

⁶⁷ 'Afghanistan's Turbulent History', *BBC News*, 21 November 2008

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 21.

⁷⁰ Hafvenstein, *Opium Season*, p. 19.

opposition from Islamic militants,⁷¹ called the Mujahideen.⁷² As Afghanistan descended into chaos the leaders of the Soviet Union watched in horror. Notwithstanding, military and technical assistance had been given to the PDPA, the Soviet Union was reluctant to intervene in Afghanistan refusing between eleven and fourteen requests from the PDPA to do so. However, the 1978 strategic alliance pact between the Soviet Union and PDPA, limited the options available to the Soviet Union as internal divisions within the PDPA escalated. The intervention was characterised by the Soviets desire to protect Afghanistan falling under America's influence and countering the threat posed to Soviet Central Asia by radical Islamists and was designed to be a short stabilisation project to help the new regime.⁷³

In response to the Soviet intervention Islamic militants, mutinous army leaders and Afghans outraged at the foreign invasion declared themselves to be Mujahideen and took up arms against the Soviet invaders. Identifying the opportunity to trump America's Cold War rival, President Carter's national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, convinced the American President to fund anti-Soviet groups in 1979. It was not until Ronald Reagan came to power in 1981, however, that the United States funding of Afghan mujahideen would grow exponentially. In addition to financial aid, the CIA was covertly arming the mujahideen with arms from former Soviet client states and counterfeit arms made in China.⁷⁴ American funding to the mujahideen resistance was via the Pakistani Intelligence Service (ISI). All foreign aid directed to the Mujahideen was in the hands of the Pakistani secret service and the ISI who, among other things, used it to conduct their own Islamic agenda in the region. Fearful of empowering any Mujahideen group that might one day seek to re-address the Afghan-Pakistan border, the ISI favoured more radical Islamist resistance movements who were focused on religion rather than national borders and neglected more moderate Pashtun nationalist factions. The ISI, to some considerable extent operated independently of the Pakistan government and pursued its own agenda, with the ISI being described as 'a state within a state'.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, p. 191.

⁷² Mujahideen means fighters in *jihad*, or sacred struggle.

⁷³ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, pp. 21-22.

⁷⁴ Shaista Wahab and Barry Youngerman, *Afghanistan: A Brief History, Second Edition* (New York, 2010), p. 185.

⁷⁵ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p. 98.

Saudi Arabia also played a substantial role in funding the Afghan resistance from 1980 matching or slightly exceeding⁷⁶ the United States annual contribution. Congressional and media interest in the conflict had grown in President Reagan's second term resulting in a massive increase in funding for the mujahideen. By 1987, the United States provided \$670 million a year to the resistance. The Afghan resistance was not, however, a single monolithic block instead it was structured along tribal and religious affiliations. Gretchen Peters states 'some of the parties were more loose amalgamations of regional warlords than functioning syndicates'.⁷⁷ The resistance was spilt in seven main factions, which became known as the 'Peshawar Seven' because of their trips to the Pakistan city of that name to receive funding from the ISI.

Despite, their forces totalling 108,800 by 1986, the Soviet Union was unable to pacify the mujahideen resistance. Later that year, Soviet forces began to withdraw after General Secretary Gorbachev's decision to find a political answer to resolve the conflict and concentrate on internal Soviet reform problems. The war left Afghanistan in a state of ruin with the economy and agricultural sector shattered, which among other things significantly exacerbated its dependency on foreign aid.⁷⁸ The withdrawal of the Soviet forces in 1989 did not conclude the fighting in Afghanistan as the various Mujahideen factions fought a three-year war with the communist backed Najibullah regime for control of Afghanistan.⁷⁹ The conflict went on despite the fact that President Mohammad Najibullah offered the opposition a way forward through the government's National Reconciliation Policy. Although, the regime was predicted to collapse in the immediate aftermath of the Soviet's withdrawal it remained military capable retaining powerful Soviet military equipment and boasted a relatively numerous army.⁸⁰ Ultimately, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1992 and the termination of all Soviet funding to the regime, President Najibullah - after receiving Russian advice – resigned.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 23.

⁷⁷ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p. 33.

⁷⁸ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p.23.

⁷⁹ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 119.

⁸⁰ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 25.

⁸¹ Wahab and Youngerman, *Afghanistan*, p. 199.

The victorious Mujahideen declared Afghanistan an Islamic State. Initially welcomed by Afghans anticipating a period of tranquillity,⁸² the promise of victory was short-lived as the capital and country almost immediately descended into civil war. A complex mosaic of conflict emerged including Mujahideen factions under the control of Pashtun Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a coalition of Tajik forces under the military control of Ahmed Shah Massood's and politically led by Burhanuddin Rabbani, and forces under the Uzbek general Abdul Rashid Dostum. Kabul had seen relatively little fighting or damage during the ten-year Soviet occupation, yet, two years of civil war saw tens of thousands die, wounded or displaced.⁸³ Prior to the Taliban gaining power, there was no functioning state in Afghanistan. Instead, the ever-changing competing mujahideen blocs, 'laid claim to the seat of power but never exercised state authority in the most fundamental definition of the term: controlling the state's territory, or exercising basic state function in regard to the population'.⁸⁴ The new Taliban Government thus faced huge challenges, many arising from the Afghan-Pakistan relationship.

One consequence of covert funding operation to the mujahideen was a well-established logistical network between Pakistan and Afghanistan transporting a variety of legal and illegal goods. Connections between the 'trucking mafia' responsible for bringing goods in from Pakistan and local, national and regional strongmen on the Afghan side of the border were made, which continue to this day. One of the most lucrative smuggling operations during the Soviet-Mujahideen conflict was the transporting of illicit heroin.⁸⁵ The Pakistani Army's National Logistical Cell (NLC) would transport mujahideen-bound CIA arms from Karachi to Afghanistan and return with Afghan heroin. Involvement in heroin trafficking reached the highest levels of the Pakistan administration, with several associates of President Zia implicated. Participation in the industry also spread to the Pakistani military with 16 senior officers arrested on drug charges in 1986 alone.⁸⁶

⁸² Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, p. 209.

⁸³ Wahab and Youngerman, *Afghanistan*, p. 208.

⁸⁴ Svante E. Cornell, 'The Narcotics Threat in Greater Central Asia: From Crime-Terror Nexus to State Infiltration?' *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Volume 4, No. 1, (February 2006), pp. 37-67.

⁸⁵ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, pp. 34-35.

⁸⁶ Michael Griffin, *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Taliban Movement in Afghanistan* (London, 2003), p. 122.

It was not only illegal smuggling that characterised the Pakistan-Afghan relationship, with legal goods providing substantial revenue. As part of the Afghan Transit Trade (ATT) agreement, Pakistan had permitted land-locked Afghanistan to import duty free goods from Karachi. Truckers coming from Karachi would sell their cargo in Afghanistan then re-sell their remaining merchandise in Pakistani markets.⁸⁷ The trade in licit goods exploded during the 1990s with a wide variety of electrical and white goods, fuel, building materials and foodstuff entering the market.⁸⁸ It was estimated that the entire value of transported goods in 1995 was \$2.5 billion; with Afghanistan-Pakistan's total illicit drugs exports – which used the same routes as the ATT – worth \$1.25 billion.⁸⁹ Frustrated by the ISI's chief client in Afghanistan, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's ability to further their interests in Afghanistan, the Pakistani government transferred their support behind an emerging movement: the Taliban.⁹⁰

THE TALIBAN (1994-2001)

The word Taliban denotes the Pashto and Persian word, derived from Arabic, meaning lower-level students of Islam.⁹¹ The bulk of 'the students of Islam' originated in the religious schools or *madrasas* of Pakistan, with the schools providing students, many of them Afghan refugees, with free education and accommodation. Supported by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, the madrasas' curriculum focused on the teaching of a strictly puritanical Islam, based on the orthodox and in many ways medievalist teachings and interpretations of the Saudi Wahabi and Deobandi schools of Islam.⁹² These ultra-orthodox Sunni Pashtun⁹³ Talibs (students) joined the various mujahedeen factions to fight in the anti-Soviet and anti-Najibullah conflicts. The leader of this movement was Mohammed Omar, a southern Pashtun Mullah, who fought with the Khalis faction of Hezb-i-Islami against the Najibullah regime. After retiring to Pakistan, Omar returned to establish a madrassa in Kandahar in 1992.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 35-6.

⁸⁸ Rashid Ahmad, 'Pakistan and the Taliban', *The Nation*, 11 April 1998.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 37.

⁹¹ Wahab and Youngerman, *Afghanistan*, p. 210.

⁹² Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, pp., 220-221.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁹⁴ Wahab, and Youngerman, *Afghanistan*, p. 212.

The origins of the how the Taliban and their leader Mullah Omar came to prominence have taken on mythological status. Events can be traced to mid-1994 when Afghanistan was plagued by out of control warlords wreaking havoc on innocent civilians and villagers came to Omar, to inform him that two teenage girls had been abducted by a local warlord and repeatedly raped. Incensed by this Omar and thirty of his madrassa Talibs attacked the warlord's stronghold rescued the girls and hung the warlord from the barrel of a tank. Shortly after, Omar was forced to act again when two rival warlords fought for the right to sexually abuse a young boy.⁹⁵ The Taliban was formalised as a movement in the autumn of 1994 in Kandahar province to 'prosecute vice and foster virtue, and stop those who were bleeding the land'.⁹⁶ The Taliban, albeit by brutal methods, would be the first authority to restore order to a country plagued by lawlessness and out-of-control warlords. Because of this the Taliban were initially accepted by a war weary people, however, the repressive methods employed by the Taliban to restore order would soon result in their loss of legitimacy.⁹⁷

Backed by the Pakistani ISI and the Pakistan Government the Taliban were groomed as the movement that would succeed the now floundering Gulbuddin Hekmatyar to help maintain Pakistani influence in Afghanistan. Additionally, the Pakistan government as a whole was an important promoter of the Taliban giving them military and logistical support, which undoubtedly aided their rapid rise to power. Pakistan's support of the Taliban needs to be considered carefully. It stemmed from long-held strategic objectives, motivated by their greatest of all fears: encirclement by India to their east and an Indian sympathiser to their west. It was primarily for this reason that Pakistan sought to maintain as much influence as possible in Afghanistan. The Pakistanis assumed that the Taliban's religious nature and focus on imposing a strict version of sharia law domestically would negate any nationalist ambitions from the group to reignite the dispute over the Durand line. However, while they nurtured this state of affairs they also endeavoured to protect their trade routes in Afghanistan and end the malign practises of warlords abusing and

⁹⁵ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p. 70.

⁹⁶ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 39.

⁹⁷ Cornell, 'The Narcotics Threat in Greater Central Asia: From Crime-Terror Nexus to State Infiltration?' pp. 37-67.

endlessly charging Pakistani truck drivers toll fees.⁹⁸ Achieving this, however, proved to be beyond their power and influence as will be seen shortly.

The movement's first main military success came in late October 1994. With Pakistani assistance the Taliban captured an ammunition dump under the control of Guulbuddin Hekmatyar at the Afghan-Pakistan border crossing of Spin Boldak netting 18,000 rifles and ammunition.⁹⁹ Then, several weeks later the Taliban were enrolled by Pakistan to help rescue a Pakistan trade convoy passing through Afghanistan that had been captured by a local bandit. Buoyed by fresh supporters the Taliban seized control of Kandahar after little fighting and through bribing local warlords. The success in Kandahar demonstrated the movement's ability to coerce opponents not only through violent means but also by successfully negotiating local networks by all means available.¹⁰⁰

Pakistan's role in Afghanistan was both extensive and important but it is also important to note, that despite the help from the Pakistani government and intelligence agency, the Taliban's main financial backers came in the shape of drug smugglers and the Pashtun trucking mafia.¹⁰¹ As was customary in Afghanistan, to enable safe passage when transporting goods truck drivers would have to pay fees to the warlord in control of the area. With the breakdown of order, drivers could be forced to pay as many as twenty tolls a journey combined with rising fees and the possibility of theft of goods: their profitability was at risk. As order was restored under the Taliban rule and the roads policed, transportation costs decreased as the movement set up a one-toll system for trucks entering Afghanistan. In an attempt to court the Afghan transport mafia's favour, the Taliban ruled that Pakistani truckers would not be permitted to carry goods destined for Afghanistan. The Taliban were financially rewarded, receiving 6 million rupees (\$150,000) from transporters in Chaman in a single day and double that sum the following day in Quetta.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, pp., 122-23.

⁹⁹ Wahab, and Youngerman, *Afghanistan*, p. 212.

¹⁰⁰ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p. 76.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁰² Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, pp., 122-24.

The Taliban's meteoric rise to power was completed in 1996 when they captured Kabul. In just under two years the Taliban controlled at least 27 out of Afghanistan's 32 provinces.¹⁰³ Like the majority of the Afghan regimes that preceded them, the Taliban were unable to extend their authority throughout the entire country, with some north eastern provinces under the control of a loose anti-Taliban amalgamation, known as the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan or the Northern Alliance (NA). Even within the areas under their control, the Taliban's authority was not absolute, as it had to deploy a mixture of coercive measures and broker deals with local elites to maintain control. As Maley states: 'The claim that the Taliban "controlled" large tracts of Afghanistan was misleading, since the Taliban presence in rural areas was light'.¹⁰⁴ Under the Taliban's authority security improved but so did the draconian measures used to govern Afghanistan.¹⁰⁵ Intolerance and human rights abuses combined with providing terrorists a safe haven and rampant drug production would eventually isolate the Taliban from the international community.

Prompted by interest in the energy reserves of the Caspian basin the first Clinton administration considered interaction with the new regime and discussed potentially re-opening the American Embassy in Kabul.¹⁰⁶ Whilst, the United States publicly declared their opposition to the Taliban's policies on drug production, intolerance and human right abuses, their main concerns were an 'all-out effort to press the Taliban to expel'¹⁰⁷ Osama bin Laden and to seek access to the energy reserves in the Caspian basin.¹⁰⁸ The former concern would, however, define the United States relationship with the Taliban regime.

Involved in the Afghan resistance against the Soviet Union, bin Laden and his al-Qaeda organisation moved to Sudan in 1992 aiming to start a jihad against the west. The Saudi would return to Afghanistan in May 1996, after becoming *persona non grata* in Sudan. After moving to Afghanistan, bin Laden in August 1996, issued his first anti-American fatwa (religious ruling), claiming the Americans were

¹⁰³ Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, p. 222.

¹⁰⁴ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁵ Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, p. 222.

¹⁰⁶ Julien. Mercille, *Cruel Harvest: US Intervention in the Afghan Drugs Trade* (London, 2013), p. 50.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ For coverage of United States energy interests in the region see: Mercille, *Cruel Harvest*. pp., 52-3.

occupying Saudi Arabia.¹⁰⁹ Bin Laden's presence in Afghanistan would have repercussions for the regime as early as December 1996, when American Secretary of State Warren Christopher warned the Taliban, that hosting bin Laden and abetting his ventures 'greatly hurt prospects for Afghanistan re-joining the world community'.¹¹⁰ As will be considered shortly, the Taliban's desire to 'join the world community' resulted in them launching, what some have described, as the most successful drug suppression campaign in history.

The United States desire for the Taliban to eject bin Laden greatly intensified after Islamic terrorists bombed American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in August 1998. The United States responded unilaterally by launching Operation Infinite Reach, a series of warship-based cruise missile attacks on three of bin Laden's camps near Khost, in eastern Afghanistan.¹¹¹ The United States made clear to the Taliban they would be judged co-conspirators to his crimes for not agreeing his extradition. It was at this juncture that former CIA officer Milton Bearden argued: 'the hunt for bin Laden has been the driving force behind the U.S. policy toward Afghanistan'.¹¹² The issue of granting extradition rights over bin Laden's was central to the United States interaction with Afghanistan as the former made 30 such requests to the latter between the 1996 and the summer of 2001.¹¹³ In fact, the United States under the Clinton administration had formulated several plans to insert Special Forces into Afghanistan or train Afghan and Pakistan operatives to snatch bin Laden from 1997 onwards, but on all occasions the plans failed consummation.¹¹⁴ Frustrated by Mullah Omar's response to extradition requests the United States imposed economic sanctions on Afghanistan. This was followed by United Nations sanctions in October 1999 - at the behest of the United States - on senior Taliban officials, bin Laden and al-Qaeda members. The UN Security Council sanctions banned commercial aircraft flying in Taliban controlled territory, suspended Taliban assets and declared the Taliban's refusal to hand over bin Laden as a threat to international peace and security.¹¹⁵ The UN Security Council would increase the pressure on the Taliban

¹⁰⁹ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban* (London, 2010), p. 133.

¹¹⁰ Jonathan Steele, *Ghosts of Afghanistan: The Haunted Battleground* (London, 2011), p. 206.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* p.208.

¹¹² Mercille, *Cruel Harvest*, p. 55.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Bob Woodward, *Bush at War* (London, 2003), pp., 5-7 and Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 134.

¹¹⁵ Steele, *Ghosts of Afghanistan*, p. 210.

regime in December 2000 when it passed further sanctions banning Ariana Afghan airlines from touching down anywhere beyond Afghan borders, applying an arms ban, insisting on the closure of terrorists training camps and asserting the imperative of abolishing illegal drug production.¹¹⁶

AFGHANISTAN'S OPIUM HISTORY

It is difficult to ascertain exactly when opium was introduced to Afghanistan, some reports indicate that soldiers in Alexander the Great's armies may have introduced opium to Afghanistan and India in 330 B.C. alternatively, 'it may have been imported as a commodity from countries like Egypt and Greece where it was a popular medicine'.¹¹⁷ In the 16th century Moghul leader Zahirruddin Mohammad Babar reportedly smoked opium after conquering Kabul in 1504.¹¹⁸ Throughout the succeeding five hundred years opium use was prevalent throughout much of Central Asia. In saying that, opium poppy was not cultivated throughout all of Afghanistan's provinces until the late twentieth century and domestic opium consumption was limited to certain regions of Afghanistan – as a coping strategy for extreme poverty and harsh conditions and as medicine – dating back to the 18th century.¹¹⁹ At the Second Opium Conference in 1924 of the Permanent Central Opium Board, run by the League of Nations, Afghanistan reported poppy cultivation in three provinces of Herat, Badakshan and Jalalabad. Eighty years later in 2004, opium cultivation was recorded in all of Afghanistan's provinces. In 1905, the British Indian government noted that opium cultivation was one of the principal crops planted during the autumn planting season in Nangarhar province. The *Imperial Gazetteer*, also in the same year, reported that limited quantities of opium cultivation were prevalent in Kabul, Kandahar and Jalalabad.¹²⁰ Much of opium produced was exported to neighbouring countries, mainly Iran. Under the control of the Afghan royal family, opium cultivation and production in the first half of the 20th century fluctuated, although in 1932 Afghanistan produced 75 tons of opium, a considerable quantity considering the population was no more than ten million, and they only consumed a small segment of

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p. 213.

¹¹⁷ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 60.

¹¹⁸ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p. 29.

¹¹⁹ UNODC, 'The Opium Economy in Afghanistan', p. 88.

¹²⁰ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 60.

that production.¹²¹ However, this was nowhere near the 6,000 tons produced by China in 1932.¹²²

Opium production was officially banned in 1945 and production sharply decreased to 12 tons. This was followed by another ban in 1957.¹²³ However, by the early 1970s the problem of opium production had become more severe, with the Afghan government limited in their ability to restrict production or trafficking.¹²⁴ Government rule did not extend into areas where tribal communities, dominated affairs ‘isolated from the power centre both geographically and politically’.¹²⁵ The intertwined issue of drug production and lack of government authority in the tribal areas would prove equally as problematic for the Karzai government to address after 2001. The Afghan government’s ability to enforce an opium ban was described at the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in 1971 as passive. The following year Afghanistan was listed by the same organisation as a country that posed a problem and after sending a delegation noted that it was restricted in its ability to control production.¹²⁶ Opium production in Afghanistan sharply increased from 130 tonnes in 1970 to 1,200 in 1989 – a rise of 800 per cent.¹²⁷ After replacing Burma in 1991 as the world’s premier opium producing country,¹²⁸ Afghanistan began a process of setting and then breaking records for producing opium, firstly under the Taliban regime, then more latterly and more conclusively after the 2001 American led intervention. In 2007 Afghanistan produced 8,200 tonnes of opium, which amounted to 93 per cent of global output.¹²⁹ While Washington thought that Afghanistan and its drug production were worrisome, during much of this time its attention was more on Pakistan where the drug trade present in Pakistan’s lawless tribal regions was seen as more

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² UNODC, ‘The Opium Economy in Afghanistan’, p. 88.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 60.

¹²⁵ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 20.

¹²⁶ UNODC, ‘The Opium Economy in Afghanistan’, p. 88.

¹²⁷ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. xiii.

¹²⁸ However, Myanmar, was the leading opium cultivator until 2003. Myanmar, since 1990 has had more land under cultivation than Afghanistan but due to poor soil and climatic conditions, the yield of opium in Myanmar was less than the yield in Afghanistan. David. Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 60.

¹²⁹ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 13.

alarming.¹³⁰ In retrospect, given the contribution to the problems America and its allies were to suffer in Afghanistan, this was probably a misplaced priority.

For more than two decades Afghanistan has been the world's largest producer of opium and forerunner of the opium producing Golden Crescent of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. Once overshadowed by the opium producing Golden Triangle of Burma, Laos and Thailand several factors have led to Afghanistan's global hegemony. The decline of Turkey as Europe's main opium supplier, following a ban on opium cultivation in 1972,¹³¹ stimulated the production of opium in Afghanistan. Events later in the decade would catapult opium production even higher in Afghanistan and provide the necessary conditions for the opium industry to consolidate itself. The combined events of the Iranian Revolution – which resulted in opium prohibition, the Southeast Asian drought, Pakistan's opium ban and the Afghan-Soviet war produced the external and internal conditions necessary for Afghanistan to become the world's pre-eminent opium producer.¹³²

The Rise of Opium Cultivation during the Soviet Intervention

Pakistan's president General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq ban on opium in 1978 (to take effect one year later) would mark the beginning of a trend that would see opium cultivation pushed across the border into neighbouring Afghanistan. Despite this ban, Pakistan would remain one of the world's largest opium producers in the 1980s, producing approximately 800 metric tons a year or 70 per cent of the world's supply of heroin until 1989.¹³³ The conflict in Afghanistan and the subsequent CIA-ISI clandestine support to the Afghan resistance fostered the growth of the trade on the Pakistani side of the border. The Pakistani opium trade would only be seriously addressed after the cessation of the Afghan-Soviet conflict, with western aid to the Pakistani government totalling \$100 million to eradicate the drugs industry. Over the ten year period cultivation was slashed from 800 tons in 1989 to 24 tons in 1997 and 2

¹³⁰ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p. 31.

¹³¹ James D. Medler, 'Afghan Heroin: Terrain, Tradition, and Turmoil', *Orbis*, Vol. 49, No 2 (Spring 2005), pp. 275-291.

¹³² Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 31.

¹³³ Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 120.

tons in 1999.¹³⁴ Concerning opium cultivation Chouvy comments: ‘the region’s geographic, socio-ethnic and political features explain in part the development of the opium economy that would take place in Afghanistan from the 1980s on. Indeed...the European colonial powers, in this particular case the British, exercised only a very limited, if not inexistent, control over the tribal populations of Afghanistan and Pakistan’.¹³⁵

In an attempt to gain control in the Afghan countryside in the mid-1980s, the Soviet forces adopted a ‘scorched earth’ policy, designed to obliterate the agricultural sector. Whilst in command of the urban centres, the Soviets were ineffectual in the countryside failing to counter a determined insurgency. With conventional military tactics failing to produce the required results in the countryside, Soviet forces calculated that by annihilating agriculture it would force the population into the urban centres. A United Nations report on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) catalogues the agricultural destruction:

Between 1979 and 1989 regular agricultural production was severely disrupted. Between half and two thirds of all villages were bombed. The amount of live-stock fell by 70%. Between a quarter and one third of the country’s irrigation systems were destroyed. About one third of all farms were abandoned. The reduction in fertilizer availability and affordability lowered crop yields further; in some areas fertilizer use declined by 90 per cent. Thus, by 1988 total food production had declined to around 45% of the level prevailing before the Soviet invasion in 1979. The country had to import 500,000 tons of wheat annually from the Soviet Union.¹³⁶

As the intricate structure of irrigation canals was destroyed, farmers had no alternative but to replace the traditional Afghan economy constructed on the export of dried fruit and nuts with opium production, as it required far less irrigation, fertilizers

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.122.

¹³⁵ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 21.

¹³⁶ UNODC, ‘The Opium Economy in Afghanistan’, p. 90.

or transportation.¹³⁷ The Soviet intervention, followed by two further decades of war reduced Afghanistan to an importer country of grains, fruits and vegetables – in stark contrast to a country that was advancing towards self-sufficiency in the 1970s. The abundance of fruits and nuts supplied Afghanistan with a healthy export portfolio, which accounted for 40 per cent of the country's foreign exchange earnings in the 1970s.¹³⁸ The devastation of the agricultural economy resulted in output falling by one-third in 1987 compared to 1979.¹³⁹ Opium production commensurately increased by nearly fifty per cent from 300 tonnes to 575 tonnes between 1982 and 1983. The trajectory of opium cultivation continued between 1986 and 1987 rising from 350 tonnes to 875 tonnes.¹⁴⁰

Whilst the Soviet 'scorched earth' policy devastated the Afghan landscape resulting in the entrenchment of the opium industry in rural Afghanistan, evidence indicates that the opium industry did not finance the Afghan resistance. Instead, the resistance received most of their funding and material support from Muslim countries, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, in addition to China 'either directly or by way of CIA-ISI cooperation'. The finances generated by the opium industry were considerably less than the aid from foreign sponsors, in 1984, the opium industry netted farmers \$21 million compared to the international assistance to the mujahideen that totalled \$300 million.¹⁴¹

Notwithstanding, several mujahideen commanders became prominent players in the Afghan opium industry during this period. While most commanders took a percentage of opium profits in the regions that were under their influence, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar expanded his role in the drug industry by taking the unusual step of setting up heroin processing plants. Nasim Akhundzada, known as the 'Heroin King', set the conditions by allowing and encouraging Helmandi farmers to cultivate opium poppy. In 1981, he issued a *fatwa* authorising cultivation. His brother, Mohammed Rasul explained the rationale: 'We must grow and sell opium to fight our holy war against the Russian non-believers'. In an attempt to guarantee sufficient production,

¹³⁷ Azmat Khan, 'Opium Brides: Why Eradication Won't Solve Afghanistan's Poppy Problem', *Frontline*, 3 January 2012

¹³⁸ 'The Gardens of Eden: Fighting the drought, and the looters', *The Economist*, 19 September 2002

¹³⁹ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p.115.

¹⁴⁰ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 31.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp.31-32.

Akhundzada announced that 50 per cent of land be devoted to opium poppy in 1989.¹⁴² He also offered cash advances to farmers to cultivate opium poppy, through the *salaam* system, that would allow farmers to pre-sell their poppy at planting time for less than its harvest price.¹⁴³ This system, which survives today, has been responsible for perpetuating a vicious cycle of debt which farmers are sometimes unable to redeem – due to bad harvests or eradication programmes. In some instances farmers are forced to sell their daughters or flee to Pakistan to escape the debts.

Participation in the trade would afford several mujahideen commanders financial independence from other competing ISI funded mujahideen groups and financial incentives were also in play as well as commitment to the Afghan resistance campaign. A situation developed where the distributors of foreign aid, namely the ISI and Iran, favoured religious based mujahideen groups at the expense of the traditional elites. This was an incentive for those elites to circumvent that policy by exploiting the opium trade.

There were reservations emanating in the United States administration about supplying the Afghan resistance, who had ties to the opium industry. Giving them financial and material support could prove counterproductive. As Yale University psychiatrist and White House Drug Advisor in the Carter administration argued against entering the conflict ‘to support the opium growers in their rebellion against the Soviets’.¹⁴⁴ Comparisons can be drawn with the CIA’s involvement in Vietnam - where the intelligence Agency backed anti-communist guerrillas involved in the drugs trade.¹⁴⁵ Not for the first time, the American government would ‘turn a blind eye’ to its foreign partner’s involvement in the illicit drugs trade in pursuit of higher priorities, ignoring the ‘link between the Mujahideen, Pakistani drug traffickers and elements in the military’.¹⁴⁶ A 1990 Washington Post article claimed American officials had ‘received but declined to investigate’ reports that many Afghan mujahideen and Pakistani intelligence were complicit in the drug trade.¹⁴⁷ Despite

¹⁴² For in-depth coverage of mujahideen commanders involved in the opium industry see: Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, pp., 115-17.

¹⁴³ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*. p. 35.

¹⁴⁴ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 31.

¹⁴⁵ Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 120.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p. 39.

widespread reports and credible evidence many within Washington claimed there was no concrete confirmation to support the claim that the Afghan mujahedeen were involved in a systematic drug running operation as a way of de-prioritising the drug issue.¹⁴⁸ Even as drug industry expanded, the main objective of American involvement in Afghanistan was to give the Soviets a ‘black eye’,¹⁴⁹ not to become embroiled in a drugs war.

The Americans pragmatic approach to dealing with allies involved in drug trafficking would repeat itself with the Central American cocaine traffic¹⁵⁰ and more recently, characterise America’s initial post-Taliban intervention in Afghanistan. Opium cultivation continued to rise in the concluding years of the Soviet intervention, as the red army withdrew from rural Afghanistan to urban centres. The rise would then exacerbate further after the Soviet withdrawal – reaching 1,600 tons in 1990.¹⁵¹ During the Soviet intervention (1979-1989) the annual average growth rate for opium production was 14 per cent, but increased to 19 per cent in the five years after the Soviet Union’s withdrawal.¹⁵²

The Entrenchment of Opium Cultivation under the Warlords Rule

The Soviet intervention exacerbated the collapsing nature of the Afghan state during the 1990s as civil war beset the country. Among other things, that debilitated the social and legal restrictions on the cultivation of opium poppy.¹⁵³ Other factors were just, if not more important in the continued rise of opium cultivation after the Soviet Union’s departure. Naturally, foreign funding of resistance groups dwindled in the years after the end of the conflict, therefore, the former mujahideen groups needed a fresh source of income to fund the civil war that engulfed post-Soviet Afghanistan and drug money provided the main source. Both Ahmad Shah Massoud and Burhanuddin Rabbani tapped into the opium industry, in conjunction with other

¹⁴⁸ The DEA and the CIA, however, did a launch a brief covert operation called ‘operation jihad’ against the Afghan drug trade in the late 1980s. The agencies utilised mujahedeen informants to identify and eliminate drug labs in return for several thousand dollars. The operation came to an end when the mujahedeen fighters started executing the lab workers. Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, pp., 26-28

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁵⁰ Medler, *Afghan Heroin*, pp. 275-291.

¹⁵¹ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 32.

¹⁵² UNODC, ‘The Opium Economy in Afghanistan’, p. 90.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 89.

money generating opportunities such as mining precious stones, to finance their campaigns during this period. Massoud was initially reluctant to participate in the drugs trade citing Islamic reasons, however, he would later revise his decision in the late 1980s. It was estimated that taxes on opium production and trade and drug trafficking¹⁵⁴ contributed between 30-40 per cent of the Northern Alliance's war chest.¹⁵⁵ The absence of Soviet forces from rural Afghanistan allowed agriculture and trade to return to the countryside, however, 'much of this renewed production took the form of opium growing, heroin refining, and smuggling; these enterprises were organised by combines of mujahideen parties, Pakistani military officers, and Pakistani drug syndicates'.¹⁵⁶

With licit income streams severely weakened opium was a reliable commodity that generated a healthy return. In a practise that survives to this day, opium became a trustworthy method of savings – as the government attempted to plug a financial hole by printing money.¹⁵⁷ Ten years of war and economic contraction left the Afghan economy in ruin. Conservative figures produced by the Afghan government reveal the country's gross domestic product (GDP) declined by sixteen per cent from 1980-1990, however, the contraction was probably far greater due to the millions of Afghans who were displaced to neighbouring countries or were killed. Based on the data that nine per cent of the population was killed between 1978 and 1989 and approximately 30 per cent of the country displaced, a more accurate figure of the reduction of GDP between the years 1981-1991 would have been sixty per cent. The International Centre for Humanitarian Reporting concluded that the gross national product (GNP) per capita decreased by more than 25 per cent in seven years from \$222 in 1984 to \$167 in 1991. Only Mozambique and Ethiopia tabled below Afghanistan in GNP for that period.¹⁵⁸

Afghanistan is predominantly an agricultural country with approximately 78 per cent of the population living in rural locations¹⁵⁹ and the opium industry can offer

¹⁵⁴ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 120.

¹⁵⁵ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 53.

¹⁵⁶ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p. 53.

¹⁵⁷ UNODC, 'The Opium Economy in Afghanistan', p. 90.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Jan Koehler and Christoph Zuercher, 'Statebuilding, Conflict and Narcotics in Afghanistan: The View from Below', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.14, No.1, (2007) p. 63.

an avenue to a secure source of income. UN studies indicated that the opium industry ‘filled an economic void’ in the Afghan economy and created a system of credit, labour and commerce. As civil war engulfed the country, the opium industry was conducted on trust and with little violence, from the cultivating process to the end stage of refined heroin.¹⁶⁰ Devastated by war and drought, Afghanistan’s rugged terrain was inhospitable for the cultivation of many crops.¹⁶¹ Opium, however, was a drought resistant cash crop. It was by far the most lucrative crop available, on a good year it can reach anywhere between five and twenty-five times the price of wheat.¹⁶² In saying that, the UN estimated farmers obtained less than 1 per cent of the total profits produced by the opium industry, with dealers in Afghanistan and Pakistan’s share totalling 2.5 per cent and 5 per cent spent in countries along the transit route to western markets. Distributors outside of the region netted the remaining profits.¹⁶³

Given the labour intensive nature of harvesting poppies - nine times those for wheat¹⁶⁴ - opium cultivation benefits the wider rural community by providing employment opportunities to landless peasants. ‘Approximately 350 person days are required to cultivate one hectare of poppy plants in Afghanistan, compared with approximately 41 days per hectare for wheat and 135 person days for black cumin. Harvesting alone requires as much as 200 person days per hectare for poppy.’¹⁶⁵ Once harvested, opium is a robust crop that does not need refrigeration, so the lack of reliable roads and electricity is no obstruction. Additionally, its gum can be stored for months or years before processing, so villagers stockpile the gum and use it as barter.¹⁶⁶ A 1998 UN survey of opium growers concluded 95 per cent had taken loans in the previous year, with the majority borrowing against delivery of their future opium harvest.¹⁶⁷ Therefore, opium also serves as a vital source of finance to the majority of the rural population who have no access to modern western style banking systems to offer loans or other sources of credit.

¹⁶⁰ Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade* (Revised ed. Chicago, 2003), p. 510.

¹⁶¹ Hafvenstein, *Opium Season*, p. 10.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 119.

¹⁶⁴ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, p. 510.

¹⁶⁵ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 127.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, p. 510.

Taliban and the Opium Industry

The Taliban's relationship with the opium industry, both during and after holding power has been fluid, pragmatic and dependent upon time and space. Up until the Taliban's comprehensive opium ban in 2000, the movement did little to stem the rising tide of opium cultivation throughout their tenure. Contrary to conventional wisdom, David Mansfield argues that the Taliban did not initially ban opium cultivation in Helmand in late 1994 – citing Islamic reasons - because they did not secure victory in the province until January 1995 – one month after the end of the opium-planting season.¹⁶⁸ Instead, the Taliban decreed 'the cultivation of, and trading in *charas* (cannabis, used for hashish) is forbidden absolutely. The consumption of opiates is forbidden, as is the manufacture of heroin, but the production of and trading in opium is not forbidden'.¹⁶⁹ Abdul Rashid, the head of the regime's anti-drug operations in Kandahar explained why the regime would tolerate opium cultivation but not hashish cultivation '[hashish] is consumed by Afghans, Muslims...Opium is permissible because it is consumed by *kafirs* [unbelievers] in the West and not by Muslims or Afghans'.¹⁷⁰

Under Taliban rule opium cultivation expanded significantly, as by 1999, the year before the Taliban's prohibition, cultivation rose to 91,000 hectares and spread to provinces with no previous history of cultivation.¹⁷¹ Three factors proved critical in this growth: as discussed above Afghanistan was crippled by economic crisis in the 1990s and opium cultivation offered farmers a viable economic avenue that was absent in the legal agricultural market. Secondly, landless labourer's or farmers with opium cultivating experience who were unable to buy land in traditional opium cultivating provinces expanded the trade by resettling in non-opium producing provinces where land opportunities were available. Finally, as overall security improved under the Taliban and with the removal of checkpoints along major highways, fewer obstacles confronted 'established' drug traffickers or 'new entrants to the trade'.¹⁷² Far from a concerted effort by the Taliban to consolidate and spread

¹⁶⁸ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 138.

¹⁶⁹ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 126.

¹⁷⁰ Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 118.

¹⁷¹ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 138.

¹⁷² *Ibid.* pp.,138-39.

opium production across the country, several factors coincided with the Taliban's own territorial expansion across Afghanistan to enlarge the trade.

The Taliban did not rule over a formalised drug industry through a centralised system. Mansfield states: 'some viewed this expansion of the trade and its coincidence with the Taliban's territorial gains as evidence of the Taliban's control of the trade, the relationship was more complex, reflecting the local political settlements and bargains that were made when the Taliban movement expanded its influence across an expanding geographic area'.¹⁷³ The Taliban's policies towards the opium trade were not uniform but dependent upon the specific Taliban leadership in control of certain regions. Policies ranged from permitting the production and trade in some areas to active participation others areas through taxation, production, processing and transport.¹⁷⁴ In some instances the Taliban backed mass heroin processing operations in the east of the country. Forced across the Afghan border to Jalalabad, after Pakistan authorities' crackdown in the mid-1990s, the Taliban allowed hundreds of operations to flourish in return for a small taxation fee of \$70 per kilogram of heroin.¹⁷⁵

Mirroring the regime's local and unequal involvement in the opium trade was the uneven profit derived by the Taliban from the opium industry. Some critics claimed taxation on production and the trade of opium was the largest source of taxation enjoyed by the regime, with taxes on opium exports providing the principle source of their income and war economy.¹⁷⁶ Wahidullah Sabawoon, the Northern Alliance finance minister argued by the final years of their rule 'poppy, the Pakistanis, and bin Laden contributed the most to the Taliban coffers'.¹⁷⁷ Whilst the movement was operational in taxing the trade, tax was collected or donated in an *ad hoc* manner in the form of zakat or ushr. Traditionally, *zakat* and *ushr* conforms to Islamic law and has been operational in the Muslim world for centuries. Zakat or purification is the third tenet of Islam, which decrees Muslims pay a tax that is redistributed for charitable purposes, to rulers or for the holy fighters of the jihad. Ushr, or tithe, is a tax raised on agricultural products, with 50 per cent going to the poor and the

¹⁷³ Ibid. p. 139.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, p. 509.

¹⁷⁶ Chouvy, *Opium*, pp. 51-2.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

remainder going to the local mullahs and the rulers.¹⁷⁸ The assistant director of the Taliban's Kandahar bank, Pashtani Tjarati commented 'a landowner must pay 10 per cent of whatever amount he makes on his crops'.¹⁷⁹ However, this statement does not provide an accurate analysis of the reality of taxation under the Taliban. In practise, taxation was not a unitary system applied nationally but a system that differed from location to location and was sensitive to the local environment. Nor was the rate of taxation uniform across the country, with some farmers paying only what they could afford and others paying in cash or kind.¹⁸⁰ With this in mind, it is extremely difficult to ascertain the financial value of the drug industry to the Taliban as the smuggling of legal goods also increased under Taliban rule and the Afghan Transit Trade provided the Taliban 'with the largest source of official income'.¹⁸¹

It was not only financial benefit that the Taliban derived from 'tolerating' the opium industry; it generated a substantial amount of support for the movement in rural Afghanistan. The noted author Ahmed Rashid's interview with a Kandahari farmer supplies an illustration: 'we cannot be more grateful to the Taliban. The Taliban have brought us security so we can grow our poppy in peace. I need to grow poppy crop to support my 14 family members'.¹⁸² Moreover, examination of Taliban pronouncements can provide insight to the coadjutant relationship between the opium industry and legitimacy for the movement. As Abdul Rashid, the head of the Taliban's counter narcotics force in Kandahar stated: 'We let people cultivate poppies because farmers get good prices. We cannot push the people to grow wheat, as there would be an uprising against the Taliban if we forced them to stop poppy cultivation. So we grow opium and get our wheat from Pakistan'. Rashid further commented: 'Everyone is growing poppy. If we try to stop this immediately, the people will be against us'.¹⁸³ Another equally important reason why the Taliban failed to tackle the drugs industry at this juncture was their lack of international recognition, which stymied the possibility of trading in legitimate agricultural commodities. As a Taliban governor Mohammed Hassan explained: 'Drugs are evil and we would like to substitute poppies with another cash crop, but it's not possible at the moment because

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁸⁰ Author Interview with British Official (10), 24 September 2014.

¹⁸¹ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 52.

¹⁸² Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 118.

¹⁸³ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 126.

we do not have international recognition'.¹⁸⁴ It was this desire to join the international community that led the Taliban to launch an opium prohibition in 2000 in the hope that sanctions would be eased and trade renewed.

The Taliban's Opium Prohibition (2000)

The Taliban initiated one of the most effective¹⁸⁵ drug suppression strategies in history in 2000 - a fact not lost on the international community, particularly in the light of the failures of the Karzai administration and its western backers subsequently to prevent record growths in opium cultivation.¹⁸⁶ Cultivation decreased from 82,172 hectares in 2000 to less than 8,000 in 2001, thus reducing the worldwide heroin market by 75 per cent.¹⁸⁷ The majority of the 8,000 hectares cultivated were in areas controlled by the Northern Alliance, where Taliban influence was negligible. The Northern Alliance writ was limited to the Panjsher Valley and the north-eastern regions of Afghanistan. Northern Alliance commanders had been involved in the drug industry since the 1980s and over the course of several years had progressed from controlling production to establishing heroin refineries. Whilst the Taliban's prohibition had slashed opium production in the rest of the country, 'in the Shura (Northern Alliance) controlled Badakhshan province, it surged by 158 per cent from 2000 to 2001'.¹⁸⁸

The motives behind the Taliban's ban have been contested and many theories abound. Doubt emanated in some quarters about the genuineness of the ban with a UN report stating 'If the Taliban officials were sincere in stopping the production of opium and heroin,' it read, 'one would expect them to order the destruction of all stocks existing in areas under their control'.¹⁸⁹ Some observers contended the stimulation to ban opium was driven by financial motives. As a result of over production in the previous years, opium prices began to fall, thus a ban would

¹⁸⁴ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, p. 508.

¹⁸⁵ Whilst considered effective in reducing the volume of land under cultivation, the ban cannot be considered successful. Lack of economic alternatives made available to farmers rendered the ban counterproductive and unsustainable.

¹⁸⁶ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 152.

¹⁸⁷ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 130.

¹⁸⁸ Cornell, 'The Narcotics Threat in Greater Central Asia: From Crime-Terror Nexus to State Infiltration?' pp. 37-67.

¹⁸⁹ Griffin, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, p. 240.

dramatically increase the price of opium again. According to UN estimates almost instantly, the price of opium rose from \$28 per kilo to between \$350 and \$400 per kilo.¹⁹⁰ One such protagonist of this view is Gretchen Peters: ‘The poppy ban, it turned out, was the ultimate insider trading con. The Taliban gambled they could win millions of dollars in international aid-and perhaps even recognition of their government-while top leaders sold of their opium hoards at far higher prices. Just before the ban, top leaders purchased huge amounts of opium’.¹⁹¹ However, while it is probable some with ties to the Taliban could have benefitted financially from the ban the Taliban’s desire for international recognition was the chief motivating factor.

Internationally weak and isolated, only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates recognised the Taliban administration as legitimate,¹⁹² therefore, drug suppression could potentially offer the Taliban an avenue to gain international acceptance. With that in mind, Mullah Omar made sporadic attempts to bargain with the international community for recognition by floating the possibility of banning opium production from 1996.¹⁹³ However, the regime continued to be frozen out of international affairs and prevented from taking its seat at the United Nations because of objections from the United States, Iran and Russia. The previous Afghan government still controlled the seat despite being in control of less than 10 per cent of Afghanistan and with its president in exile.¹⁹⁴ An examination of the regime’s quest for international recognition should be evaluated against the backdrop of the harsh economic conditions prevalent in Afghanistan during the 1990s. Compared to many underdeveloped countries Afghanistan fell short, rarely experiencing running water, little electricity, telephones, motorable roads or regular energy supplies.¹⁹⁵ Economic development was also non-existent with the average wage of Afghans being approximately US\$1-3 a month and many urban Afghans forced to rely on UN agencies for subsidised food, with half of Kabul’s 1.2 million received food from western aid organisations.¹⁹⁶ Further complicating matters, were the regime’s

¹⁹⁰ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p 93.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p. 94.

¹⁹² Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 154.

¹⁹³ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, page 509.

¹⁹⁴ Barbara Crossette, ‘Taliban Open A Campaign to Gain Status at the U.N.’, *The New York Times*, 21 September 2000.

¹⁹⁵ Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 126.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 127.

international isolation and economic sanctions, which meant it was unable to receive development assistance from the World Bank or private sector. Coupled to its repressive policies on women and continuing conflict with the Northern Alliance was enough to dissuade other investments.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, by banning opium production and placing it within the boundaries of adherence to international drug control efforts, the Taliban predicted it could gain international acceptance and much needed development aid.

Leading international efforts to facilitate the Taliban's ban on opium production was the United Nations. Concerned by Afghanistan's graduation to the world's primary opium producer in 1994, the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (now part of the United Nations on Drugs and Crime Office – hereafter UNODC) launched its first opium survey. The organisation had been active in Afghanistan since 1989, when it initiated an Alternative Development project, Drug Control and Rural Rehabilitation - that operated until 1996. The venture stipulated a 'poppy clause' requiring its participants to agree to terminate opium cultivation. The project had only limited success in the reconstruction of the Afghan countryside, and it did not even dent opium cultivation.¹⁹⁸

Shortly after securing the capital in November 1996, the Taliban had made its first move to open dialogue with the international community over suppressing the opium industry. Foreign Minister Mullah Mohammad Ghaus sent a letter to Giovanni Quaglia, the UNODC director in Islamabad intimating international assistance was vital in order to control the drug business, stating: 'the struggle against production, refining and traffic in narcotic substances is possible only through regional and international cooperation'.¹⁹⁹ This came only days after the DEA published a document stating 'the Taliban had reached a de facto agreement with cultivators, and perhaps even traffickers, to limit their attack on opium cultivation and domestic drug abuse'. The information stated in the report was based on the first communication between the DEA, State Department's Narcotics Affairs Section and the Taliban

¹⁹⁷ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 155.

¹⁹⁸ Transnational Institute, *'Afghanistan, Drugs and Terrorism Merging Wars'*, Drugs & Conflict Debate Papers, No.3. TNI Briefing Series. (December 2001), p. 9.

¹⁹⁹ John Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*, (3rd ed. London, 2002), p.124.

leadership.²⁰⁰ Giovanni Quaglia was appointed UNODC representative to negotiate a potential settlement over drugs control. The UNODC was adamant international aid would only be forthcoming if the Taliban publicly denounced opium cultivation and enforced the terms of the agreement. Mr Quaglia explained that the deal would only work if there was give and take:

We have told them, 'We give you one, and you give us one back'. This is the language of business. Taleban are Afghans and Afghans are traders. This is the language they understand. Taleban has been told that silence is complicity. It already has a serious international problem, and the time has now come for the leadership to make clear to the world its policy on drugs'.²⁰¹

In September 1997, The Taliban announced 'The Islamic State of Afghanistan informs all compatriots that as the use of heroin and hashish is not permitted in Islam, they are reminded once again that they should strictly refrain from growing, using and trading in hashish and heroin'.²⁰² With the deal still to be finalised,²⁰³ the incoming Director of the UNODC, Pino Arlacchi travelled to Afghanistan in November 1997 to discuss potential drug control solutions with the Taliban representative Mullah Mohammed Hassan. The Kandahari governor pledged Mullah Omar's assurance to eradicate opium cultivation if the UN supplied farmers with economic aid to plant legal alternatives. Concerned there would not be sufficient funds available to support the project covering the entire Taliban controlled territory, Pino Arlacchi agreed that cultivation would be prohibited in three districts with farmers being provided with seeds and fertilisers for replacement crops.²⁰⁴ The aim was to expand the project every year for five years until opium cultivation was eradicated completely from the Taliban controlled Afghanistan. Dr Arlacchi promised UN and international financial aid to the tune of \$25 million for ten years. The deal offered by Dr Arlacchi proved controversial for many reasons; firstly, the Taliban regime was an unrecognised international pariah with many states refusing to cooperate with them because of their

²⁰⁰ Griffin, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, p. 130.

²⁰¹ Transnational Institute, *'Afghanistan, Drugs and Terrorism Merging Wars'*, p. 9.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, p. 509; Brenda Shaffer (ed.), *The Limits of Culture: Islam and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 284.

²⁰⁴ Steele, *Ghosts of Afghanistan*, p. 197.

human rights abuses. Secondly, the Dr Arlacchi had made the deal without securing international aid first. Despite this the proposal received support from President Clinton.²⁰⁵

The plan agreed by the Taliban and Pino Arlacchi proved unsuccessful as the following year opium cultivation increased in Taliban controlled territories. In May 1998, officials from the United States DEA travelled to Afghanistan to discuss drug control with the Taliban authorities. Frustrated with the lack of progress made by the UNODC to advance alternative development the Taliban threatened to abandon their collaboration with the organisation. Despite this, in October 1998, Mullah Omar would again offer the elimination of opium in Taliban controlled territories in 1998, in exchange for international recognition, destroying 34 heroin laboratories in Nangarhar as a demonstration of his commitment. Despite this, Mullah Omar failed in his bid to be taken seriously.²⁰⁶

Throughout this period the UNODC – one of the few contacts the Taliban had with the international community - remained in dialogue with Taliban official's organising a series of meetings to discuss drug control. A March 1999 meeting, conducted in Islamabad, UNODC officials reported the Taliban were 'pleased with positive international exposure' to stem from the meeting.²⁰⁷ Later that year a deal was agreed for the UNODC to fund another poppy reduction programme, with Mullah Omar issuing an edict for a one third reduction in opium cultivation in the 1999-2000 growing season. The agreement also included forced eradication to be executed if the ban was not in upheld. By November 1999, dismayed by the lack of international aid, the Taliban requested international recognition as a precursor for continued involvement in the project.²⁰⁸ The UN observed that the Taliban's adherence to drug control 'remains questionable, as it continues to collect taxes on the opium crop that is harvested and the heroin that is manufactured' a U.S. State Department report was critical of the regime's activities; '[the Taliban are] in active collusion with smugglers

²⁰⁵ Graham Farrell and John Thorne, 'Where have all the flowers gone? Evaluation of the Taliban crackdown against opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan (2005) *International Journal of Drug Policy* 16 (2005), p. 85.

²⁰⁶ Griffin, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, p. 188.

²⁰⁷ Farrell and Thorne, 'Where have all the flowers gone?', p. 84.

²⁰⁸ Shaffer, *The Limits of Culture*, p. 284.

and criminal elements to manufacture and export heroin'.²⁰⁹ Like previous attempts, the project was not completely successful. Whilst there was some reductions in the UNODC target areas in Kandahar,²¹⁰ the Taliban were unable to deliver an overall one third reduction in opium cultivation.²¹¹

In July 2000, Mullah Omar issued a *fatwa* proscribing poppy cultivation and opium production under the pretence of upholding Islamic principles. Like all previous flirtations to ban opium production by the regime, the motivation lay in its desire for international recognition and financial aid. Positioning the ban as an attempt to adhere to international law, and 'self-sacrifice where the interests of consumer nations were given priority over the economic needs of the rural populations of Afghanistan',²¹² the ban threw many rural households into poverty as certain regional economies collapsed overnight. The ban accentuated the catastrophic effects of a four-year countrywide drought, which decimated 70 per cent of the country's livestock and resulted in 50 per cent of the land being uncultivable.²¹³ DEA agent Steven Casteel commented: 'The bad side of the ban is that it's bringing their country...to economic ruin'. An Afghan farmer complained replacing opium for wheat would result in his annual earnings decreasing from \$10,000 to \$400'.²¹⁴ Already suffering from a fall in domestic support, the ban resulted in support for the Taliban all but vanishing in areas such as the Khogiani district of Nangarhar province and instances of large-scale resistance. In other areas the ban had only been implemented after the Taliban had paid local powerbrokers a bribe.²¹⁵ Extension of the ban for a second year would require as Mullah Mohammad Hassan Akhund, governor of Kandahar and member of the Taliban stated: 'many people to be killed and others to face starvation'.²¹⁶ The Taliban had anticipated this domestic distress would be transitory, as development aid would flow in from the international community. David Mansfield sums up the Taliban's estimations of the situation:

²⁰⁹ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, page 510.

²¹⁰ Afghanistan Country Brief: Drug Situation Report, United States Drug Enforcement Administration, September 2001.

²¹¹ Farrell and Thorne, 'Where have all the flowers gone?', pp. 84-85.

²¹² Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p.157.

²¹³ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p. 19.

²¹⁴ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, p. 519.

²¹⁵ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 167.

²¹⁶ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, pp., 131-32.

There was strong pressure on donors to respond with development assistance. The Taliban leadership likely calculated that the international political support gained by prohibiting opium outweighed the unpopularity it would be exposed to amongst the rural population within Afghanistan. This perception was reinforced in conversations between UNDCP and the Taliban leadership. It was calculated that if the international community kept their part of the deal, then the impact on the rural population would be short lived; on the other hand, if the international actors failed to deliver the ban could simply be rescinded.²¹⁷

It was under this framework that the Taliban effectively banned opium cultivation in 2000, and three months after the ban, Taliban envoys travelled to the United Nations in New York seeking recognition for the regime. During the meeting, the Taliban Deputy Foreign Minister, Abdur Rahman Zahid, condemned their Northern Alliance rivals as a ‘band of thugs’ and the main protagonists involved in the drugs trade.²¹⁸ The mission proved unsuccessful with the recognition failing to materialise. The Taliban believed they were unfairly treated, as a representative stated: ‘we have done what needed to be done, putting our people and our farmers through immense difficulties. We expected to be rewarded for our actions, but instead we were punished with additional sanctions’.²¹⁹ The UN Security Council, led by the United States imposed further sanctions on the Taliban for the continued sanctuary of Osama bin Laden. Conversely, the United States delivered \$43 million in humanitarian aid to the regime for successfully quashing opium cultivation. The United States were however the leading contributor of humanitarian aid to the regime, contributing \$124 million for the year and \$114 million the previous year.²²⁰ The delivery of aid in support of the opium ban should not detract from the United States attitude to the Taliban regime nor the differences that set the two countries apart, as U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell stated: ‘the ban on poppy cultivation, a decision by the Taliban that we welcome’, however, indicated the several issues remained

²¹⁷ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 162.

²¹⁸ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, p. 518.

²¹⁹ Shaffer, *The Limits of Culture*, p. 285.

²²⁰ Mercille, *Cruel Harvest*, p. 62.

outstanding ‘a number of fundamental issues separate us: their support for terrorism; their violation of internationally recognised human rights standards, especially the treatment of women and girls.’²²¹ The Bush administration would increase the pressure on the Taliban regime by expelling its representative in New York from the United States in February 2001.²²² It then promulgated an executive order continuing economic sanctions in June and July 2001. President Bush upheld the ‘National Emergency’ with respect to the regime because it ‘continues to allow territory under its control in Afghanistan to be used as a safe haven and base of operations for Usama bin Laden and the al-Qaida organisation’.²²³ Ultimately, the Taliban’s quest for international recognition was a forlorn hope. As long as the regime continued to support and harbour Osama bin Laden, a substantial reduction in opium cultivation would not be sufficient to gain the regime international recognition.

It appears the Taliban’s power and legitimacy were irreversibly weakened by their prohibition of opium cultivation. So much so, Alfred McCoy argues that the bombing of the Taliban regime by coalition forces in October 2001 only contributed to the destruction of a regime already seriously weakened by its own actions:

Although the U.S. bombing campaign did enormous psychological and physical damage, it probably played a catalytic, not causal, role – accelerating an on-going internal collapse that may have eventually swept the Taliban from power without foreign intervention. The Taliban’s economic evisceration had left their theocracy a hollow shell of military force that shattered with the first American bombs.²²⁴

The onset of conflict with coalition forces terminated the Taliban’s opium ban. The Taliban, in fact brought an end to the ban in early September 2001. The intervention led to opium traders flooding the market with stockpiled opium, causing prices to fall by 500 per cent and filling any gaps in global supply.²²⁵ As highlighted in subsequent chapters, the fall of the Taliban regime and the ushering in of a

²²¹ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, p. 518.

²²² Steele, *Ghosts of Afghanistan*, p. 211.

²²³ Mercille, *Cruel Harvest*, p. 62.

²²⁴ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, p. 520.

²²⁵ Ibid.

western-backed regime in Afghanistan did very little to curb the level of opium cultivation.

CONCLUSION

Afghanistan historical legacy provided the context within which the Bush administration based its intervention, however, the administration made some critical errors interpreting the country's past and the drugs trade would prove an enduring problem, which undermined attempts at creating and improving governance in Afghanistan. Traditionally plagued by weak central governments, the new Afghan authority post-2001 would have little experience or political infrastructure to draw on to enable them to provide a functioning government that could provide basic services to the population, secure the population's allegiance or effectively carry out the agenda of the international community. Successive Afghan governments have failed to extend their authority throughout the country, partly due to an ethnically diverse and fragmented population that places its loyalty to its ethnicity or tribe before its loyalty to the central state and the inability of the state to provide services for the population. The state has not been an undisputed dominant actor within the Afghan political landscape resulting in a continuing struggle among groups for the acquisition of power and resources. This has obstructed the central government's ability to exert control over the entire country and reinforced the difficulty in achieving a harmonistic political system that is free from tribal and ethnic competition. The Durand Line also added to the instability as it allowed anti-government elements safe haven from which to destabilise the Afghan and Pakistani states. Complicating matters further was Pakistan's continued involvement in Afghan affairs and their patronage of individuals and organisations that the Pakistani authorities thought could help protect their interests in Afghanistan. All of which, as we will see in subsequent chapters, make the post-2001 Afghan administrations task of establishing state authority challenging. The hollowness of the Afghan state was evident even prior to the beginning of the Soviet intervention with the economy and political institutions redundant.²²⁶ Already heavily dependent on foreign aid by the 1970s, the economic problems were to worsen as the country over the next two decades as the Soviet Union withdrew and Afghanistan was

²²⁶ Frederick S. Starr, 'Sovereignty and Legitimacy in Afghan Nation-Building', in Francis, Fukuyama, *Nation-Building: Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq* (Baltimore, 2005), p. 107.

trapped in a cycle of civil conflict. It was this continuous conflict that further crippled the institutions of the state and Afghan economy.

Accompanying the disintegration of the state was the unsavoury and rapacious behaviour of warlords that terrorised and abused Afghan citizens and would ultimately lead to the conditions that allowed the Taliban to acquire power. Despite their swift rise to power, the Taliban's authority was not absolute. The Taliban extended their authority through negotiation and political bargaining, in the same mould as all Afghan governments that preceded them. Significantly, not even the Taliban were able to exert control over 100 per cent of Afghanistan's territory – with the NA in control of the north-eastern territory. This historical factor would also point to the difficulty in the ability of any Afghan regime to unite the entire country. It had been through negotiation, religious pressures and political bargaining that the Taliban were able to launch one of the most successful drug elimination programmes in history.

Inextricably linked to the weakness of the central state, limited economic development and continuous warfare was the entrenchment of the opium industry. However, whilst the past thirty years has consolidated the opium industry by destroying the economy and political infrastructure, the development of these trends can be traced back to Afghanistan's longer-term history.²²⁷ Efforts to control the opium industry in the second half of the twentieth century were of limited success because of the inability of the state to project its authority into the provinces, again, a historical legacy that would confront the post-Taliban Afghan government. It was not until the Soviet intervention in late 1970s that opium cultivation would become more prominent as Afghanistan's rural infrastructure was crippled by the Soviet Union's 'scorched earth policy', designed to destroy Afghanistan agriculture sector. The result was the obliteration of Afghanistan's livestock, irrigation and food producing capability. It was also at this time that the Afghan mujahideen would turn to the opium industry for finance. So by the time the warlord period was ushered in several years later the opium industry had well-established networks for the warlords to build

²²⁷UNODC, 'The Opium Economy in Afghanistan', p. 81.

on. The opium industry also offered wide variety of actors and communities' financial reward during a period of economic stagnation and offer others the opportunity of social mobility. It was against this backdrop of economic crisis and continuous warfare that would set Afghanistan on the path to becoming the world's leading opium producer. The Taliban, despite religious proclamations to the contrary would do little to stem the tide of opium cultivation until their 2000 opium ban. The Taliban, isolated from the international community for its repressive policies and hosting Osama bin Laden, paradoxically saw banning opium cultivation as a way to gain international recognition. The regime estimated that international aid would fill the financial gap for the rural population negating any long-term adverse affect, however, the ban did not achieved the desired international recognition but forced large parts of the population into economic distress and weakened the population's support for the Taliban. Ironically, the effective opium ban weakened the country and support for the Taliban. Already in significant decline after the opium ban, the American lead intervention quickly defeated the Taliban regime. The intervention would have a profound impact for the return of opium cultivation. This was in large because of the way the Americans conducted the intervention in Afghanistan; allying themselves with and bringing back to power many warlords who had connections to the drug industry. As we will see, the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States would not only guarantee the return of opium cultivation but also another period of instability and weak government in Afghanistan.

CHAPTER THREE

**September 11 and its Consequences for the
Anglo-American Relationship**

INTRODUCTION

On September 11th 2001, the United States and its allies were shocked and traumatised by a coordinated and well executed terrorist attack that struck at the symbols of the American economic power and military might, as nineteen men crashed three planes into the Twin Towers and the Pentagon – with a fourth plane crashing in Pennsylvania, all in all killing 3,000 people.²²⁸ This act of terror would come to define the nature of American foreign policy under the Bush administration and act as the starting point for two American led interventions.

To correctly evaluate the intervention in Afghanistan, and the subsequent policies of the Bush administration after September 11 2001, the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers and Pentagon should not only be viewed as a ‘criminal act perpetrated by a specific group’ but as the starting point to what the administration viewed as a multifaceted threat posed to the United States. This threat was ‘terrorist groups with a global reach, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the malign influence of rogue states’.²²⁹ This interpretation of the danger posed to the United States, in concurrence with the administration’s preoccupation with Iraq, would shape how President Bush and his advisors conducted their intervention in Afghanistan. The intervention was construed in very narrow counterterrorism terms; the United States primary and only mission in Afghanistan was to capture or kill members of al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The rigidity of the United States focus would have implications for their role in post-conflict Afghanistan and their relationship with their greatest ally: the United Kingdom.

As 9/11 offered those in the United States administration an opportunity to further objectives that been established after the first Gulf War, the terrorist attacks would provide the British Prime Minister an opportunity to increase the UK’s international prestige by entering into a partnership with the United States. In addition, UK foreign policy under Tony Blair would be underpinned by his philosophy of international community and commitment to moral intervention. Moreover, Tony Blair’s beliefs would help set the conditions that resulted in the UK

²²⁸ Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda* (London, 2007) p. 22.

²²⁹ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 48.

committing to tackling the Afghan drugs trade in the wake of 9/11. Throughout the three phases of intervention in Afghanistan (planning, military campaign and post-conflict re-configuration) the United Kingdom would be the United States most trusted coalition partner with cooperation evident at every stage. However, the degree to which the partnership was equal and the ability of the UK to influence the U.S. varied throughout the three phases. This was important, as there were differences.

It is the purpose of this chapter to examine how the United States construed 9/11 and what factors shaped its response. It will then develop the United Kingdom's position to the terror attacks and the interaction between the UK and the U.S. and the policy-formulating process of both actors. Of particular interest will be the United Kingdom's focus on destroying the Afghan drugs trade during policy discussions in the immediate wake of 9/11. The next section will examine the military operation in Afghanistan and how this tested the Anglo-American relationship. The final section will consider the post-Taliban reconfiguration of Afghanistan and the differences between the United States and United Kingdom's response.

THE ANGLO-AMERICAN RESPONSE TAKES SHAPE

Ideological Currents in the Bush Administration

As the smoke begin to settle over the World Trade Centre and Pentagon, attention turned to who was responsible for such an attack. For those in the American intelligence community the answer was regrettably obvious, Osama bin Laden, the Saudi extremist who had issued several anti-American *fatwas* and was responsible for conducting terrorist attacks against American installations over the previous years. Both CIA Director George Tenet and National Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure Protection and Counterterrorism Richard Clarke²³⁰ (among others) had warned those within the Clinton and Bush administrations that al-Qaeda posed a very real and dangerous threat to the United States homeland. Adding to the sense of trauma was the belief that 9/11 was only the first in a series of impending attacks as

²³⁰ Ibid., pp.54-55.

President Bush cautioned ‘this is not an isolated incident’.²³¹ Vice President Cheney was also deeply concerned about the U.S.’s vulnerability to further attack and argued that averting another terrorist assault should be the U.S.’s top priority.²³²

It is against this backdrop that the Bush administration had to formulate a response to September 11. The day after the attacks George Tenet set about briefing the President, that all the available evidence indicated that bin Laden and al-Qaeda were responsible for the attacks on America. Ominously, however, key members of the Bush administrations including the President himself sought to link 9/11 to Iraq and Saddam Hussein. By the afternoon of 11 September Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld considered whether to ‘hit S. H. [Saddam Hussein] same time-not only UBL [bin Laden]’²³³ and persuaded the President to contemplate which actors *could* have been involved in the attacks, mentioning Iraq, Libya, Sudan and Iran, as well as Afghanistan.²³⁴ The president it seemed was also convinced of Saddam Hussein’s involvement in 9/11 as he asked Richard Clarke, at the morning intelligence briefing to investigate the connection between the attacks and Saddam Hussein, to which Clarke replied ‘But al-Qaeda did this’, Bush retorted ‘I know, I know...but see if Saddam was involved’.²³⁵ The issue, as Clarke’s deputy Rodger Cressy stated: ‘clearly reflected what their [senior members of the Bush administration’s] frontal lobe issue was. And they viewed Iraq as something that was an existential threat to the United States’.²³⁶

It was clear from the start of the Bush administration in 2001 that there were a large number of highly ideological people in high places, but Bush himself came across as more moderate and pragmatic than many he had appointed. During the election campaign he had presented a profile of caring conservatism and early in his administration he seemed little different from a conventional, albeit right of centre, pragmatist. However, the ideologically charged neo-conservatives and their fellow-travellers – Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, John Bolton, Richard

²³¹ Woodward, *Bush at War*, p. 45.

²³² Dick Cheney, *In my Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York, 2011) p. 333.

²³³ Peter L. Bergen, *The Longest War: The Enduring Conflict Between America and al-Qaeda* (New York, 2010) p. 52.

²³⁴ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p.55.

²³⁵ Bergen, *The Longest War*, p. 52.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

Perle, Stephen J. Hadley and Condoleezza Rice had a clear agenda that they had either constructed over the past decade, or, as fellow-travellers, came to embrace after 9/11.²³⁷ While neo-conservatism sounds like traditional realism, it is permeated with values that transform it into something else. In fact it is ‘a new political animal born of an unlikely marriage of humanitarian idealism and brute force.’ It differs from Wilsonianism’s desire to make the world over in the image of American liberalism in that ‘neo-conservatives prefer to act alone and heavily armed rather than work through the often laborious multilateral process.’²³⁸ Furthermore, the moral dimension of neo-conservatism departs from realism as it emphasises the promotion of values as well as security. In the fog of war, only now are the implications becoming clear. The promotion of these values are informed by both strategic doctrine fathered by Albert Wohlstetter, who was one of the first to realise the importance of smart weapons, and the unipolar condition of one remaining military superpower, influentially popularised by Charles Krauthammer. In the aftermath of 9/11 this neo-conservative agenda provided a clear policy for Bush’s response. In fact the idea of regime change in Iraq had been under preparation since the very first NSC meeting of the Bush Administration on 30 January 2001.²³⁹ Thus the response would not be primarily against terrorists, but against undemocratic rogue states such as Iraq that could challenge the USA and its security by developing weapons of mass destruction and using terrorist proxies to deliver them against the USA and its allies. Confronting this challenge, the neo-conservatives convincingly argued that the traditional deterrence option was impotent and that smart weapons must be used to intervene pre-emptively and clinically against rogue states. A major sub-theme of their strategy to deal with instability in the Middle East (and conveniently the oil access problem) was to spread democracy and the free-market, first in Afghanistan, then in Iraq and then onwards throughout the region. The outcomes of these value positions were embodied in diplomatic exchanges and policy and strategy papers over the months that followed 9/11. Even while President Bush appeared initially to move multilaterally it was

²³⁷ Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *America Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order* (Cambridge, 2004), p.110.

²³⁸ James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush’s War Cabinet* (New York, 2004), pp., 181 and 160.

²³⁹ Ron Suskind, *The Price of Loyalty: George W. Bush, the White House, and the Education of Paul O’Neill* (New York, 2004), pp., 74-75 O’Neill’s view is collaborated by Clarke, Richard A. ‘Against All Enemies: Inside America’s War on Terror’, (London: Free Press, 2004) page 264, and these are somewhat at odds with the earlier views in Bob.Woodward, *Bush at War*.

appearance rather than reality. The US military made it very clear to the French from the outset that they were not going ‘to wage war by committee’ – Kosovo had provided the salutary lessons.²⁴⁰ In his January State of the Union Address in 2002 Bush spoke of an axis of evil. In June at West Point he spoke of the need for pre-emptive action against clear and present dangers, which soon seemed to develop into a policy of preventative action against less clear and less present dangers. Arthur Schlesinger has seen this as a deeply disturbing return to the dangers of the Imperial Presidency. ‘The essence of our new strategy is military: to strike a potential enemy, unilaterally if necessary, before he has a chance to strike us. War, traditionally a matter of last resort, becomes a matter of presidential choice.’²⁴¹ In September 2002 in *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* three key concepts were embedded: the need for pre-emptive/preventative action; that the USA must be the unchallengeable superpower; and that US democratic values should be trumpeted and spread abroad.²⁴² In many ways, even though National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice determined much of the content, the ideas were a logical follow-on from the findings of the 1998 Commission to Assess the Ballistic Missile Threat to the United States chaired by Donald Rumsfeld and into which Paul Wolfowitz also fed ideas.²⁴³ All this shifted the balance further away from overlapping and shared values and attitudes in the transatlantic alliance, particularly with U.S. unilateralism and the suspect legitimacy of the doctrine of preventative strike, and this made Blair’s job of trying to act out the role of pivotal power between the USA and Europe more difficult. However, the bilateral US-UK relationship remained ‘special’ and provided a platform from which Blair could at least try to act as a bridging element across the Atlantic.

Nevertheless, the way in which the intervention in Afghanistan would be construed stemmed from, in part; the convictions of the highly ideological senior members of the Bush administration and these would later separate the intentions of the allies in the transatlantic alliance. Chief among these convictions was opposition

²⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 304 quoting interview by author with François Bujon de L’Estang, French Ambassador to the USA.

²⁴¹ Arthur M. Jr., Schlesinger, *War and the American Presidency* (New York, 2005), p. 21.

²⁴² The Office of the President of the United States of America, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, September 2002.

²⁴³ Andrew Newman, ‘Arms Control, Proliferation, and Terrorism: The Bush Administration’s Post-September 11 Security Strategy.’ *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, (2004), 27: pp. 59-88.

to the United States military being involved in nation building activities – a much-criticised trait of the Clinton administration and an ideal Tony Blair would later promote for Afghanistan. (Whilst the author acknowledges the difference between state and nation building both will be used interchangeably for ease of reading).²⁴⁴ Members of the Bush administration pointed to America's involvement in peacekeeping during the 1990s in Yugoslavia and Haiti under the Clinton administration as a 'waste of political and economic resources on such unfocused and ill-judged adventures'. Key players within the administration – the President, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice, consistently argued before and after the 2000 presidential election against using the American military in nation-building activities.²⁴⁵ The National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice stated during the election campaign 'we don't need the 82nd Airborne escorting kids to kindergarten'. The President himself would also argue against nation building during the election campaign, as he stated in a debate with Al Gore: 'The vice president and I have a disagreement about the use of troops. He believes in nation building. I would be very careful about using our troops as nation builders'.²⁴⁶ A memo written by Douglas J. Feith of the Defense Department, to his boss Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, days after the American campaign against the Taliban began illustrates how this conviction shaped the United States early-intervention engagement in Afghanistan, 'nation building is not our key strategic goal in Afghanistan'.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁴ A distinction between the terms 'state-building' and 'nation-building' requires clarification. 'State-building' denotes interventionist policies to build or rebuild the institutions of, in most cases, failed states. On the other hand, 'nation-building' denotes the construction of the cultural identity of a particular territory of the state. Most agree that external actors (foreign countries) usually perform 'state-building' activities. Von Bogdandy, Armin, et al, *State-Building, Nation-Building, and Constitutional Politics in Post-Conflict Situations: Conceptual Clarifications and an Appraisal of Different Approaches* in Von Bogdandy, Armin, Wolfrum, Rudiger and Philipp, Christianne, E., *Max Planck yearbook of United Nations law*, Vol. 9, (London: Kluwer Law International, 2005). However, Lakhdar Brahimi, notes 'nation-building' 'reflects the specifically American experience of constructing a new order in a land of new settlement without deeply rooted peoples, cultures and traditions. Nations cannot be built, especially not by foreigners descending on a country for a short period of time. Nations emerge through an unplanned historical-evolutionary process'. Remarks by Brahimi, Lakhdar, 'State Building in Crisis and Post-Conflict Countries', Global Forum on Reinventing Government Building Trust in Government, Vienna, (June 2007). Despite the term 'state-building' more accurately reflecting their activities in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Bush administration opted to refer to its activities as 'nation-building'. With the frequency that American officials used the term 'nation-building', it unsurprisingly soon crossed over into the mainstream media, resulting in a blurring of the meaning of the terms. Therefore, whilst the author acknowledges the distinction between both terms, they will be used interchangeably to reflect usage by American officials.

²⁴⁵ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, pp. 48-49.

²⁴⁶ Bergen, *The Longest War*, p. 179.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, a distain for nation building was not the only conviction shaping the coming intervention in Afghanistan. The way in, which the American military would be, deployed in future conflicts was decided before September 11th 2001. George Bush campaigned during the 2000 election that the American military needed to adapt to the challenges of modern warfare and embrace the technological superiority of the American armed forces. Convinced the American military should build on the technological developments first seen in during the Gulf War (1991), President Bush's presidency would enhance these developments through a military 'transformation'. As the Soviet Union, faded into history so did the Soviet-era threat. Modern warfare according to this premise would not be decided by traditional tactics of deploying a large number of troops fighting conventional battles but by transforming American forces to, as George Bush stated in 1999, 'agile, lethal, rapidly deployable [forces requiring] ... a minimum of logistical support'.²⁴⁸ Additionally, 'the use of force ... would come to equate operational victory on the battlefield with strategic and political success'. On arrival at the Pentagon, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz had a clear mission: transform the military to meet the challenges of the modern warfare by focus on new technologies, and producing a trim and flexible military that could respond to new threats with a minimum of manpower. The transformation agenda was focused on quickly deployed agile forces that would perform swiftly achieve victory then withdraw to circumvent being drawn into nation building exercises – as American forces had been under the Clinton regime.

The United Kingdom Stands Shoulder to Shoulder with the United States in the Wake of the Attacks

Most of the global community offered support over the September 11th terrorist attacks but for the United States one ally would stand above all in the coming months and years. The United Kingdom and United States 'special relationship' would enter a new phase under the presidency of George Bush and premiership of Tony Blair. Just as George Bush's presidency would be defined by his responses to 9/11, so would his

²⁴⁸ Paul K. Davis, 'Military Transformation: Which Transformation, and What Lies Ahead', in Stephen J. Cimbala (ed.) *The George W. Bush Defense Program*, (Dulles, 2010) p. 20.

chief ally's legacy be defined by his involvement in the coming wars and his resolute support for the Bush administration.

On September 11, Tony Blair was scheduled to deliver a speech to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), however, learning of the attacks, the Prime Minister decided to abandon his prepared speech and say a few impromptu words. Tony Blair's words were laced with moralistic imagery as he indicated had a very clear idea of the new threat to society and the response the international community should take. 'This mass terrorism is the new evil in our world today...the democracies of this world, are going to have to come together to fight it and eradicate this evil completely'.²⁴⁹ The themes espoused by Tony Blair in his short address to the TUC alluded to the doctrine of international community, the focus of the Prime Minister's April 1999 Chicago Speech. The Chicago speech highlighted the moral responsibility of western nations to intervene in countries to prevent acts of genocide as in Kosovo in 1999.²⁵⁰

The most pressing foreign policy problem we face is to identify the circumstances in which we should get actively involved in other people's conflicts. Non-interference has long been considered an important principle of international order. And it is not one we would want to jettison too readily. One state should not feel it has the right to change the political system of another or foment subversion or seize pieces of territory to which it feels it should have some claim. But the principle of non-interference must be qualified in important respects. Acts of genocide can never be a purely internal matter. When oppression produces massive flows of refugees which unsettle neighbouring countries then they can properly be described as "threats to international peace and security". When regimes are based on minority rule they lose legitimacy – look at South Africa.

²⁴⁹ Alastair Campbell, *The Alastair Campbell Diaries: The Burden of Power Countdown to Iraq*, Volume 4 (London, 2012) p. 4.

²⁵⁰ Anthony Seldon, (ed.), *Blair's Britain, 1997-2007* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 58.

Looking around the world there are many regimes that are undemocratic and engaged in barbarous acts. If we wanted to right every wrong that we see in the modern world then we would do little else than intervene in the affairs of other countries. We would not be able to cope.

So how do we decide when and whether to intervene. I think we need to bear in mind five major considerations.

First, are we sure of our case? War is an imperfect instrument for righting humanitarian distress; but armed force is sometimes the only means of dealing with dictators. Second, have we exhausted all diplomatic options? We should always give peace every chance, as we have in the case of Kosovo. Third, on the basis of a practical assessment of the situation, are there military operations we can sensibly and prudently undertake? Fourth, are we prepared for the long term? In the past we talked too much of exit strategies. But having made a commitment we cannot simply walk away once the fight is over; better to stay with moderate numbers of troops than return for repeat performances with large numbers. And finally, do we have national interests involved? The mass expulsion of ethnic Albanians from Kosovo demanded the notice of the rest of the world. But it does make a difference that this is taking place in such a combustible part of Europe.

I am not suggesting that these are absolute tests. But they are the kind of issues we need to think about in deciding in the future when and whether we will intervene.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=279>.

Tony Blair was the first foreign leader invited to the United States after George Bush's presidential victory as a 'tribute to the special relationship between the United States and United Kingdom'²⁵² and significantly it was Tony Blair who was the first foreign leader the President would call on September 12. George Bush recounted his view of the phone call:

Tony began by saying he was "in a state of shock" and that he would stand with America "one hundred per cent" in fighting terror. There was no equivocation in his voice. The conversation helped cement the closest friendship I would form with any foreign leader. As the years passed and the wartime decisions grew tougher, some of our allies wavered. Tony never did.²⁵³

In the hours after the attacks Prime Minister Blair diligently immersed himself in all the available information on al-Qaeda, the Taliban and Afghanistan to make as much impact as possible when he spoke with President Bush.²⁵⁴ During the conversation Prime Minister Blair was supportive but urged restraint, arguing that the United States needed to be certain of who was responsible for the attacks and dissuading any action against Iraq – later Tony Blair would comment 'we had to separate the two missions'.²⁵⁵ The Prime Minister advocated a multilateralist approach generating support across the international community utilising NATO and the UN and holding a special G8 conference on terrorism – an idea President Bush did not seem to favour. Tony Blair feared President Bush would 'turn inward'²⁵⁶ and become even more isolationist – a trait that was evident in the later years of the Clinton administration. The Prime Minister also urged improved relations with Afghanistan's neighbours: Iran and Pakistan and the re-ignition of the Middle East peace process (MEPP) to generate Arab support for the coming military actions against a Muslim country. Tony Blair thought the focus should remain, at least for the time being on al-Qaeda and evidence should be released demonstrating the group's

²⁵² George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York, 2010) p. 230.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.140

²⁵⁴ Anthony Seldon, Peter Snowdon and Daniel Collings, *Blair Unbound* (London, 2007), pp., 48-49

²⁵⁵ Campbell, *The Alastair Campbell Diaries*, p. 12.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

involvement in the terrorist attacks. The Taliban should be given an ultimatum to hand over bin Laden and if they failed to comply, America would be within their rights to launch a military response. Importantly, the prime minister articulated that whilst al-Qaeda were the immediate focus, the mission would be expanded to tackle all those who supported, financed and committed terrorism around the world,²⁵⁷ including failed states that had connections to terrorist organisations.²⁵⁸ When President Bush and Prime Minister Blair spoke again days later, the president thanked Tony Blair for his previous comments, which reflected his own thinking.²⁵⁹ Sadly, as will become clear later, many of Blair's tactics were side-lined by the ideological hardliners who came to dominate US policy.

The direction of British foreign policy after 9/11 under Tony Blair was centred on 'being as close' to the Americans as possible. This would, predicted Prime Minister Blair, result in the UK having 'real influence' on the world stage and have the ability to effect world events. According to a Number 10 official 'what we wanted to do was influence American decisions, to be a player in Washington – as Churchill was with Roosevelt, or Macmillan with Kennedy, or Thatcher with Reagan'. Similarly, Alastair Campbell noted Tony Blair's thoughts in his diary 'He [Tony Blair] said...we still had an opportunity to mould things in the right direction'.²⁶⁰ Tony Blair would seek to exert as much influence as possible over his American counterpart but would remain absolute in their support of the Americans. Tony Blair was convinced of his ability to influence the American president and would later write in a letter to Archbishop Carey 'Bluntly, I am the one Western leader the US will really listen to on these issues'.²⁶¹ As will become evident later, Tony Blair's ability to influence the President's key decisions would be more limited than he hoped.

The Prime Minister not only dominated the direction of British foreign policy but also the policy-making process as he abandoned the 'regularised institutions of decision making such as the cabinet and the Foreign Office'²⁶² in favour of an informal process consisting of consultation with his inner circle. The group comprised

²⁵⁷ Seldon, Snowdon and Collings, *Blair Unbound*, pp., 49-50.

²⁵⁸ Stephen B. Dyson, *The Blair Identity: Leadership and Foreign Policy* (Manchester, 2009), p. 75.

²⁵⁹ Seldon, Snowdon and Collings, *Blair Unbound*, p. 52.

²⁶⁰ Campbell, *The Alastair Campbell Diaries*, p.12.

²⁶¹ Seldon, Snowdon and Collings, *Blair Unbound*, p. 87.

²⁶² Stephen, B. Dyson, *The Blair Identity*, p. 80.

of: Jonathan Powell, David Manning, Alastair Campbell, Sally Morgan, Jack Straw and Richard Wilson²⁶³ and would meet frequently, sometimes multiple times per day in the PM's office. The intelligence chiefs Sir John Scarlett, Sir Stephen Lander and Sir Richard Dearlove delivered intelligence on the Taliban and al-Qaeda directly to Blair and his inner circle. Opting to conduct policy through the 'sofa' cabinet, formal cabinet meetings were held infrequently; in the two weeks following the attacks cabinet only met twice and were bereft of rigorous policy discussion.²⁶⁴ Tony Blair was not available for open consultation outwith his closest confidants, as 'Downing Street said: Blair was seeing people when necessary'.²⁶⁵ As will be discussed later, it was in this informal policy-making environment that those who commanded the PM's ear were able to influence UK policies (and specifically early counter narcotics strategy) in Afghanistan that were widely argued against by the Foreign Office - the chief foreign policy-making organ of the British government.

The Anglo-American Alliance makes their Case for War

Cofer Black, the head of the CIA's Counterterrorism Center proposed the United States first possible strategy in response to the attacks at the National Security Council Meeting on the 13th September. The next day Cofer Black met with CIA officer, Gary Schreou to unveil his plan for overthrowing the Taliban regime and eliminating al-Qaeda, 'Gary, I want you to take a small team of CIA officers into Afghanistan. You will link up with the Northern Alliance and convince them to cooperate with the CIA and U.S. military as we go after al-Qaeda'.²⁶⁶ As a way to induce the cooperation and 'loyalty' of the northern warlords the CIA would distribute millions of dollars in cash. The CIA and Special Forces units working with the Northern Alliance would direct America airpower against Taliban and al-Qaeda positions, and hunt terrorist operatives with the eventual goal of the capture of bin Laden and overthrow of the Taliban regime.²⁶⁷ As the President discussed the available options for intervention in Afghanistan later that day, he instructed the

²⁶³ Seldon, Snowdon and Collings, *Blair Unbound*, p. 57.

²⁶⁴ Dyson, *The Blair Identity*, p. 81.

²⁶⁵ John, Kampfner, *Blair's War's* (London, 2003), p. 121.

²⁶⁶ Bergen, *The Longest War*, p. 54.

²⁶⁷ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 66.

Defense Secretary to include the United Kingdom in the mission, ‘The British...really want to participate. Give them a role’.²⁶⁸

The Bush cabinet convened at Camp David on September 15th for a two-day session to discuss United States response to the attacks. Despite, articulating the focus of the upcoming campaign, the Pentagon, the most obvious architect of a war plan, failed to propose a viable proposal. In fact, the Defense Department did not have an ‘off-the-shelf’ proposal to topple the Taliban regime or pursue al-Qaeda and instead opted to suggest a strategy over-reliant on airpower. Notwithstanding, the possibility and worthiness of an attack on Iraq featuring heavily in the discussions, the President decided that Afghanistan would be the first step in America’s war on terror.²⁶⁹ As the President vetoed an attack on Iraq, the British the senior military advisor to CENTCOM, Air Chief Marshall Jock Stirrup based in Tampa, Florida, conveyed Britain’s support to General Tommy Franks for intervention in Afghanistan and the hunt for bin Laden but not for the invasion of Iraq.²⁷⁰ The best plan came from CIA Director George Tenet, who had argued for the implementation of the suggestions by Cofer Black days before. Limited by a dearth of options, the CIA’s plan to place officers laden with cash into Afghanistan to generate support from anti-Taliban warlords and prepare the way for American Special Forces who would direct an American air assault on Taliban installations – was the best and only plan available to the Bush administration.²⁷¹ With that, the President authorised the plan six days after the 9/11 attack.²⁷²

On 20th September 2001, President Bush invited the British Prime Minister as a guest of honour for his speech before a joint session of congress outlining the coming intervention. On arrival the President reassured Tony Blair that al-Qaeda and the Taliban were the focus not Iraq, which he said would keep for another day – a statement the Prime Minister did not take literally. The conversation turned to the President’s address at the Joint Session of Congress later that evening, by being informed of the key points of the speech before it was revealed to Congress indicated

²⁶⁸ Dyson, *The Blair Identity*, p. 73.

²⁶⁹ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, pp. 65-66.

²⁷⁰ Seldon, Snowdon and Collings, *Blair Unbound*, p. 52.

²⁷¹ Bergen, *The Longest War*, p. 55.

²⁷² Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 67.

to the Prime Minister he would be a chief ally in the coming war, however, it also indicated that the key decisions had already been made without his input.²⁷³ In fact, the Bush administration had already decided the core policy decisions ‘by the end of that first weekend in Camp David’ a senior Bush official stated so there was ‘not much of a role for Blair in helping to shape the American response to the attacks of 9/11’.²⁷⁴

Tony Blair’s influence would be felt however, on what the Americans saw as the smaller issues, namely the need to re-start the MEPP and to build a multilateral coalition force – the latter was rejected by Rumsfeld and Cheney because it could potentially constrain their actions, as Cheney commented: ‘it was important, I said, that we not allow our mission to be determined by others. We had an obligation to do whatever it took to defend America, and we needed coalition partners who would sign on for that. The mission should define the coalition, not the other way around’.²⁷⁵ The pretence of multilateral action was maintained and the MEPP was only ever pursued half-heartedly.²⁷⁶

Over dinner, before the president addressed Congress, he shared with the British Prime Minister his plans for a joint CIA-military operation in Afghanistan and that ‘the country was run by a bunch of nuts and we had to get a new government in there’.²⁷⁷ If only he had realised what a new government would entail and what challenges it would face. Both the President and Prime Minister travelled together to Congress in the president’s limousine – an honour in itself. Tony Blair was seated in the ‘heroes’ gallery next to the first Lady, an enclosure reserved for ‘all American heroes: who inspire others to greatness and embody the American dream’. During the President’s speech, Tony Blair received commendation from George Bush: ‘I’m so honoured the British Prime Minister has crossed the ocean to show his unity with America...Thank you for coming my friend’.²⁷⁸ Blair’s show of unity was powerful and above all it would cement Great Britain as a valuable and trusted ally in the coming war(s).

²⁷³ Seldon, Snowdon and Collings, *Blair Unbound*, p. 55.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

²⁷⁵ Cheney, *In my Time*, p. 298.

²⁷⁶ Seldon, Snowdon and Collings, *Blair Unbound*, p. 53.

²⁷⁷ Campbell, *The Alastair Campbell Diaries*, p. 24.

²⁷⁸ Seldon, Snowdon and Collings, *Blair Unbound*, p. 56.

President Bush's speech declared that the Taliban regime was 'repressing its own people, it is threatening people everywhere by sponsoring and sheltering and supplying terrorists'. The President laid forth an ultimatum to the Taliban regime:

The United States of America makes the following demands on the Taliban: Deliver to United States authorities all the leaders of al Qaeda who hide in your land...Close immediately and permanently every terrorist training camp in Afghanistan, and hand over every terrorist, and every person in their support structure, to appropriate authorities...They will hand over the terrorists, or they will share in their fate... Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.²⁷⁹

Less than two weeks later, on the other side of the Atlantic Tony Blair addressed the Labour Party Conference on October 2 2001 reaffirming his support for the United States and publicly stating his case for the intervention in Afghanistan:

We were with you at the first. We will stay with you to the last. We know those responsible. In Afghanistan are scores of training camps for the export of terror. Chief amongst the sponsors and organisers is Usama Bin Laden...He is supported, shielded and given succour by the Taliban regime...There is no diplomacy with Bin Laden or the Taliban regime...State an ultimatum and get their response. We stated the ultimatum; they haven't responded...Just a choice: defeat it or be defeated by it. And defeat it we

²⁷⁹ <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>.

must...I say to the Taliban: surrender the terrorists; or
surrender power. It's your choice.²⁸⁰

In the same speech, Tony Blair highlighted the Taliban's relationship with the Afghan opium industry and the inextricable connection between Afghan opium and the British heroin market. The Prime Minister's comments would give the first indication that should the West intervene in Afghanistan there was enthusiasm within some sections of the United Kingdom government to counter the Afghan drugs trade:

It is a regime founded on fear and funded on the drugs trade. The biggest drugs hoard in the world is in Afghanistan, controlled by the Taliban. Ninety per cent of the heroin on British streets originates in Afghanistan...The arms the Taliban are buying today are paid for with the lives of young British people buying their drugs on British streets...That is another part of their regime that we should seek to destroy.²⁸¹

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11 the argument to attack Britain's heroin problem at source gained some high profile endorsements with the Chief of Defence Staff Admiral Sir Michael Boyce and Director General of the Security Service (MI5) Sir Stephen Lander suggesting 'the heroin trail should also be hit' at a September 17 intelligence meeting.²⁸² The Prime Minister had also suggested as much in his note to President Bush on September 20.²⁸³

Calls for the British government to engage the Afghan drugs trade in the wake of 9/11 fed into a growing policy debate within the UK government that had been well established over a number of years as 90 per cent of heroin present in the UK originates in Afghanistan – compared to only 10 per cent of the heroin found in the United States. This would, in part, come to shape the UK's interest (and to a minor extent the U.S.'s disinterest) in counter narcotics. Afghanistan had featured heavily in the UK's counter narcotics discussions prior to September 2001, with the central point

²⁸⁰ 'Labour Conference: Full Text: Tony Blair's Speech (Part One)', *The Guardian*, 2nd October 2001.

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Campbell, *The Alastair Campbell Diaries*, p. 16.

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 21.

of debate being: to what extent was it worth applying pressure at source countries to cut off the supply of illegal narcotics to UK streets. This form of upstream interdiction would appeal to certain individual members of the FCO, military and cabinet office but consensus was never reached across government about whether work on the ground was a priority strategy for the UK. Indeed, consensus on what form this engagement would take also proved elusive in the years prior to 9/11. But as policy options were explored in the days and weeks after 9/11, there were growing calls particularly from No.10 that cutting off the supply of heroin to UK streets at source would be an attractive and achievable task for the UK.²⁸⁴ How these events were to take shape and unfold will be considered shortly.

Adding to the genuine sense of enthusiasm for upstream interdiction within No.10, was a need to cater to domestic politics by identifying the destruction of the Afghan drugs trade as yet another reason for intervention. By linking destroying the Afghan drugs trade to direct benefits it would have for the British population, it would make the coming intervention more palatable for the domestic audience. Alastair Campbell noted in his diary ‘He [Tony Blair] emphasised that we had continually to make the link to domestic policy – that this had implications for our fight against drugs and terrorism’.²⁸⁵ Over the coming year Tony Blair would maintain that destroying the Afghan drugs trade was possible,²⁸⁶ and indicated the wider benefits to UK society. The Prime Minister reminded the audience at the Labour Conference in 2002 of the connection between Afghan heroin and Britain, reiterating: ‘Our young people ... die from heroin imported from Afghanistan’.²⁸⁷

The public statements by the British government over the issue demonstrated a degree of domestic and party politics but tackling the drug trade to cut off the source of heroin to British streets would become a key strategic objective for the Prime Minister and No.10 officials – but even the savvy Blair did not appreciate the problems in Afghanistan created or exacerbated by the opium industry. The importance placed on the issue by the UK government was not reflected in the wider

²⁸⁴ Author Interview with British Official (11), 22 October 2014.

²⁸⁵ Campbell, *The Alastair Campbell Diaries*, p. 43.

²⁸⁶ 14 November 2001 *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)* (House of Commons) col. 872 (available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmhansrd/vo011114/debtext/11114-07.htm>)

²⁸⁷ ‘Labour Conference: Full Text: Tony Blair’s Speech (Part One)’, *The Guardian*, 1 October 2002

Anglo-American alliance as the U.S. administration contended that destroying the drug trade was not part of their counter-terrorism mission in Afghanistan, arguing in doing such would constitute becoming involved in nation-building activities.

The refusal to consider the Afghan drugs trade as a priority let alone an objective can be exemplified in the days after 9/11, when the Bush administration was presented with information that if acted upon could have severely disrupted the Afghan drug trade for a year or more. In response to al-Qaeda's bombings of two United States Embassies in East Africa prior to 9/11, the American intelligence community had established a cross departmental unit to monitor high value bombing targets within Afghanistan. After the 9/11 terrorists attacks the unit delivered information to the military that had accrued over the past two and half years. Included in the list were 'twenty to twenty five major drug labs, warehouses, and other drug-related facilities'.²⁸⁸ However, according to a C.I.A. source the military and Pentagon declined to launch an attack on any drug-related facility, instead even though 'on the day after 9/11 that target list was ready to go, ... the military and the NSC threw it out the window'.²⁸⁹ The CIA source evaluated the impact of these targets 'The drug targets were big places, almost like small towns that did nothing but produce heroin...[if the United States had bombed those facilities] it would have slowed down drug production in Afghanistan for a year or more'.²⁹⁰ The unwillingness of United States to eliminate the high value drug targets was the first indication that many within the Bush administration did not place any importance on fighting the Afghan opium business in the initial post-intervention period and this attitude stood in contrast to their closest ally.

The unwillingness to counter the opium industry was in part, due to the dominance of the Pentagon, led by the traditional Realist Donald Rumsfeld, over the American policy-making process. The Secretary of Defense continually argued against committing large numbers of troops to the upcoming intervention or becoming involved in police work and his ability to push his agenda through whilst side-lining competing views guaranteed this position. Foremost among the competition was the

²⁸⁸ James Risen, *State of War: The Secret history of the CIA and the Bush Administration* (New York, 2006), p. 154.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

State Department and Colin Powell. Unlike Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld who were able to act in concert to influence the President's decision-making, Colin Powell was seen somewhat as an 'outsider', often operating in isolation on the fringes of the administration.²⁹¹ Adding to this sense of isolation was Powell's hesitancy in interfering in military matters. Powell, a retired four-star general and former Joint Chiefs of Staff had vast military experience and prowess, but opted not to interfere with military matters that were now outside his remit as Secretary of State. Donald Rumsfeld had no such compunctions. As a former American official commented:

There is an old idea in the army called stay in your lane and it means in the division of labour...if you are the guy that is the writer then you write and if someone else is the quartermaster they hand out the checks...And you do not get in the way of what the artillery guy is doing, and he does not get involved in what you're doing; that way there are very clear lanes. The problem is in a way Rumsfeld got into other people's lanes, and Powell as a loyal soldier...he did not try to be the Secretary of Defence.²⁹²

Donald Rumsfeld did not shy away from influencing the military and diplomatic decision-making and was able to tactically outmanoeuvre his opponents including the President himself. According to White House officials, Donald Rumsfeld only obeyed the President's wishes if they concurred with his own. Condoleezza Rice, who was charged with heading the interagency process proved incapable of keeping the Defense Secretary in check. As a result Rumsfeld was able to employ several tactics to manipulate the President and other White House officials to further his own objectives. Rumsfeld would continuously object to proposals not to his liking through an unrelenting succession of questions, if that failed to have the proposal rejected, Rumsfeld would petition other administration members until his plans were adopted.²⁹³ Personal differences aside, the State Department and Pentagon had two diametrically opposed views on how American soldiers should be utilised.

²⁹¹ Woodward, *Bush at War*, p. 14.

²⁹² Author Interview with American Official (3), 7 March 2014.

²⁹³ Risen, *State of War*, pp., 161-162.

The ideologies of both departments would clash as early as 2000, when Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld advocated the imminent withdrawal of American troops from Bosnia. For him their job was over as the fighting had finished. Secretary of State Powell on the other hand saw much still to be done to stabilise and rebuild Bosnia and countered Rumsfeld by arguing that such a move would hinder the United States relations with its NATO allies. This early dispute was a sign of things to come and contributed to the development of battle lines between the two departments over the role of American troops and the merits of 'nation-building'.²⁹⁴ 'All of these factors coalesced to ensure that, in the first few years of the Afghanistan intervention, the foreign policy of the Bush administration would emerge as a result of victory over the State Department by Rumsfeld and dominance of the Department of Defense to an extent that had few parallels in US political history'.²⁹⁵

Tony Blair Acts as the United States Unofficial Envoy

The 9/11 terrorist's attacks had a profound impact on G W. Bush, he was like a born again evangelical preacher as one of his senior administration officials said '[Bush] really believes he was placed here to do this as part of a divine plan'.²⁹⁶ Tony Blair also saw 9/11 as a career defining moment where he could facilitate the triumph of good versus evil as Sally Morgan commented: 'It was as if a rod had been inserted into his spine'.²⁹⁷ Tony Blair was convinced that terrorism, with the threat of WMD's was the most potent danger to Western security and military action was the correct way to respond and he was the best and only candidate capable of building international support for America. Blair enthusiastically set about the mission of building a coalition of support. 'In the eight weeks after 9/11, he undertook thirty-one flights covering 40,000 miles and held fifty-four meetings with foreign leaders'.²⁹⁸ Tony Blair's efforts to build an international coalition proved successful with 68 countries offering support.²⁹⁹ Tony Blair positioned himself simultaneously as the United States' unofficial envoy and leader of the international coalition of support.

²⁹⁴ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 70.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ John Davis (ed.), *Presidential Policies and the Road to the Second Iraq War: From Forty One to Forty Three* (Aldershot, 2006) p. 21.

²⁹⁷ Seldon, Snowden and Collings, *Blair Unbound*, p. 57.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 62.

The New York Times noted: ‘He has not only been Washington’s partner in facing the wider world, but on many occasions the world’s ambassador to Washington’. It was in this *unofficial position* Tony Blair organised a meeting of all the major European heads at Downing Street before flying to Washington.³⁰⁰ By travelling the globe engendering support for the upcoming intervention, Tony Blair estimated his efforts would make him a global player³⁰¹ and bring him closer to the United States.

Significantly, the United States received support from the United Nations Security Council, which provided legitimacy for armed intervention through Resolutions 1368 and 1373. Additionally, NATO, for the first time in their history invoked Article 5, which states an attack on any member nation is deemed an attack on all member nations and authorises the use of force in response.³⁰² Perhaps ungraciously, the United States would rebuff NATO’s overtures – a move designed to keep America firmly in control of the upcoming mission.³⁰³

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM

The operation against the Taliban and al-Qaeda would begin in earnest when a seven-man CIA unit, under the new code-name of ‘Jawbreaker’, led by Gary Schroen arrived in the Panjshir Valley in north-eastern Afghanistan on 26th September. The unit, well versed in unconventional warfare, was part of the CIA Special Activities Division and left America with an unambiguous outline of their mission from Cofer Black: I have discussed this with the President and he is in full agreement...Your mission...to find Usama bin Ladin and his senior lieutenants and to kill them... I want them dead... They must be killed.³⁰⁴

Armed with 3 million in cash Schroen and his unit set about distributing this largesse among Northern Alliance commanders – many of whom had unsavoury backgrounds and were involved in the drugs trade - to build a willing anti-Taliban fighting coalition. Realpolitik and the exigencies of the ‘War on Terror’ were already

³⁰⁰ Kampfner, *Blair’s War’s*, pp., 137-138.

³⁰¹ Dyson, *The Blair Identity*, p. 78.

³⁰² Bergen, *The Longest War*, p. 57.

³⁰³ Kampfner, *Blair’s War’s*, p. 117.

³⁰⁴ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 73.

overriding ethical considerations: if drug dealers could help find or kill bin Laden then so be it, but American hands were already tainted in a way that would return to damage their later strategies for Afghanistan. The Americans set straight to work offering Aref Sarwari, the former intelligence chief of murdered Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud³⁰⁵ \$500,000 on the 26th September. The next recipient of the money was General Mohammed Fahim, the Tajik commander who has succeeded Massoud as NA leader, who received \$1 million.³⁰⁶ The support offered to Northern Alliance commanders and subsequent distribution of money would lead to an issue that would present itself time and again in the coming weeks, months and years, discord and competition between the various Afghan factions as they looked to cement their powerbases in the coming post-Taliban Afghanistan.³⁰⁷ The tensions and rivalries were more than the traditional inter-tribal rivalries or power-plays between regional strongmen, the contract work offered by the Americans presented these warlords with an opportunity to get rich and ‘acted as seed money for future business interests’. The money would finance many legal and illegal business activities including, property deals, the drug industry and other smuggling operations. One consequence of the CIA financial inducements would weaken the post-Taliban administration, undermine democracy and return the warlords back to power after their absence from power during the Taliban reign.³⁰⁸

The American bombing assault – to which the UK provided submarines: *Triumph* and *Trafalgar* armed with Tomahawk missiles - would begin on the 7th October, two weeks after the arrival of the Schroen’s CIA unit. The Taliban had not met the demands of the ultimatum, therefore, President Bush commenced an air assault, however, the opening strikes did not have the desired impact, failing to take out the more militarily significant targets of the frontline positions of al-Qaeda and the Taliban. It was only when more CIA and Special Forces operatives arrived in Afghanistan by mid to late October and airpower was coordinated with them and the NA that the bombing campaign began to make progress.³⁰⁹ Although the United Kingdom contributed Special Forces to the effort, their presence was more symbolic

³⁰⁵ Ahmed Shah Massoud - the leader of the Northern Alliance - was killed two days before 11th September 2001, by two al-Qaeda operatives posing as journalists.

³⁰⁶ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 74.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.75.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9.

than vital to the success of the operation.³¹⁰ A French official summed up their perception of the UK's involvement in the early campaign and the way in which Tony Blair projected UK power. 'In Afghanistan, the Brits sent a few missiles but Blair gave the impression he was running the war'.³¹¹

The first military success of the campaign came when Uzbek general Abdul Rashid Dostum³¹² - a prominent drug lord who controlled the opium trade into Uzbekistan³¹³ with the help of Special Forces took the strategically important Uzbek city of Mazar-e-Sharif on 10th November. Developments snowballed soon after and three days later, Taliban and al-Qaeda operatives abandoned the capital and Kabul was captured by the Northern Alliance.³¹⁴ Several days' later a hundred British Special Boat Service (SBS) personnel were flown into Bagram Air Base (Kabul) to act as a landing party before the deployment of several thousand British troops – what would be the first major deployment of coalition troops to Afghanistan.³¹⁵ Objections by the Northern Alliance were soon raised after the FCO failed to forewarn them of the British troops arrival. As Alastair Campbell noted: 'there seemed to be real confusion over what our troops were doing. The American focus seemed to be almost entirely getting OBL, with the future of Afghanistan barely getting a look-in. So it looked like our troops were sitting there for no purpose, with neither the NA nor the Americans really wanting them there'.³¹⁶ Shortly after the arrival of the SBS, the thousands of additional British troops that were on 48-hour standby were stood down. Officially, the PM and Minister of Defence Hoon stated that the troops were stood down because of the ever-changing flexible nature of the campaign but privately Alastair Campbell noted: 'We were still communicating a sense of split with us wanting to put more troops in and the US not...Rumsfeld's basic position was that they didn't want anything that detracted from the hunt for OBL, so having had our troops on 48-hour standby, they had to be let down again'.³¹⁷

³¹⁰ Seldon, *Blair's Britain, 1997-2007*, p. 605.

³¹¹ Kampfner, *Blair's War's*, p. 138.

³¹² Bergen, *The Longest War*, pp. 59-60.

³¹³ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, p. 521.

³¹⁴ Bergen, *The Longest War*, pp. 61-62.

³¹⁵ Richard Norton-Taylor, Patrick Wintour, and Julian Borger, 'British Marines Fly into Kabul', *The Guardian*, 16 November 2001.

³¹⁶ Campbell, *The Alastair Campbell Diaries*, p. 91.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

With the Taliban and al-Qaeda still operating in Eastern Afghanistan and intelligence reports indicated that bin Laden and his men fled Kabul towards the province of Jalalabad, near the Pakistani border, events still remained unresolved. The CIA was forced to collaborate with and fund a band of low-level warlords and criminals, whose only support and powerbase was linked to CIA dollars. These commanders would later earn the moniker the ‘American warlords’ as they did not have the traditional powerbase associated with Afghan warlords and their influence derived almost exclusively from the money the CIA had furnished them with.³¹⁸ With bin Laden and his men confined within the mountain complex of Tora Bora, near Jalalabad, the lack of ground troops meant that the limited numbers of American and British Special Forces present were unable to pursue the al-Qaeda leader into the mountains or block off the escape route to Pakistan. As reinforcements failed to materialise, bin Laden and his followers were able to escape across the border into Pakistan.³¹⁹

Again, British Special Forces were marginalised in the campaign as America refused to authorize their participation during the hunt to capture bin Laden at Tora Bora. The early military campaign was almost exclusively formulated and implemented by the United States with the United Kingdom playing a relatively minor role, so much so, a Whitehall spokesman stated ‘at the end of September 2001 that, in terms of the war on terror, we don’t have a an exit strategy. And we don’t have an entry strategy either’. David Blunkett, the Home Secretary revealed the lack of harmonization between the two partners at this point, ‘there was no coordinated strategy between the US and Britain’. Geoff Hoon, Minister of Defence goes further by stating the operation was ‘ the American Show’.³²⁰ Differences between the allies would be heightened as attention turned to what post-Taliban Afghanistan would look like.

AFGHANISTAN’S POST-TALIBAN CONFIGURATION: DIFFERENCES IN THE ANGLO-AMERICAN ALLIANCE

³¹⁸ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, pp. 87-88.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-92.

³²⁰ All quotes are from: Dyson, *The Blair Identity*, pp., 77-78.

As it became clear the Taliban were on the verge of collapse, plans for the post-Taliban configuration of Afghanistan were required. Somewhat inevitably, the Bush administration reaffirmed its opposition to become involved in a nation-building exercise or retaining a large number of troops in Afghanistan after the conflict had ended.³²¹ The United States goal was to topple the Taliban regime and destroy al-Qaeda, other than these narrow objectives the Bush administration had not really considered in great length what a post-Taliban Afghanistan would look like. Afghanistan was only the first step in the United States global 'War on Terror'. Therefore, the decisions made about the post-Taliban Afghanistan were underpinned by the Bush administrations broader concerns about the 'War on Terror', not by concerns about effectively rebuilding Afghan society.

An illustration of the United States intent regarding its role in post-conflict Afghanistan can be gleaned from President Bush's comments at a National Security Council meeting on 13 November. 'The U.S. forces will not stay...we don't do police work. We need a coalition of the willing...and then pass on these tasks to others. We've got a job to do with al-Qaeda'.³²² These comments reveal that not only was America's involvement in Afghanistan going to be limited after the end of the conflict but that the Bush administration viewed its remit purely in terms of regime change and hunting terrorists, any other *menial* tasks could be delegated to their allies. Spearheading this coalition of the willing would be the United Kingdom

This reluctance to stay in Afghanistan beyond killing bin Laden highlighted a fundamental difference within the Anglo-American alliance. Contrastingly, Tony Blair, from the outset of the intervention believed the international community should commit to Afghanistan in the long term by providing a peacekeeping force and help to reconstruct post-Taliban Afghanistan.³²³ The Prime Minister indicated his intentions in a speech in October 2001: 'We will not walk away from Afghanistan, as the outside world has done so many times before'.³²⁴ A former British official noted a more fundamental difference existed between the American and British approach to nation-building: 'nation-building certainly under the Bush administrations...has not

³²¹ Ibid., p. 93.

³²² Woodward, *Bush at War*, p. 310.

³²³ Seldon, Snowdon and Collings, *Blair Unbound*, p. 67

³²⁴ Kampfner, *Blair's War's*, p. 146.

been given the primacy that we would focus on as a country'.³²⁵ There was not, however, clear direction from the neither British government nor Tony Blair in what form this commitment should take.

With the UN designated to secure Kabul, there was consensus that a multi-ethnic and broadly representative administration, headed by a Pashtun leader would be the most stable political arrangement of a post-conflict Afghanistan, one that would, hopefully circumvent ethnic unrest. The United Nations chief envoy to Afghanistan Lakhdar Brahimi proposed a roadmap for the political reconstruction of Afghanistan to the Security Council that would organise a convention of Afghan factions to decide an interim government, leader and would agree to an international security force providing security in the capital.³²⁶

Bonn Conference

This convention of Afghan factions under the auspices of the UN would be held in Bonn, Germany on 5 December 2001. Far from being an inclusive affair, only four groups were selected to take part in the conference with many essential sections of Afghan society being absent. The exclusiveness of the meeting and underrepresentation of certain groups would side-line key interest groups from the Afghanistan political landscape in the coming years creating a sense of marginalisation in the south and east of the country. Somewhat unsurprisingly, the Taliban were not represented at the conference – a move that Lakhdar Brahimi later stated would have helped negotiate a peace settlement.

Those at the conference set about deciding the make-up of the Afghan political landscape. There was consensus among all factions that the head of the new interim administration would have to be a Pashtun. The most popular choice was American backed Hamid Karzai. Karzai, a Pashtun exile who had links to the Soviet resistance and was a member of the Rabbani government,³²⁷ was regarded correctly as the most sanitized candidate most likely to bridge the gap between Afghanistan's

³²⁵ Author Interview with British Official (4), 23 April 2013.

³²⁶ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p. 95.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

main factions and regional powers involved in the country. Karzai possessed many rare commodities in an Afghan leader, he had ‘impeccable tribal credentials; had not been associated with any major human rights abuses; was urbane, with a degree of personal charm; had met most of the key players; did not have a reputation, at this stage, for gross personal corruption; and was intelligent and well educated’.³²⁸ Determined that the post-conflict settlement should reflect the effort and ultimate victory of the NA over the Taliban, the Northern Alliance demanded the lion share of positions in the new administration.³²⁹

The American delegation to the Bonn conference contained officials of a modest status. What was even more disturbing was the lack of input the United States afforded to the process to decide the political landscape of a post-conflict Afghanistan. American interest in the affair was lacking to the point that Ambassador Dobbins, the United States envoy to Afghanistan, did not have any written instructions from Washington on the best way to proceed during the conference. In fact, Ambassador’s Dobbins very presence in Afghanistan was more for appearance and somewhat in response to moves made by the British government as opposed to commitment to the post-Taliban settlement. As Ambassador Dobbins recounts:

This arrangement would at least give the appearance of active diplomacy, and this appearance, I learned, was not a negligible consideration. British Prime Minister Tony Blair had appointed his own personal envoy to the Afghan opposition several weeks earlier; thus, the contrast between a visible British engagement and the absence of any comparable American diplomatic activity had already become a sore point within the administration. In fact, in some measure, my appointment was in response to Blair’s initiative.³³⁰

³²⁸ Ibid., p. 97.

³²⁹ Ibid., pp. 98-99.

³³⁰ James Dobbins, *After the Taliban: Nation-Building in Afghanistan* (Washington, 2008), pp. 16-17.

The lack of consideration afforded to post-conflict Afghanistan illustrated that the reconstruction agenda was not a priority for the Bush administration.³³¹ This initial neglect would prove self-defeating to the Americans as it would prevent the establishment of a stable and secure Afghanistan and that kept the Americans in Afghanistan for years. The Bush administration's lack of strategic clarity could not be more evident than in its omission to formulate an appropriate form of governance for Afghanistan. Democracy would find its way into the Bonn Accords not by design but through a conversation between Dobbins, and an Iranian diplomat. The Iranian official noticed that the proposed Bonn declaration omitted several key features: 'It doesn't make any mention of elections or democracy. Don't you think that Afghans should be pledging themselves to hold elections and build a democracy?' Dobbins recounted 'this was before the Bush administration had discovered democratization as its panacea for the region, so I didn't have any instructions on the subject, but it seemed a harmless suggestion, so I said, 'Yeah, that seems like a good idea'.³³²

The Bonn Agreement established the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA) under the leadership of Hamid Karzai. The AIA would govern for six months until a Loya Jirga was called - a grand assembly of tribal leaders and elders to decide political matters. The Emergency Loya Jirga was assembled in June 2002 to establish a transitional administration, create a new constitution and elect a transitional President within two years.³³³ The agreement also concluded that there was a need for an international security force to provide security in Kabul with the option of it being extended throughout the rest of the country. Ambassador Dobbins and the British Representative to Bonn, Robert Cooper autonomously introduced the peacekeeping element to the discussions, without prior instruction from Washington or London. Mr Cooper, however, predicted that Tony Blair would support sending a British force to lead the mission if the Afghans and Americans requested it. It was also predicted that the Americans, unwilling to become involved themselves, would only *support* a

³³¹ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p.100.

³³² Bergen, *The Longest War*, p. 66.

³³³House of Commons Library Research Paper 05/72: Afghanistan: the culmination of the Bonn Process (26th October 2005) available at (<http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2005/RP05-072.pdf>)

British led force, as they were the only nation in the coalition that the Americans could rely upon to act with a minimum of U.S. support.³³⁴

The Bush administration supported the UN's Afghan envoy Brahimi proposal that any forces sent to Afghanistan should follow the 'light footprint' approach, so as to permit the Afghan's taking a prominent decision-making role..³³⁵ An International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was dispatched to Kabul after the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1386 (2001) on 20 December 2001. The United Kingdom government volunteered to command the first force, much to the displeasure of the British military.³³⁶ The force would be under the leadership of Major General John McColl initially, with eighteen other nations contributing to the mission and leadership of the force rotating six months thereafter. The size of the force was to be 5,000, after NA warlord turned Defense Minister Fahim, sought to limit the size of the force.³³⁷ There were conditions to the United States support for the mission, namely, the U.S.'s unwillingness to expand ISAF's role outwith Kabul. That was contrary to requests from Hamid Karzai, Kofi Annan – the then head of the United Nations,³³⁸ Brahimi and Vendrell³³⁹ to roll out ISAF across Afghanistan as unrest and violence escalated outside of the capital. Additionally, both American and British diplomats, James Dobbins and Robert Cooper argued for its expansion but met stiff resistance from the military of both nations. Such was the UK military's opposition to heading ISAF; the chief of UK Defence Staff threatened to resign over the issue. Tony Blair sought to resolve the situation by limiting the amount of time the UK would remain lead nation for.³⁴⁰

The Afghan conflict was further complicated from its inception by the fact there were two separate international operations running concurrently. The first was the American led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) the primary and only purpose of which was to hunt and kill the Taliban and al-Qaeda, not to engage soft in missions

³³⁴ Dobbins, *After the Taliban*, p. 88.

³³⁵ Steele, *Ghosts of Afghanistan*, p. 261.

³³⁶ Dobbins, *After the Taliban*, p. 103.

³³⁷ Maloney, Sean M. 'The International Security Assistance Force: Origins of a Stabilization Force,' *Canadian Military Journal*, July 2003

³³⁸ Bergen, *The Longest War*, p. 181.

³³⁹ Steele, *Ghosts of Afghanistan*, p. 262.

³⁴⁰ Dobbins, *After the Taliban*, p. 128.

such as reconstruction and securing the population.³⁴¹ The second was the UN mandated, predominantly European, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which NATO would subsequently lead³⁴² and which was involved in state-building and peacekeeping.

American reluctance to expand the mission was prompted by several concerns. Firstly, it was predicted that a large number of foreign troops could generate widespread popular resistance as had been the case with the Soviet intervention two decades previously. Secondly, any expansion of ISAF could potentially interfere with their counterterrorism mission by exposing their warlord allies' to possible disarmament. Additionally, there was trepidation over American military equipment and personnel being dragged into ISAF operations, at a time when both were in scarce supply and were preparing to head to Iraq.³⁴³ As Peter Bergen notes: 'Not only was the United States unwilling to police Afghanistan; it wasn't going to let anyone else do it, either'.³⁴⁴ The issue would prove costly for the future stability of Afghanistan and the subsequent efforts to implement the rule of law outside of the capital, particularly in southern and eastern Afghanistan. At the very moment when the United States should have capitalised on an opportunity to stabilise the new post-Taliban order and help consolidate the new transitional authority it actively prevented the stabilisation of Afghanistan. As we will see in subsequent chapters, this, unfortunately, would not be the first time that America would stonewall Afghanistan's progress to suit their own agenda. It was October 2003 before the United States would eventually agree to the expansion of ISAF out of Kabul.³⁴⁵

Regardless of the United States unwillingness to commit to the stabilisation mission, the British Prime Minister's demonstrated his commitment to Afghanistan by visiting the country, at great personnel risk on the 7 January 2002 to meet with interim leader Hamid Karzai to promise his continual help.³⁴⁶ He stated: 'Afghanistan has been a failed state for too long and the whole world has paid the price – in the

³⁴¹ Bergen, *The Longest War*, p.181.

³⁴² Sean M. Maloney, 'Conceptualizing the War in Afghanistan: Perceptions from the Front, 2001-2006,' *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol.18, No.1, (2007), pp. 27-44.

³⁴³ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, pp.103-4.

³⁴⁴ Bergen, *The Longest War*, p. 181.

³⁴⁵ Geoffrey Hayes and Mark Sedra, (eds). *Afghanistan Transition Under Threat* (Ontario, 2008), p. 12.

³⁴⁶ Seldon, Snowdon and Collings, *Blair Unbound*, p. 68

export of terror, the export of drugs and finally in the explosion of death and destruction on the streets of the USA. It is in all of our interests that Afghanistan becomes a stable country, part of the international community once more'.³⁴⁷

CONCLUSION

Convinced that the response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks should be directed against terrorism in its broadest sense, the Bush administration developed a strategy that viewed Afghanistan as the first step in a global war on terrorism. To avoid being drawn into a long and costly war and afford the United States the flexibility to shift their focus if needed, President Bush commissioned the CIA and Special Forces with the assistance of the NA to conduct a non-conventional war in Afghanistan that would produce an instant success. And it did: but at what cost for the future will be demonstrated shortly. The response was dictated by a number of factors. One of which was the military transformation agenda. President Bush and Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld sought to use Afghanistan as a testing ground for a streamlined military force. This force would respond to modern warfare by deploying a trim and flexible force with a minimum of manpower enabling a swift victory. Importantly, it would also allow an equally swift exit after victory was achieved allowing American forces to move onto phase two of the mission.

The 'special relationship' between the United States and United Kingdom entered a new phase, as Prime Minister Blair remained committed in his support for President Bush's intervention in Afghanistan. Tony Blair capitalised on the post 9/11 window of opportunity to remould the direction of British foreign policy. With this in mind, the PM hoped his unwavering support of American policies would give him the opportunity to influence the United States and make the United Kingdom a global player. Guided by what he saw as ethical foreign policy motivations, Prime Minister Blair argued there was a moral duty to intervene in Afghanistan;³⁴⁸ this policy position would separate the intentions of the UK and U.S. as President Bush and his fellow travellers did not see the merits of a humanitarian effort in Afghanistan. Whilst Blair would be a chief ally in the coming wars, his influence was significant on the

³⁴⁷ Kampfner, *Blair's War's*, p. 149.

³⁴⁸ Seldon, Snowden and Collings, *Blair Unbound*, p. 58

edges of the policy-making process not on the major decisions shaping the United States foreign policy agenda and that would lead to errors in Afghanistan and difficulties for Anglo-American relations. During the planning phase of the intervention Tony Blair's insights offered to the President were measured and well judged but did not influence the President's decision-making as the UK assumed the role of important ally but junior partner. Moreover, as the campaign moved into the military phase of intervention British assistance was more symbolic than vital to the success of the operations and did not reflect Tony Blair's ambitions.

The Pentagon, with Donald Rumsfeld at its helm, was extremely influential in shaping the United States Afghan policy to coincide with the agenda of the Defense Department. Determined to link 9/11 to Iraq from the afternoon of 11 September, Rumsfeld and his deputies angled to include Iraq in the United States response to the attacks. The threat of rogue states and WMD's would come to dominate the Bush administrations agenda and focus would turn to the invasion of Iraq not the reconstruction of Afghanistan. In addition to viewing the intervention in very narrow counterterrorism terms, the Bush administration had publicly before and after the 2000 presidential election declared its opposition to nation building. This disdain for nation building, which was seen fruitless waste of political and economic resources, determined the resources Afghanistan would receive during and after the initial post-intervention period. This Pentagons dominance not only shaped American policy but prevented the United Kingdom and Afghan government from implementing policies. As we will see below, this would have a negative impact for the ability of the aforementioned governments to execute a properly resourced reconstruction agenda and prevent the consolidation of the drug industry. Tony Blair's domination over the British policy-making apparatus would in effect, result in the established arms of the UK foreign policy machine being excluded from the decision-making process. As will be considered shortly, this would have consequences for the UK's involvement in Afghanistan and specifically for their role in countering the drugs trade.

Whilst regime change was part of the plan, the United States lack of strategic clarity was evident in addressing what the political landscape of a post-conflict Afghanistan would look like. As previously noted concerns about be drawn into a nation building exercise, an exclusive focus on counterterrorism and Iraq, guided how

the United States would approach the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Limited involvement and passing on the reconstruction agenda to others would be the order of the day. In contrast, Tony Blair believed the international community should commit to Afghanistan in the long term by helping to reconstruct post-Taliban Afghanistan. The first move designed to provide support in the stabilisation mission was the UK's command of the first ISAF force but even these attempts would not run smoothly due to domestic political concerns. This would however, highlight the diverging agendas of the U.S. and UK as the Pentagon vetoed any attempt to extend the remit of the security force outside of Kabul. Not only would the United States distance itself from any form of nation building or peacekeeping it would prevent anyone else from doing it.

The intervention produced what the Secretary of Defense would describe as a military success: the rout of the Taliban and al-Qaeda (notwithstanding the escape of Osama bin Laden). However, viewing the mission in such narrow terms and conducting the intervention in a limited way would have a destabilising and lasting impact on the post-Taliban Afghanistan and prove costly for the development of the Afghan state and its ability to extend its authority outside of Kabul or engender support from the population. At the very moment when the United States should have capitalised on opportunity to stabilise the new post-Taliban order and help consolidate the new transitional authority it actively prevented the stabilisation of Afghanistan. As we will see below, by not committing to a comprehensive reconstruction agenda and bringing to power warlords and drug lords with unsavoury records on human rights would fundamentally flaw the development of the Afghan state. Corruption would not be lessened, governance would not be improved, accountability of government figures would remain elusive, security would rapidly deteriorate, and distortions in the economy would manifest. The factors would lead a return of the drugs industry and the Taliban.

CHAPTER FOUR
Early Anglo-American Counter Narcotics Policy
in Afghanistan (2002-2005)

INTRODUCTION

As attention turned from the military campaign to the post-conflict reconfiguration of Afghanistan an important issue loomed large and remained unresolved: what involvement, if any, should the international community take to confront the Afghan drugs trade. The American-led intervention and subsequent collapse of the regime in late 2001, ominously pointed to a revival of opium cultivation and an end to the Taliban's opium prohibition. Bernard Frahi, the UN Drug Control Program's representative remarked: 'all the ingredients for illicit cultivation are there...war, continuing poverty, and a breakdown in law and order. We could see a huge resumption in cultivation'.³⁴⁹ Frahi's predictions were realised as opium cultivation resumed in several provinces with 74,000 hectares planted in 2001.³⁵⁰ Additionally, Alfred McCoy notes it was not only opium cultivation that had resumed but: 'by late November, the country's main opium bazaars were back in business' with opium being traded in markets in Helmand and Nangarhar.³⁵¹

The reoccurrence of opium cultivation and the challenges of the drug trade in Afghanistan posed the British and the Americans with deeply intractable problems and problems which would inflame relations between the two allies. The way in which both allies viewed the problems posed by the drug trade were ultimately conditioned by the way in which they defined their role in post-conflict Afghanistan. Convinced that the UK should play a pivotal role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan, tackling the drugs trade would afford Tony Blair the opportunity not only to increase the UK's international standing but to realise his humanitarian ambitions both at home and abroad. Conversely, the Americans, with the Pentagon largely dictating policy, were adamant not to be drawn into anything resembling nation building, let alone counter narcotics work, and as such would pass on any tasks to a coalition of the willing. The policy positions adopted by both governments were not always universally accepted within each administration and resulted in an emerging bureaucratic battleground between the various departments and in the wider Anglo-American alliance, as the issue of drugs became a live political issue.

³⁴⁹ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, p. 520.

³⁵⁰ UNODC, 'The Opium Economy in Afghanistan', p. 93.

³⁵¹ McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin*, p. 520.

The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section encompasses the initial Anglo-American engagement with the Afghan drugs trade from 2001-2003. The analysis begins with an examination of the United Kingdom's first initiative to tackle the drugs trade – compensated eradication - and the policy debate within Whitehall, which underpinned the decision-making. The narrative develops with an examination of the factors, which led to the UK being assigned G8 'lead nation' for counter narcotics. The analysis then contrasts the early British efforts in counter narcotics to the involvement of their American counterparts and the decisions that dictated the American policy process. The section concludes with an examination of the UK's counter narcotics policies in 2003 and how this brought the UK into conflict with the United States.

The second section commences with an evaluation of the factors, which forced the United States to develop a counter narcotics policy in 2004 and the fractious relations between the Pentagon and State Department over the formulation process. A key theme of analysis is developed thereafter: namely, Anglo-American discord over counter narcotics policies and implementation methods. The battle between the two allies over policy proved to be a constant for the succeeding years, with the British and Afghans defending an embattled position against the State Department, members of the White House and officials from the American Embassy in Kabul among others. Despite cooperation on the main issues involved in the war in Afghanistan, at times conflict over the drug war led to something approaching diplomatic warfare between the two 'special relationship' allies. The final section considers the results of the United States new counter narcotics strategy in 2004-2005. How these phases unfolded and the reasons why they developed as they did is the subject of what follows, but it is fair to say at the outset that the UK never got to grips with being a 'lead nation' and did not have the resources to run an independent strategy for dealing with drugs: that complicated the relationship with the U.S.

THE BRITISH LED CAMPAIGN (2002)

The Bonn Agreement enshrined the new Afghan Interim Authority's (AIA) pledge to work with the international community 'in the fight against terrorism, drugs and

organized crime'.³⁵² As such, one of the first acts of the AIA was to outlaw opium cultivation, heroin production, opiate trafficking and drug use on 17th January 2002. The decree stated 'The holy religion of Islam is categorical about the evil impact of drugs...we are determined to eradicate the current poppy crop'.³⁵³ On 3 April 2002, the Afghan authorities issued a second decree that outlined an eradication programme designed by the British government to compensate farmers for opium that was planted in late 2001.³⁵⁴ The UK government had devised the eradication scheme as a policy option to reduce its own domestic heroin consumption. The scheme fed into a larger policy debate that had been active in the UK government for several years prior to 9/11, but in the days and months that followed the attacks the debate rose in significance, and asked the question: Should the United Kingdom perform upstream interdiction to eradicate the Afghan opium trade? Enthusiasm gathered pace within the Cabinet office that such an intervention was not only achievable but it could score a success for the UK both on the international stage and domestically by reducing the flow of heroin onto the British market. Officials close to the Prime Minister argued that eradicating the source of British heroin was an attractive mission that would create a shortage of heroin on British streets, which in turn would result in a significant rise in the number of heroin users seeking treatment. To cope with this projected outcome, No.10 instructed the Department of Health to formulate a plan to deal with a sudden and exponential rise in drug users presenting themselves for rehabilitation. Contrary to the projections of the Cabinet Office, Department of Health officials contended that eliminating the Afghan opium trade would not be an instantaneous process but a complex and lengthy practise. Moreover, health officials highlighted, even if the UK did manage to halt Afghan opium production, the British illegal drug market would respond by transitioning to another heroin source to counter the shortfall and/or heroin users would transition to another drug as opposed to seeking treatment.³⁵⁵ These arguments failed to move key players, including Blair, who were now committed to interdiction at source in Afghanistan.

³⁵² Christopher M. Blanchard, 'Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy', Congressional Research Service, Report RL32686, (7 December 2004) p. 23.

³⁵³ Richard Norton-Taylor and Andrew Osborn, 'EU Funds Afghan Opium Battle', *The Guardian*, 6 April 2002.

³⁵⁴ Blanchard, 'Afghanistan', p. 24.

³⁵⁵ Author Interview with British Official (11), 22 October 2014.

As the policy debate turned to how the United Kingdom would achieve the elimination of the Afghan heroin trade in late 2001, the government remained divided over involvement in such a complex task. Proponents of intervention in the Afghan drugs trade included the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Office, the British Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) and Customs and Excise. Opponents of such a move were officials from the Department of Health and senior officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Drugs and International Crime Department among others.³⁵⁶ The task was complicated by the fact that the 2001-2002 poppy had already been planted³⁵⁷ by the time of the policy discussions, which limited the options available. Thus, MI6 first advocated purchasing the entire 2002 opium poppy harvest from farmers to the sum of \$50-150 million, however, after objection from FCO officials the proposal was dropped.³⁵⁸ A document by the Economist Intelligence Unit reported the proposal was discarded because it was feared it would actually encouraged more farmers to plant poppy.³⁵⁹ What proved to be an accurate reading of possibilities seems to have got lost along the way when a modified but not too dissimilar version of the rejected MI6 proposal was adopted. The plan consisted of compensated eradication of poppy fields and interdiction of drug traffickers and drug laboratories. Tony Blair authorised MI6³⁶⁰ to distribute money to Afghan regional leaders to compensate farmers to self-destruct their opium fields.³⁶¹ The UK government contributed approximately \$32 million to the programme.³⁶² As part of the compensated eradication agenda farmers were promised compensation of US \$250 per jerib,³⁶³ which later increased to \$300-\$350³⁶⁴ per jerib of poppy that was eliminated.³⁶⁵

³⁵⁶ Author Interviews with British Official (10), 23 and 24 September 2014. This interviewee contributed greatly to the research by being interviewed on numerous occasions and by providing seminal knowledge of policy developments.

³⁵⁷ Lucy Morgan Edwards, *The Afghan Solution: The inside story of Abdul Haq, the CIA and how western hubris lost Afghanistan* (London, 2011), p. 118.

³⁵⁸ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p.321.

³⁵⁹ IRIN. In-depth: Bitter-Sweet Harvest: Afghanistan's New War. Donor-supported approaches to eradication. (2004)

³⁶⁰ Author Interviews with British Official (10), 23 and 24 September 2014.

³⁶¹ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p. 321.

³⁶² 24 July 2006 *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)* (House of Commons) col. 989W (available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/vo060724/text/60724w0064.htm>)

³⁶³ A Middle Eastern unit of land, the actual measurements is dependent on time and place.

³⁶⁴ Sources vary whether compensation was \$300 or \$350 per jeribs. UNODC, 'The Opium Economy in Afghanistan', (p. 93), contends the former and Peter Osborne, and Lucy Morgan Edward, 'A Victory for Drug-Pushers' *Spectator* 292, No. 912, (31 May 2003) pp. 26-27, contend the latter.

³⁶⁵ UNODC, 'The Opium Economy in Afghanistan', p. 93.

The plan was adopted despite widespread opposition throughout Whitehall. One of the chief opponents of the plan was the FCO's Drugs and International Crime Department, which refused to support the proposal for fear it would encourage more production. However, two reasons had won the policy debate: firstly, the PM abandoned the traditional foreign policy-making process in the wake of 9/11 opting instead to conduct policy with a small group of advisors. It was in this policy environment that MI6, the architect of the proposal, was able to convincingly 'sell' the plan to Tony Blair as a deliverable project. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, was that other actors, most notably, the FCO failed to offer an alternative plan of action.³⁶⁶ As so often would be the case in the coming years, those who suggested action would command the policy debate, as any policy – good or bad – was considered a better alternative to no policy.³⁶⁷ The direction of counter narcotics policy over the coming years, on both sides of the Atlantic, was heavily influenced by the views of individuals³⁶⁸ operating without the full endorsement of all government agencies. It is also important to recognise much of the early Afghan policy was decided by those who had little knowledge of Afghanistan or its history. War photographer, Sir John Wellesley Gunston, who had travelled extensively throughout Afghanistan since the 1980s and was familiar with the workings of the UK military and intelligence agencies, was critical of the MI6's knowledge of Afghanistan from the period when the Taliban gained power to the early part of the war:

The British, I'm afraid to say...[were] without a sense of our history and experience in Afghanistan...So I went in to brief 'Six'. It was amazing. Their knowledge was zero. They knew about the Falls Road, but that was about it...From '95 or '96 onwards, MI6 scaled down their interest. Our MI6 people were basically 'let go'. Just as the Taliban took power in '96. So they were left with a twenty-three year old running the Islamabad office! And as you know that meant not just

³⁶⁶ Author Interviews with British Official (10), 23 and 24 September 2014.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Author Interviews with British Official (10), 23 and 24 September 2014.

Pakistan but Afghanistan too was run from there. It was outrageous!³⁶⁹

British officials reported that Prime Minister Blair took ‘an intense personal interest’ in the proposal.³⁷⁰ The Prime Minister was so optimistic about the success of the UK’s forthcoming plan he was reported in the *Sunday Mirror* on 24 March 2002, saying the aim of the eradication pilot ‘is about persuading the local population with incentives to grow other things. With a relatively small commitment from us, we can hopefully curb the flow of hard drugs into Europe and on to our streets’.³⁷¹ The PM wholeheartedly believed upstream interdiction would ‘create a big win in terms of the UK drug problem’.³⁷² This optimism and even more modest ambitions of later years were all to prove over-optimistic and unrealistic.

The split in the UK government over the proposal was replicated at international level with the UNODC displaying little appetite for the compensation eradication proposal. The policy was decided without UNODC input and only later shared with officials from the international organisation. Drug representatives from UNODC, United Kingdom and United States were to maintain a close working relationship in the succeeding years, however, the UNODC would only play the role of junior partner in the policy making process. The UNODC was unable to shape the policy landscape, the compensated eradication scheme for example, was already in place before it could voice opposition. UNODC representatives, however, made several unofficial objections about the wisdom of such a proposal with their UK counterparts both in Kabul and in the UNODC headquarters in Vienna.³⁷³ Several reasons underpinned the UNODC’s decision; foremost among them was to do with legality. A UNODC official recalled the motivation not to lend support to the scheme:

From the beginning we had to separate ourselves from this because of legal issues. Cultivating narcotics is illegal and

³⁶⁹ Morgan Edwards, *The Afghan Solution*, pp., 185-186.

³⁷⁰ Osborne and Morgan Edward, ‘A Victory for Drug-Pushers’, pp. 26-27.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Author Interview with British Official (11), 22 October 2014.

³⁷³ Author interview with UNODC Official (1), 27 February 2014.

you do not compensate people to not do an illegal thing... We cannot pay a trafficker to ask him, please do not traffic in our neighbourhood. It is illegal; it is internationally prohibited. At the United Nations, at that time it was my conclusion that the UN had to abide by international law and we cannot do such a thing.³⁷⁴

At the time the UNODC estimated that opium farmers accounted for 7% of the total Afghan population of 24 million and that opium poppy cultivation covered 1% of total arable land and less than 3% of irrigated arable land in Afghanistan.³⁷⁵ It was therefore argued by another UNODC official that to reward farmers for doing something illegal would send the wrong message to the 93 per cent of law abiding farmers.³⁷⁶ In the event it seems they may very well have been correct.

The eradication programme commenced on 8 April 2002 in the southern province of Helmand and Nangarhar province in the east. Confident of the success of the compensated eradication scheme and the UK's ability to curb the Afghan drugs trade more generally, British officials attended a G8 donors meeting in April 2002 where the reconfiguration of the post-Taliban security environment was organised through a programme of 'Security Sector Reform' (SSR) under a 'lead nation' approach. The security sector was split into five main areas with a 'lead nation' being responsible for each sector. From the outset the SSR programme suffered from poor resources, a lack of attention and little Afghan ownership of the policy-making process. Each 'sector' was pursued in isolation with little coordination between each pillar or with the overall reconstruction agenda.

The United States was responsible for training the Afghan National Army (ANA), Germany took the lead in the reconstruction of the Afghan National Police (ANP), the Italians took responsibility for reforming the Justice sector, Japan led the effort to neutralize private militias through the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program and the United Kingdom was assigned lead nation for

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Foreign Policy Aspects of the War against Terrorism', Seventh Report of Session 2003-04 p. 69.

³⁷⁶ Author interview with UNODC Official (2), 13 March 2014.

counter narcotics.³⁷⁷ Several reasons underpinned the UK's decision to volunteer for the position of counter narcotics. Firstly, the compensated eradication scheme had inflated UK officials belief that they could be successful in countering the Afghan drugs trade and because of their role in this programme, the UK was somewhat thrust into the most obvious choice for 'lead nation'. Secondly, with the U.S. naturally assuming the lead for reforming the military, the UK considered themselves the only remaining country capable of taking on such an important role as counter narcotics. The UNODC, an organisation with experience of working in Afghanistan and expertise in the field of drug control was ruled out because of financial and capacity difficulties.³⁷⁸ Once again, despite the warnings of those within the FCO, officials in the Cabinet Office demonstrated a poor reading of the problem by volunteering to take on the role of G8 'lead nation' on counter narcotics. Driven partly by the success of the Taliban's poppy ban a few years previously, there was a perception within some sections of the UK government that the opium problem was 'doable';³⁷⁹ as will be demonstrated later this assessment would prove overly optimistic and false.

Nevertheless, with optimism in the cabinet office high over the compensated eradication scheme, a superficial reading of the early results seemed to confirm their optimism. The Foreign Office Minister Denis MacShane informed MPs in May 2002:

It is a key, if unsung, aspect of Foreign and Commonwealth Office work to cut off, disrupt and delay the flow of heroin...to the United Kingdom...I should like to inform the House that the Interim Administration in Kabul today announced the eradication of 16,000 hectares of opium poppies, which is about half the size of the New Forest, with a street value in Britain of approximately £5 billion. The United Kingdom has taken the lead with the Interim Administration in that task, and work to eradicate opium poppies continues as I speak. I congratulate the Interim

³⁷⁷ Goodson, Larry, 'Bullets, Ballots and Poppies in Afghanistan', *Journal of Democracy*, No. 61:1 (January 2005), pp. 24-38.

³⁷⁸ Author Interviews with British Official (10), 23 and 24 September 2014.

³⁷⁹ Author interview with British Official (5), 13 June 2013. This interviewee contributed greatly to the research by being interviewed on numerous occasions and by providing seminal knowledge of policy developments.

Administration on the progress that they have made so far...The very good news about the opium poppy eradication programme shows that farmers are ready to turn away from opium poppy production and from drug barons and drug traffickers, to build new lives for themselves and their families, with the help of further investment.³⁸⁰

Buoyed by the apparent success of the compensated eradication plan, British Cabinet officials and Ministers declared that they had dealt a substantial blow to the Afghan opium trade. In the first stage of the operation they had destroyed 16,000 hectares of opium cultivation and it was reasoned that this trend of opium destruction would follow a linear path over the coming years until the entire opium trade in Afghanistan was eliminated.³⁸¹ Attending a G8 summit in Canada in June 2002, the Prime Minister wanted to use the opportunity to gain international recognition for the UK's counter narcotics *achievements* in Afghanistan. He also outlined the UK's roadmap for the complete elimination of the Afghan opium industry. Representatives from across Whitehall reported to No.10 that an attempt to eliminate the Afghan drugs trade could take up to a generation. This assessment did not have the political impact the PM and his advisors had hoped for, therefore the timetable was amended to a target that would be more politically advantageous.³⁸² Tony Blair announced that the UK and AIA were aiming to reduce opium cultivation by 70 per cent in five years and the complete elimination of the Afghan drug industry by 2013.³⁸³

Back in Afghanistan, the compensated eradication scheme was accompanied by an interdiction operation in Ghani Khel opium bazaar in Shinwar, Nangarhar province. The Governor's son was tasked with enforcing the AIA's recent edict prohibiting opium cultivation and trafficking, during which he confiscated two tons of opium paste and cars involved in drug trafficking from the bazaar. Several weeks

³⁸⁰ 14 May 2002 *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)* (House of Commons) col. 625 (available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmhansrd/vo020514/debtext/20514-01.htm>).

³⁸¹ Author Interview with British Official (10), 23 and 24 September 2014.

³⁸² Ibid.

³⁸³ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 138., and Osborne, and Morgan Edward, 'A Victory for Drug-Pushers' pp. 26-27.

later, on 21 July 2002, British officials (either from the FCO or more probably MI6) came to the province and collected the opium paste from the Governor's office.³⁸⁴

By mid 2002 it was evident that the optimism and self-congratulation of ministers and officials from the Cabinet office were premature as the compensated eradication plan ran into a number of problems. It was in fact severely flawed on a number of levels. The most basic and fundamental problem with the scheme was that it was to prove ineffective: it did not lead to an overall reduction of poppy cultivation, notwithstanding the impressive eradication figures flaunted by the British early in the programme. The scheme actually incentivised farmers, who had not cultivated the poppy to do so (as the critics of the MI6 proposal had warned), as means of receiving a cash reward and those who had already cultivated poppy grew more to increase the potential compensation.³⁸⁵ Moreover, as the planting seasons differ depending on geographic location and climatic conditions, those in the north of country in the province of Badakhshan, who plant later in the year saw the compensation reaped by farmers in Nangarhar, in the east of country and increased their own cultivation.³⁸⁶ Afghan President Hamid Karzai emphasised the problem by condemning the British led eradication programme as a complete failure, which had actually led to an increase in the amount of poppy planted as many farmers sought to make money out of the compensation scheme.³⁸⁷

The programme was also beset by mismanagement and chaotic implementation. Not unsurprisingly - given the historically weak nature of the Afghan state and the transitional process at government level - the AIA lacked the capacity to administer the programme. A UNODC official summed up the lack of functioning capability at AIA level: 'There was no Afghan government...there was nobody on the Afghan side, you only had Karzai...and then his national security advisor'.³⁸⁸ The United Kingdom's ability to administer the programme was also constrained by a precarious security environment³⁸⁹ and the institutional infancy of the British

³⁸⁴ Morgan Edwards, *The Afghan Solution*, pp., 122-128.

³⁸⁵ IRIN, In-depth: Bitter-Sweet Harvest.

³⁸⁶ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 139.

³⁸⁷ Osborne and Morgan Edward, 'A Victory for Drug-Pushers', pp. 26-27.

³⁸⁸ Author interview with UNODC Official (1), 27 February 2014.

³⁸⁹ Osborne and Morgan Edward, 'A Victory for Drug-Pushers', pp. 26-27.

Embassy in Kabul³⁹⁰ - as it only reopened months before in late November 2001.³⁹¹ Consequently, limited manpower and resources hindered the UK's operational capacity; for example, at that time the Embassy only contained one dedicated Drug Liaison Officer, who took up the post in mid-2002.³⁹²

The British and AIA therefore, resorted to local Afghan authorities to administer and supervise the programme.³⁹³ With local Afghans in control of the programme and no independent adjudication in place, the scheme was marred by widespread corruption and fraud.³⁹⁴ Regional strongmen siphoned off the bulk of the compensation and did not distribute it throughout the farming network.³⁹⁵ In the majority of instances, many farmers who complied with the eradication programme did not receive compensation and were left with no crops and no money. As with most eradication campaigns in Afghanistan, corruption was a significant influence whether a field was eradicated or not with the main determining factor being the ability to 'buy off' eradication teams. Consequently, it was poor farmers with no financial backing who suffered the most. In some instances entire districts avoided any eradication efforts because of their connections to the authorities. Many areas in the Jalalabad region - where the opium is amongst the highest quality in Afghanistan³⁹⁶ - for example, remained free to harvest a full crop without interference from government eradication teams. Due to the lack of an autonomous adjudicator it was not uncommon for farmers to claim compensation even when they had not planted poppy. Moreover, as the government funds quickly depleted the level of compensation offered to farmers decreased significantly; by the latter stages of the programme compensation was \$90 per jerib in the Surkh Rud region and only \$40 per jerib in Chaparhar region of Nangarhar instead of the original \$350.³⁹⁷ Even when the

³⁹⁰ The United States Embassy reopened on 17 December 2001, after a gap of nearly thirteen years. Laura King, 'U.S. Embassy reopens in Kabul', *Associated Press*, 17 December 2001.

³⁹¹ Stephen Evans, the first British chargé d'affaires after the military intervention and the first incumbent since 1979, reopened the British Embassy - although the Embassy technically only ceased to perform as an embassy in 1989. Alan Philips, 'Britain reopens its embassy as 'commitment to better future'', *The Telegraph*, 20 Nov 2001.

³⁹² Author Interview with UNODC Official (2) 1 June 2014.

³⁹³ Morgan Edwards, *The Afghan Solution*, p. 117.

³⁹⁴ John F. Burns, 'Afghan Warlords Squeeze Profits from the War on Drugs, Critics Say', *The New York Times*, 5 May 2002.

³⁹⁵ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 138.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

reimbursement was paid, the reduced rate meant the compensation did not meet the financial needs of the farmers.

The scheme descended into chaos as some southern and eastern regions erupted into violence. Insulted by the unfairness of the programme and paltry amount of compensation offered by the Afghan and British scheme many farmers staged violent protests against the eradication teams resulting in the abandonment of some eradication efforts. In the Nangarhar region up to 10,000 villagers united to stave off the eradication teams.³⁹⁸ The scenes of violence worsened in the Helmand province with police killing eight farmers and wounding several other protestors.³⁹⁹ Also, land mines were used to destroy eradication tractors⁴⁰⁰ as protestors fought to save their crops.

Ultimately, the United Kingdom and Afghan authorities concluded that the programme was an unmitigated failure, which resulted in significant damage to the UK's political standing in Helmand and Nangarhar.⁴⁰¹ A local representative from the Sharwali District of Helmand complained 'these farmers kept their side of the deal and eradicated the crops, but the British government did not keep their word...in this culture this is very dishonourable and we are very angry'.⁴⁰² After the scheme failed to deliver on its promises of compensation, many farmers vowed to continue planting in the coming seasons.⁴⁰³ Back in Whitehall, British officials refused to accept responsibility for the failure, commenting 'it was an Afghan programme administered by Afghan authorities'.⁴⁰⁴

Despite the disappointment of the scheme counter narcotics would remain an important objective for the Prime Minister as a British official recalled 'Prime Minister Blair...[took] a close personal interest in the UK [']s counter-narcotics strategy... he saw counter narcotics as an important strand in a comprehensive

³⁹⁸ 'Asia Poppies Bloom Again; Drugs in Afghanistan', *The Economist*, 22 April 2002.

³⁹⁹ Indira R. A. Lakshmanan, 'Afghan Announces Victories in a New War Against Opium' *Boston Globe*, 21 April 2002.

⁴⁰⁰ Chouvy, Pierre-Arnaud. 'The Ironies of Afghan Opium Production', *Asia Times*, 17 September 2003.

⁴⁰¹ Morgan Edwards, *The Afghan Solution*, p. 116.

⁴⁰² Harding, Gareth, 'UK Cheated Afghan Poppy Growers', *United International Press*, 28 March 2006

⁴⁰³ Osborne and Morgan Edward, 'A Victory for Drug-Pushers', pp. 26-27.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

strategy for Afghanistan, before and after our mission in Helmand'.⁴⁰⁵ Another official noted the PM's interest during counter narcotics briefings 'when we went through the presentation of the counter narcotics strategy he [Mr Blair] was very probing and interested in that and concerned'.⁴⁰⁶ This view further was supported by a UK official 'No 10 was consistently the most supportive department...of our counter narcotics work and that was directly because of his [Tony Blair's] personnel interest in it'.⁴⁰⁷ This early failure then did little to douse the hopes in London for effective eradication policies.

The United States' Reluctance to Confront the Opium Industry

The importance placed on counter narcotics by the British government was not however, mirrored in the political high echelons in the U.S. despite attempts by American drug officials to highlight their strategic significance. Towards the end of 2002, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) developed a counter narcotics strategy in conjunction with British officials. The plan centred on eradication, interdiction and alternative livelihoods. Rand Beers, the head of the INL commented 'The British said they would be responsible if we gave them some forms of support, including military airlift for drug operations...this was the most prominent thing we did not agree to 100 per cent, but in principle, we agreed to do it whenever possible'.⁴⁰⁸ After agreement between the partners was reached, Rand Beers drafted a proposal and got the appropriate authorities to sign it. When an official from the INL arrived with the plan in Afghanistan the United States military blocked the proposal. Rand Beers commented 'It would appear Central Command sat on it, whether on their own or with orders from the Pentagon. Effectively putting an end to the programme then and there'.⁴⁰⁹ It would not be the first time that the Pentagon would deliberately prevent a counter narcotics plan from being implemented. This episode would signal a division within the American administration over the Pentagon's involvement in counter narcotics work and create tension within the Anglo-American alliance during the first years of the conflict.

⁴⁰⁵ Author contact - via brief email communication - with British Official (1) 5 August 2014.

⁴⁰⁶ Author Interview with British Official (3), 23 April 2013.

⁴⁰⁷ Author interview with British Official (5), 13 June 2013.

⁴⁰⁸ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p., 188-89.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p. 189.

British dissatisfaction with their American counterparts' refusal to participate in counter narcotics was brought to the attention of the House of Representatives, subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources when it travelled to London in 2002. According to Mr Souder of the committee, members of various British departments and intelligence agencies involved in the counter narcotics efforts, condemned American attempts to date and questioned their commitment to stamping out the drug industry and pleaded with them to adopt a more pro-active approach to fighting drugs in Afghanistan.⁴¹⁰

This policy of non-intervention enforced by the American military set the counter-narcotics mission in Afghanistan back several years. It denied the campaign resources and allowed drug dealers and traffickers to operate largely without fear of reprisal. By allying themselves with warlords for immediate military reasons, many of whom were connecting to the drugs trade, the American policy makers sent a powerful signal that opium cultivation would be tolerated and actively allowed their allies to profit from the trade. The International Crisis Group succinctly summed up the impact of turning a blind eye: 'a culture of impunity was allowed to take root in the name of stability'.⁴¹¹ Tackling the trade did not even register on the list of priorities for the Bush administration, even when counter-narcotics gravitated up the policy agenda it never received the attention or funding it needed to address it properly.

Several reasons underpinned this rationale. As noted above, the Bush administration, with the Pentagon largely dictating policy, saw the intervention in Afghanistan as the first step in a global war against terrorism; therefore, the United States mission was framed in narrow counterterrorism terms. To deal with issues such as rebuilding a government or fighting drugs would constitute becoming bogged down in a state building exercise which the Bush administration had consistently argued against. Instead, the drug industry was seen as a task for law enforcement and

⁴¹⁰ Hearing before the Committee on Government Reform Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources. Statement of Assistant Secretary of State at the U.S. State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Robert B. Charles, *'Are the British Counternarcotics Efforts Going Wobbly?'* (1 April 2004) (Available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-108hhrg96745/pdf/CHRG-108hhrg96745.pdf>).

⁴¹¹ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p. 107.

as far as the White House and Pentagon were concerned the American military was in Afghanistan to fight terrorists, not get involved in suppressing the opium business. The Pentagon, certainly up to 2004, did not see the correlation between fighting terrorists and the drug industry, viewing them as two distinct problems.⁴¹² Undersecretary of Defense, Douglas Feith explained in a White House meeting in February 2002 ‘that counter-narcotics was not part of the war on terrorism, and so Defense wanted no part of it in Afghanistan’.⁴¹³ Moreover, there was no clear policy on what the military’s mission would be regarding counter-narcotics. Official directives indicated that the military *could* destroy drug shipments but it was not necessary. One army soldier reported he was specifically told to ignore opium and heroin stashes when he encountered them on patrol.⁴¹⁴ Additionally, it was not unusual for American forces to allow vehicles carrying poppy safe passage once it was ascertained there were no al-Qaeda members on board.⁴¹⁵ The American military was also in possession of intelligence information on the location of opium and heroin refiners, particularly in south-eastern Afghanistan yet refused to destroy the sites.⁴¹⁶ Donald Rumsfeld remained steadfast that involvement in counter narcotics would damage the United States primary objective of destroying terrorism in Afghanistan⁴¹⁷ and harm their campaign to ‘win hearts and minds’. Furthermore, the United States’ preparations for the invasion of Iraq placed significant pressures on resources, so even if the Pentagon had agreed to tackle the drugs trade, it would have been logistically difficult. The objection to tackling the drugs trade filtered to the CIA – despite some CIA officials advising drugs targets in Afghanistan should be bombed after 9/11 – with the organisation disbanding its counter-narcotics staff in order to transfer them to counterterrorism.⁴¹⁸

The lack of interest in pursuing drug traffickers in Afghanistan during 2001-2002 can be illustrated by the fact that the United State authorities released from custody, Haji Juma Khan, an influential drug trafficker⁴¹⁹ in December 2001.

⁴¹² Risen, *State of War*, p. 154.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p.184.

⁴¹⁵ Anne Barnard and Farah Stockman, ‘U.S. Weighs Role in Heroin War in Afghanistan’, *Boston Globe*, 20 October 2004.

⁴¹⁶ Risen, *State of War*, p. 158.

⁴¹⁷ McGirk, Tim, ‘Drugs? What Drugs?’ *Time*, 18 August 2003.

⁴¹⁸ Risen, *State of War*, p. 155.

⁴¹⁹ McGirk, Tim, ‘Terrorism's Harvest’, *Time*, 2 August 2004.

Although, known to be involved in the drug industry and having ties to both the Taliban and al-Qaeda, American authorities released him after he falsely promised to help them in their counterterrorism mission. This incident epitomised the United States goal during the first few years of the intervention in Afghanistan: chasing down terrorists would override and marginalise all other activities.⁴²⁰ Robert B. Charles, former chief of the INL confirmed this: ‘In Afghanistan, finding terrorists has always trumped chasing drug traffickers’.⁴²¹ From the start of the invasion American policy was geared around a quick military campaign and the avoidance of state building, however, refusing to tackle drug traffickers had sinister implications.

The Pentagon realised that any attempt to fight the drugs trade in Afghanistan would bring them into conflict with the warlords who were helping in the fight against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The CIA and American government realised that certain key military commanders of the Northern Alliance were heavily involved with the drugs trade, but chose to ignore this because they realised their own counterterrorism strategies were heavily, if not, almost exclusively dependent on the cooperation of the Northern Alliance. The United States not only sought the support of these regional strongmen to utilise their services in direct military operations against al Qaeda and the Taliban,⁴²² but as a mechanism to gain local favour. This strategy of ‘ignoring complicity in the opium trade’ reached the highest levels of the American government, but was deemed as a necessary prerequisite of victory. An example of the Bush administration’s reluctance to purge from their payroll Afghan warlords involved in the drugs trade was their relationship with one of the largest benefactors of American aid: Afghan Defence Minister and later vice-President Mohammad Fahim.⁴²³

In 2002, the United States possessed evidence indicating that the new defence minister was active in the narcotic industry; a CIA report contended ‘he was still involved after regaining power and becoming defence minister. He now had a Soviet-made cargo plane at his disposal that was making flights north to transport heroin

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Risen, James. ‘An Afghan’s Path from U.S. Ally to Drug Suspect’, *The New York Times*, 2 February 2007.

⁴²² Bewley-Taylor, ‘Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime in Afghanistan’, p. 10.

⁴²³ Risen, James and Landler, Mark. ‘Accused of Drug Ties, Afghan Official Worries U.S.’, *The New York Times*, 27 August 2009.

through Russia, returning laden with cash'.⁴²⁴ The evidence indicating Fahim was directly involved in the opium business resulted in a debate among White House officials concerning future relations with the Defense Minister. Hillary Mann Levett, then director for Afghanistan at the National Security Council (NSC) contended that to furnish Fahim with financial aid would contravene American law – supplying a known drug trafficker with military aid. It was argued that, as there was no indisputable evidence to prove that Fahim was directly involved in the Afghan drugs trade contact should continue. But, as a matter of precaution, United States authorities resolved only to deal with Fahim's subordinates to prevent being accused of illegal workings. Even so, recent evidence suggests that top U.S. officials namely Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Major General Karl W. Eikenberry continued to meet directly with Marshal Fahim.⁴²⁵

The ambiguity of the United States attitude towards the drug industry in the initial post-intervention period was best described by a White House statement 'A challenging security situation...has complicated significantly the task of implementing counter narcotics assistance programmes, and will do so for the immediate future'.⁴²⁶ This view was supported at ground level, as a DEA agent commented in 2003, 'right now, we realise our work has to take a backseat to the war on terror'.⁴²⁷ The United States government recognised the direct link between an aggressive counter-narcotics policy and the impact it would have on their counterterrorism agenda. 'Western diplomats admitted that without money from drugs, our friendly warlords can't pay their militias. It's as simple as that. Thus, the U.S. military did not interfere with drug convoys or bust the drug labs and storage depots that it encountered'.⁴²⁸ This non-interventionist policy allowed the regional warlords to establish a firm grip over the narcotics industry in their area cementing their authority.

After their authority was established many warlords became regional governors and police chief commanders and become involved in taxation of the drugs

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Richard Norton-Taylor and James Astill, 'Allies at Odds Over How to Fight Afghan Drugs Boom', *The Guardian*, 5 December 2003.

⁴²⁷ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p. 108.

⁴²⁸ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 136.

trade. Regional Warlords offered protection of the transportation of drug consignments for a nominal fee. The composition of the Karzai government suffered from the President's need to stabilise his power base replacing government experts with regional warlords and tribal chiefs with strong links to the narcotics industry.⁴²⁹ In an effort to temper the power of the regional warlords President Karzai incorporated these strongmen in the national administration.⁴³⁰ Warlords who were heavily involved in the narcotics industry were given high-ranking government positions, in what David Bewley-Taylor described as 'the development of a criminal-political nexus'.⁴³¹ While in office many warlords continued the illegal activities they had participated in during the preceding years. Felbab-Brown comments that this policy actually increased the power of the warlords. 'While the co-opted warlords have become integrated into the Afghan political system, few have fully severed their connections to the drug trade. Many have learned to manipulate counter-narcotics policies to appease Kabul and the international community while continuing to reap multiple benefits from the illicit economy'.⁴³² Instead of strengthening the position of the government through the integration of local warlords the new administration would be prevented from developing a corruption free and accountable government. In addition one of the many side effects of the United States backing of the anti-Taliban warlords in the initial phase of the invasion was to undermine the authority of the interim government and strengthen the warlord's position within Afghanistan.⁴³³

British Counter Narcotics Policies (2003)

Contrasting with the American military's refusal to become drawn into interdiction activities, the United Kingdom placed considerable emphasis⁴³⁴ on interdiction of drug traffickers and drug producing facilities. Interdiction was considered a more fruitful course of action by the British government as a British military Official explained: 'The British were...happy...to do interdiction...you are dealing with the

⁴²⁹ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p. 209.

⁴³⁰ Rubin R. Barnett, 'Putting an End to Warlord Government', *The New York Times*, 15 January 2002.

⁴³¹ Bewley-Taylor, 'Drug Trafficking and Organised Crime in Afghanistan', p. 12.

⁴³² Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 137.

⁴³³ Barnett, 'Putting an End to Warlord Government'.

⁴³⁴ William A. Byrd, 'Responding to Afghanistan's Opium Economy Challenge: Lessons and Policy Implications from a Development Perspective', *World Bank South Asia PREM Policy Research Working Paper, Report No. 4545* (March 2008) p. 19.

next level up...Dealing with the level of the farmer was always going to be fraught with difficulty so if you could deal with the next tier up, the people who make money out of it, it wasn't an essential part of their livelihood it was mere criminal activity. So interdiction was our favoured approach'.⁴³⁵ Vanda Felbab-Brown argues this lack of cohesion in the Anglo-American alliance had a detrimental effect on British interdiction efforts and even led to the Prime Minister raising the point with President Bush:

British interdiction efforts were clearly at odds with the U.S. laissez-faire policy, and the United States maintained the upper hand...British officials became increasingly frustrated with the unwillingness of the U.S military to cooperate in any way with counter narcotics operations. U.S. forces even refused to share intelligence on prominent drug traffickers, which prompted Prime Minister Tony Blair to raise the issue with President Bush.⁴³⁶

In January 2003, the United Kingdom helped establish The Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNPA) as the premier counter narcotics law enforcement agency under the Ministry of Interior (MOI).⁴³⁷ Later that year the United Kingdom established an elite level interdiction unit the Afghan Special Narcotics Force (ASNF), trained by British Special Forces and under the authority of CNPA. A British Military Official commented 'they were...well trained, well equipped and well-motivated...they were very effective'.⁴³⁸ The ASNF were active in the UK-led *Operation Headstrong*⁴³⁹ that targeted drug traffickers and drug related facilities in 2003 and 2004.

In 2004 attempts were made to place interdiction efforts within the overall law enforcement and justice framework by establishing a Counter narcotics Criminal

⁴³⁵ Author Interview with British Military Officer (2), 13 February 2014.

⁴³⁶ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 140.

⁴³⁷ House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Foreign Policy Aspects of the War against Terrorism', 2003-04. Written Evidence. International Conference on Afghanistan – 1 April 2004 (available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmfaff/441/441we19.htm>).

⁴³⁸ Author Interview with British Military Officer (2), 13 February 2014.

⁴³⁹ Geoffrey Hayes, and Mark Sedra, *Afghanistan Transition Under Threat*, p. 61.

Justice Task Force (CJTF). Prior to the CJTF's establishment, interdiction missions were jeopardised from the lack of judicial and correctional capacity, as a British official commented: 'we knew where some of the ringleaders were but if you captured them where do you take them?' He further elaborated: 'an element of our strategy at one stage was to try and take on ten to fifteen very high profile targets so we could demonstrate real impact but again the judicial enforcement...is why...we were not able to follow through.'⁴⁴⁰ This was a direct consequence of the 'lead nation' approach, which fostered a lack of cohesive movement on reconstruction of the security sector. Funded and trained by the United Kingdom and UNODC, the CJTF sought to improve the lack of coordination between law enforcement and judicial apparatus by training lawyers and judges to try illegal drug cases. A specifically designed courthouse and jail just north of Kabul airport would try the cases then house those convicted.⁴⁴¹ Despite these improvements, initial interdiction and judicial efforts failed to make a substantial impact with UK and Afghan forces unable to apprehend major drug traffickers due to institutional weakness and corruption.

Further complicating the effectiveness of interdiction campaigns was discriminatory implementation and corruption. William Byrd argues that corrupt Afghan officials would target low-level producers or traffickers for interdiction campaigns while major producers and traffickers linked to provincial and central authorities strengthened their positions through the elimination of their competition. Provincial authorities would charge traffickers a fee to protect their merchandise against impoundment from the government or theft from rival drug dealers. Officials were also involved in the theft of drug consignments after arresting the drug dealers; who they would release with half of their narcotics for a fee then sell the remaining half of the drugs themselves. As with eradication campaigns those most affected were small traders with little financial and tribal backing and those able to profit the most had connections with insurgents, warlords and provincial and central government officials.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ Author Interview with British Official (3), 23 April 2013.

⁴⁴¹ Author Interview with British Military Officer (2), 13 February 2014.

⁴⁴² Byrd, 'Responding to Afghanistan's Opium Economy Challenge', p. 19.

The UK's new eradication policy was plagued by similar problems that beset its interdiction policies: corruption and institutional weakness. Following the unsuccessful British compensated eradication scheme the year before, there was a slight re-adjustment of UK and Afghan policy as the scheme was replaced with a new, but not dissimilar plan of governor-led eradication – reportedly at the insistence of President Karzai.⁴⁴³ The new scheme would incentivise governors with financial reimbursement to eradicate poppy fields in their provinces. The policy was meant to act as a deterrent to prevent farmers from planting poppy and reward those governors who showed 'commitment' to tackle opium cultivation. However, like its predecessor this policy was open to abuse and corruption. Farmers - who could afford to - could prevent their fields being destroyed by bribing the governor. British officials complained 'many governors were unreliable, [and] were implicated in the opium trade, and eradication would be a slow and complex process'.⁴⁴⁴

In its role as G8 'lead nation' on counter narcotics the United Kingdom, in conjunction with the Afghan government, agreed on a broader programme that identified four key areas where assistance should be targeted: improving Afghan law enforcement capability; rural reconstruction to generate alternative livelihoods for opium poppy farmers; capacity-building for Afghan drug control institutions; and establishing prevention/treatment programmes to tackle addiction.⁴⁴⁵ The UK helped to formalise the AIA's anti-drug stance by drafting the first Afghan National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS). The law came into effect on the 19 May 2003 and provided the framework for the international communities engagement with the AIA's anti-drug campaign. The NDCS was centred on four key principles: improved drugs law enforcement; promoting alternative livelihoods for poppy farmers; capacity building for Afghan anti-drugs institutions; and public awareness campaigns/treatment programmes to help reduce demand.⁴⁴⁶ The Afghan government's ownership of the formulation of the NDCS was minimal with the strategy largely constructed by

⁴⁴³ Geoffrey Hayes, and Mark Sedra, *Afghanistan Transition Under Threat*, p. 55.

⁴⁴⁴ IRIN, In-depth: Bitter-Sweet Harvest.

⁴⁴⁵ 3 June 2003 *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)* (House of Commons) col. 1W (available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmhansrd/vo030603/text/30603w01.htm>).

⁴⁴⁶ 'Major Heroin Producing and Trafficking Countries', *FCO National Archive Website*, 6 February 2008 (available at: <http://collections.europarchive.org/tna/20080205132101/www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front%3Fpagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1044901612198>).

British, UNODC and American officials. There are a number of explanations for the lack of input in the 2003 strategy. A drug policy expert commented: the Afghans may have accepted the transferral of strategy into Afghanistan as a way to be considered credible at international level. It is possible that the Afghans recognising the seriousness of the issue appreciated the need for an over-arching document to help them tackle the problem but were still too institutionally immature to tackle the issue effectively alone. Alternatively, it is possible the Afghans did not fully comprehend the issue or the best way to tackle it.⁴⁴⁷ The 2003 document demonstrated a degree of measure when assessing the drug industry and the correct prerequisites to address the problem: '[the approach should] take account of the economic and social causes of illegal cultivation. Attention is first needed to establish security and the rule of law and to create a stable environment to accelerate reconstruction and building institutions'.⁴⁴⁸ However, one of the key failings of strategy was the timeline laid forth to eliminate the drug industry. The NDCS targets were unduly optimistic and failed to appreciate the complexities of opium cultivation. The NDCS reaffirmed the UK target for reduction opium cultivation with a 70 per cent reduction within 5 years and total elimination within 10 years.⁴⁴⁹ The NDCS also failed to appreciate the limited capacity of the Afghan government to implement its policies and its over-reliance on the foreign aid and help to administer the key goals of the strategy.

The same year (2003) the UK government would upgrade the institutional capacity of the Kabul Embassy with the establishment of the British Embassy Drugs Team (BEDT). The BEDT was tasked with the delivery of the United Kingdom's counter narcotics strategy, devised by the FCO in London.⁴⁵⁰ Perhaps unsurprisingly, the United States counter narcotics resources and manpower at that point were undermanned and underfunded with the American Embassy containing only one Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) officer⁴⁵¹ - the DEA in conjunction with INL were the two departments tasked with American counter narcotics strategy in

⁴⁴⁷ Author Interview with Academic (2), 19 March 2013.

⁴⁴⁸ World Bank, *Afghanistan – State Building, Sustaining Growth and Reducing Poverty (A World Bank Country Study)*. Washington DC: World Bank: 2005 p. 125.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁰ House of Commons Defence Committee *UK operations in Afghanistan* Thirteenth Report of Session 2006-2007 (July 2007) Written Evidence. Memorandum from the Afghan Drugs Inter-Departmental Unit (ADIDU) (available at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmdfence/408/408we13.htm>).

⁴⁵¹ Author interview with UNODC official (2), 13 March 2014.

Afghanistan, the Department of Defense, Department of Justice, and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) contributed to formulation and implementation of strategy. The DEA did not have an office in Afghanistan before 2003 and even then most of the staff were not permanent.⁴⁵²

Notwithstanding the American military's refusal to engage with their British counterparts over counter narcotics policy the relationship between the British and American drug officials in many ways mirrored the relationship between the partners over the war in general: close cooperation, mutual respect, agreement on the larger issues but differences of opinions on some concepts and approaches. There was a large degree of coordination over counter narcotics policies with United Kingdom and United States funding and cooperating in many initiatives and agreeing with the direction of the overall strategy.⁴⁵³ Formally, senior drug and government officials from both parties would attend biannual drug talks – the Counter narcotics Strategy Group⁴⁵⁴ – in Washington or London to share analysis and agree upon strategy for the coming year. Regular informal meetings would take place throughout the year between the heads of the respective drug agencies to discuss issues.⁴⁵⁵ In Afghanistan, there was greater coordination between the two partners with UK Embassy officials in Kabul being in daily contact with their American counterparts⁴⁵⁶ and on the ground, there was a very close and coordinated relationship.⁴⁵⁷ However, tension would soon appear in the relationship when the Bush administration began to take more of an active interest in counter narcotics in Afghanistan and the approach employed by the British up until 2004 would thus come under scrutiny. As would be the case so often within the sphere of counter narcotics, a sharp increase in the amount of land dedicated to opium cultivation would be accompanied by calls for stronger action.

⁴⁵² Hearing before the Committee on Government Reform Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources. Statement of Administrator Karen Tandy at the U.S. Justice Department's Drug Enforcement Administration 'Afghanistan: Law Enforcement Interdiction Efforts in Transshipment Countries to Stem the Flow of Heroin' (26 February 2004) (Available at <http://www.dea.gov/pubs/cngrtest/ct022604.htm>).

⁴⁵³ Author interview with British Official (5), 13 June 2013.

⁴⁵⁴ Inspectors General, U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Defense. Interagency Assessment of the Counternarcotics Program in Afghanistan. U.S. Department of State Report No. ISP-I-07-34. U.S. Department of Defense Report No. IE-2007-005. (July 2007) p. 47.

⁴⁵⁵ Author interviews with British Official (5), 13 June 2013 and 5 July 2013.

⁴⁵⁶ Author Interview with British Official (6), 3 July 2013.

⁴⁵⁷ Charge d'Affaires, Norland, Richard. 'Trip Report PDAS Schweich to Afghanistan', Wikileaks cable: 06KABUL317.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNITED STATES COUNTER NARCOTICS STRATEGY AND ANGLO-AMERICAN DISCORD (2004)

Early British attempts at drug control had failed to make a quantitative impact with opium cultivation rising to 74,000 hectares in 2002 – from 8,000 hectares in 2001 - and spreading to 24 out of 32 provinces (Map A). The following year the number of opium producing provinces continued to increase to 28 out of 32 (Map B). By 2004 opium cultivation was present in all of Afghanistan's provinces⁴⁵⁸ (MAP C). As a consequence, international media attention focused on this dramatic rise in opium cultivation and questioned the American military's opposition to tackling the Afghan opium industry.⁴⁵⁹ Moreover, broader concerns were raised regarding the impact record levels of opium would have on what was considered an otherwise positive state-building effort in Afghanistan.

As noted in Chapter 2, the American led intervention of Afghanistan quickly and decisively defeated the Taliban regime – although not the Taliban itself. By May 2003, there was a perception among the American military that the Afghan war was - in the words of Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, in the 'clean up phase'.⁴⁶⁰ With the main military operation over – apart from the U.S. counterterrorism mission against al-Qaeda - the war had progressed to what was now predominately a reconstruction and a state building effort. This transition marked a shift in policy by the United States as Rumsfeld and Cheney – two of the main opponents to state building – saw the benefit of passing the reconstruction of Afghanistan to NATO. With the Alliance at the helm in Afghanistan, it would allow the United States to pass some of the cost of the war to NATO countries, prevent American soldiers from being dragged into state building and allow U.S. forces to concentrate on the phase two of the 'war on terror': Iraq.⁴⁶¹ Against the backdrop of growing instability and violence in Iraq, Afghanistan was a good news story for the United States. A new constitution

⁴⁵⁸ UNODC and Government of Afghanistan Counter Narcotics Directorate, 'Afghanistan Opium Survey: Summary Findings', (Vienna and Kabul, November 2004).

⁴⁵⁹ For example, see: Carlotta Gall, 'U.N aide says Afghan Drugs Trade Pays for Terrorist Attacks', *The New York Times*, 5 September 2003, McGirk, 'Drugs? What Drugs?', Rowan Scarborough, 'Military Resists Afghan Drugs War', *Washington Times*, 14 October 2004.

⁴⁶⁰ Thomas H. Johnson, and Chris M. Mason, 'Understanding the Taliban and the Insurgency in Afghanistan', *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs*, 51 No. 1 (Winter 2007), p. 71.

⁴⁶¹ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, pp.116-117.

had been signed, the Taliban had been defeated as a strategic force and the 2004 Afghan elections – that confirmed U.S. backed Hamid Karzai as President - were considered to have been a ‘moral and psychological defeat for the Taliban’.⁴⁶² However, to protect these positive developments and prevent Afghanistan slipping into a ‘narco-state’⁴⁶³ the United States was eventually forced to confront the growing problem of opium cultivation and develop a counter narcotics strategy, but it was some time in coming because of abiding opposition to it in Washington, particularly and most strongly from Rumsfeld and the Pentagon.

In the twenty-four months or so after the invasion members of the Bush cabinet were either ignorant of Afghanistan’s drug problem or simply refused to pay any significant attention to it. With Iraq commanding the attention of the Bush administration, Robert B. Charles, Rand Beers’s successor for INL struggled to raise the profile of the narcotics problem in the Washington. Charles was ‘a creature of the Republican Congress...and he had a keen sense of how issues played with the Republican lawmakers on Capitol Hill’ and knew the politically sensitive nature of drug trafficking.⁴⁶⁴ Charles correctly assumed, that if the extent of the drug problem was realised by the American public, and furthermore the United States government was not actively involved in attempting to rectify the problem, congressional opinion would promptly alter.⁴⁶⁵ At every opportunity Charles briefed his counterparts in other government departments warning that the United States would have to engage with the drug problem in Afghanistan or it would eclipse all the achievements the United States had made to date and potentially derail the state-building project.⁴⁶⁶ However, Charles’s message went unheeded by everyone in the administration apart from his boss, Secretary of State, Colin Powell. Charles’s incessant protests over the issue led to him receiving the moniker ‘Cassandra’ in his own office.⁴⁶⁷

Robert B. Charles and other State Department officials advocated the need for the implementation of a comprehensive drug control strategy for Afghanistan.

⁴⁶² Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and the Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (London, 2007), p. 1.

⁴⁶³ James. Risen, *State of War*, p. 151.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.153.

Charles' initiative would be based around five pillars: effective public information, tough law enforcement, enhanced alternative livelihoods, aggressive interdiction, and expanded eradication.⁴⁶⁸ The most controversial aspect of the proposal was the introduction of forced eradication through aerial spraying which Charles promoted as the key element in his strategy. This was a deeply entrenched policy in the State Department, which had its roots in the Department's drug suppression strategy for Colombia - 'Plan Colombia'-⁴⁶⁹ introduced by the Clinton administration in 2000. During an on the record briefing at the State Department, Charles highlighted the link between with the two strategies. 'I would go so far as to call it something tantamount to a Plan Afghanistan, which has parallels to the Plan Colombia effort'. As will be detailed later, some prominent State Department officials who would come to be involved in countering the Afghan drugs trade had served in Colombia strengthening the calls to implement the same policies the State Department had utilised in there.

Another strand of policy running through the State department - despite the arguments that contended opium cultivation was a result of poverty – was that ultimately opium cultivation was an illegal activity and should be dealt with as a law enforcement issue, regardless of the socio-economic status of the farmer. Therefore, while the State Department advocated the need to create alternative livelihoods, it was argued that strong action needed to be taken first against criminal activity, namely cultivating poppies. Central to combatting criminality was the implementation of the rule of law. There could be no exceptions made, rule of law had to be adhered to in Afghanistan in the same way it had to be adhered to by poor Americans mixing methamphetamines in their trailers – involvement in the drug trade was illegal and should be punished.⁴⁷⁰ As a former American official commented: 'nowhere in the world does alternative development work by itself. You have to be able to create a criminality associated with the behaviour you are trying to stop'.⁴⁷¹ Instead of transitioning farmers away from opium cultivation gradually by increasing alternative livelihoods, access to markets and improved security the State Department wanted to

⁴⁶⁸ Robert B. Charles, Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. 'Counternarcotics Initiatives for Afghanistan', On-The-Record Briefing, State Department, Washington, DC, 17 November 2004 (available at: <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/inl/rls/prsr/spbr/38352.htm>)

⁴⁶⁹ For a discussion of Plan Colombia see: Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*.

⁴⁷⁰ Thomas Schweich, 'Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?' *The New York Times*, 27 July 2008.

⁴⁷¹ Author Interview with American Official (3), 7 March 2014.

signal that opium cultivation would not be tolerated and immediately set about implementing effective deterrents. The official further stated: ‘so what you have to do, is try to find a way to deter the production’⁴⁷² and the most effective way in the State Departments’ view was aerial eradication. This line of argument was difficult to reconcile in practice with the objective of creating alternative livelihoods.

In many cases (but not all) opium cultivation is a mechanism to alleviate financial hardship, poverty and food insecurity, therefore, eradication can further the economic distress of the poorest farmers. If eradication is conducted in the early stages of the planting cycle, farmers will be able to grow another crop. If it is conducted in the latter stages of the planting cycle, not only has the crop been lost resulting in no income, the farmer has lost the money invested for labour, seeds, water and fertilisers and has no chance to plant any alternative that season. Commonly, opium poppy farmers in Afghanistan, sell their crop in advance at a fixed price (i.e. using their future crop as collateral⁴⁷³) to drug traffickers. As noted above, some actors (officials from the State Department) viewed opium cultivation not as a consequence of economic necessity but as an illegal act, and thus argued that implementing law enforcement methods was vital for deterrence. The view holds opium farmers are rational economic actors who choose to operate out with the confines of the law to derive economic profit from opium farming. As such eradication is necessary to ‘deter farmers from the blind pursuit of profit’.⁴⁷⁴

Charles also advocated a more forceful interdiction policy against drug traffickers, however, for that to be successful the Pentagon would have to agree to take a more active role in the fight against drugs and alter its rules of engagement for American forces.⁴⁷⁵ The State Department warned of the relationship between drugs and terrorist groups and the potential of the Afghan insurgency to morph into a Revolutionary Armed Forces Colombia (FARC) style insurgency with their operations being funded by the drugs trade. As an American official commented: ‘drug traffickers are the primary funders of the warlords, and...primary funder of the terrorists whether that be Al Qaeda or the Taliban...all the big terrorist groups and all

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ UNODC, ‘The Opium Economy in Afghanistan’, p. 12.

⁴⁷⁴ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 158.

⁴⁷⁵ Gretchen. Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p.191 and James. Risen, *State of War*, pp., 159-160.

of the warlords drew their money from heroin'.⁴⁷⁶ And as such the best way, to deal with this threat was to employ the same methods utilised in Colombia: tough law enforcement methods. The official further commented: 'my view was the best way...to get large percentage of crop eradicated from the air because, that works very well in Colombia'.⁴⁷⁷ This group of actors wrongly believed that widespread and forced eradication had successfully cut off the flow of finance between the drugs trade and FARC and could defeat insurgent groups in Afghanistan.

The calls for stronger action in Afghanistan resulted in direct conflict between the United States and United Kingdom over the counter narcotics policy. The United Kingdom's apparent 'slowness' in eradicating poppy fields, through Governor-led Eradication, led to an open diplomatic rift manifesting itself in the Anglo-American alliance in arguments over the best way to conduct eradication. The rift gained prominence after members of the Bush administration, in reversal of their previous arguments, criticised the British approach to eradication as weak and ineffective and urged more forceful action,⁴⁷⁸ namely aerial eradication. Tension was present between the two partners at formal drug meetings to discuss policy formulation in Washington. Members of the State Department attempted to pressure their UK counterparts into agreeing to aerial eradication. As a former British official commented: 'my dialogue ... whenever I was in Washington with State and others was: look we hear what you are saying but this is not something we want to do'. At diplomatic and ministerial level the issue was constantly pressed but the British 'held the line'.⁴⁷⁹

The dispute would break into open diplomatic warfare when, in a remarkable move Robert B. Charles criticised the British approach when he testified before a Republican-chaired hearing of the House narcotics sub-committee entitled: 'Afghanistan: are British counter-narcotics efforts going wobbly?' in the spring of 2004. The title of the hearing was a pointed reference to a phone conversation between Margret Thatcher and George Bush Senior before the first Gulf War when

⁴⁷⁶ Author Interview with American Official (3), 7 March 2014.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Patrick Wintour, 'Battle Begins to Stem Afghan Opium Harvest', *The Guardian*, 3 May 2004

⁴⁷⁹ Author Interview British Official (3), 23 April 2013.

Thatcher warned Bush Senior ‘not to go wobbly’.⁴⁸⁰ Set against the backdrop of rapidly increasing opium cultivation, at the time of the hearing the 2003-2004 planting season was predicted to produce the largest volume of opium ever. In the end opium cultivation eclipsed previous records by increasing two-thirds and reaching a staggering 131,000 hectares.⁴⁸¹ The hearing was convened to examine these problems and to assess whether or not the ‘the British-led effort on eradication of opium poppy [had] stalled’.⁴⁸² The hearing commenced with a short introduction from Chairman Congressman Mark E Souder – a drug warrior who petitioned for increased American involvement in countering the drug trade - setting forth his concerns of British recent activity:

The subcommittee has received disturbing reports that while our British allies were supposed to eradicate a targeted 12,000 acres of opium poppy, they are barely off the ground in Helmand and have done almost nothing in Nangarhar. According to our sources, there is dithering on agreement on how to measure what is actually being eradicated, which hampers accountability among the governments pledging counter narcotics resources.⁴⁸³

The Chairman also highlighted the Pentagon’s reluctance to involve itself in counter narcotics operations as a problem:

Let me be clear: if it is true that there is some degree of foot dragging by the British in this complex matter, the U.S. Department of Defence comes off far worse. Let me quote from our House Government Reform Committee’s Views and Estimates on the Fiscal 2005 Budget of the United States: Our British allies have identified many Afghan opium processing plants necessary to the heroin trade. Yet despite

⁴⁸⁰ David Rennie and Anton La Guardia, ‘America accuses Britain of failing in war on drugs’, *The Telegraph*, 2 April 2004.

⁴⁸¹ UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2004.

⁴⁸² Charles, ‘Are the British Counternarcotics Efforts Going Wobbly?’.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

the financing of terrorists and other destabilizing elements from the drug trade, the Department of Defence does not view these as military targets. The committee urges in the strongest terms for the Department to reconsider.⁴⁸⁴

Robert Charles testimony exposed the conflict between the State Department and United Kingdom over the best approach to eradication and to the split within the U.S. government itself. Charles explained the United States plan was constructed around the notion of a hard-line approach to eradication that was not subject to local political consent or alternative livelihoods. Whereas, the UK opted for a less aggressive approach to eradication, selecting only to eradicate when the local political conditions were right. How to eradicate the poppy highlighted divergent attitudes between the British and the Americans, not only to the counter narcotics campaign but also to the war in general. The view within most of the UK government believed the best way to operate was with endorsement from the Afghan government, local Afghan support and maintain as much political capital as possible. The UK considered eradication as a necessary tool but it should only be utilised when there were clear alternative livelihoods available. The policy was designed to provide a balance between incentive and disincentive.⁴⁸⁵ This would complement the British view that wide-scale eradication could potentially disrupt the livelihoods of farmers who depended upon opium cultivation to survive. Within this framework targeting the next level up from the farmers was considered a more prudent course of action.⁴⁸⁶ The State Department favoured a more aggressive policy, which if possible would include aerial spraying, that would attack poppy fields regardless if the local political environment was unstable or alternative livelihoods were in place. The State Department wanted instant success and to send a message that opium production would not be tolerated and opium cultivation was regarded as a criminal act that needed to be dealt with accordingly.

The United Kingdom's military forces did not participate directly in eradicating poppy fields; instead, intelligence was gathered on the location of poppy

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Victoria Burnett and Peter Spiegel, 'Fear of Fighting and Economic Ruin Hold Back Bid to Stamp out Opium', *Financial Times*, 4 January 2005.

⁴⁸⁶ Author Interview with British Military official (2), 13 February 2014.

fields, which was provided to the American trained Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) to perform eradication. Not only did the United Kingdom oppose the aggressive eradication policy of the United States generally; it also held divergent attitudes on when in the planting cycle eradication should be performed. British officials argued it was only acceptable to eradicate poppy fields during the infancy phase of growth, where farmers had invested minimum effort. They opposed eradication at the flowering pre-harvest stage, where farmers had invested considerable money, time and effort, which would increase the possibility of a hostile response from farmers: the farmers would also not have the option of sowing and harvesting an alternative.⁴⁸⁷ Afghanistan's Ambassador to America, Said Jawad, supported the rationale: 'we think it's better to put more resources on preventing cultivation because once it's cultivated, it's too late...you eradicate it, you lose the support of the people'.⁴⁸⁸ The British employed a 23 variable test to assess if eradication should take place. In reality, effective implementation was hindered by lack of information and obstructive local power holders seeking to limit the volume of eradication.⁴⁸⁹ Robert Charles further commented:

It would be inaccurate to say that we are in complete agreement on all aspects of the eradication effort or on the ways to achieve the essential, critical and mutual goal of eradicating a measurable and significant quantity of heroin poppies. For example, we believe that the current set of eradication targeting criteria, while designed with the best of intentions, may be overly restrictive. Criteria such as developing alternative development to be in place and a preoccupation with avoiding any possibility of resistance may restrict our ability to collectively reach these eradication goals.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁷ Charge d' Affaires, Richard Norland, 'Codel Hoekstra Sees Poppy Problem First Hand', Wikileaks cable: 06KABUL1277.

⁴⁸⁸ Janine Zacharia, 'Afghanistan at Odds With U.S. on Plan to Eradicate Opium Crop', *Bloomberg*, 8 August 2007.

⁴⁸⁹ Rubin R. Barnett and Alexandra Guaqueta, 'Fighting Drugs and Building Peace: Towards Policy Coherence between Counter-Narcotics and Peace Building', *Occasional Papers*, No 37 / November 2007 p. 20.

⁴⁹⁰ Charles, Robert, B 'Are the British Counternarcotics Efforts Going Wobbly?'

The United Kingdom in conjunction with the Afghan government was responsible for conducting part one of a two part eradication programme to hinder opium cultivation in the south of the country in the 2003-04 planting season. The second phase of the programme was to be conducted by the Afghan authorities with American backing finishing in north Afghanistan. However, the United States became dismayed by the progress of phase one ‘Since you have obviously also seen the worrisome phase one progress to date, and thus called this hearing...The U.K. financed, Governor-led eradication effort commenced just in one province this past weekend, and has reportedly been unfolding somewhat slowly’.⁴⁹¹ Charles implored the British to act with more urgency and aggression if the eradication scheme was to prove successful. Another major point of contention between British and American policy makers was the role alternative livelihoods played in the eradication process. The UK argued that it would be reluctant to eradicate opium fields if there were no alternative livelihoods in place; however, Robert Charles argued that opium production only accounted for 8% of all cultivated land, thus meaning that 92% of the land cultivated (that is without alternative development) produced wheat or barely. He concluded that options were available other than opium:

It appears that our point of disagreement, to some degree here, and I point to it very directly, is that we believe that if there are alternative income streams, but more importantly, if there is heroin poppy there, which needs to be eradicated, we shouldn’t be picking and choosing, we shouldn’t be delaying, we shouldn’t be making it conditional upon providing an instant and available income stream. I would note that the 92 per cent, which are alternative crops, that’s the free market doing its job... And the key here again is that deterrence occurs not because you have put alternative development programs in place first, or simultaneously... So that’s why we have to be highly aggressive at taking out the fully flowering poppy. We have to say, yes, of course, we all want

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

alternative development support. But we cannot make our eradication efforts conditional on pre-existing or parallel, the necessity of parallel development.⁴⁹²

Mr Charles argued that alternative livelihoods were preferable but not essential to eradication. Condemnation of the United Kingdom's performance on eradication was also heard at the American Embassy in Kabul. Embassy officials contended speed would be a key requirement to quell the flowering poppy production and were unhappy at the UK's 'lack of urgency'. An Embassy official commented 'Britain will achieve the results they want in 10 years and that's fast enough for them. We will achieve the result we want only if we do it more quickly'.⁴⁹³ Robert Charles testimony was a specifically crafted strategy to force the British into taking more forceful action. It was reasoned if the rift were aired publically, the UK would have little alternative but to accede to the State Department's demands, as an American official commented:

We tried privately again and again to get everything to work...the British had a role to play...Well, we were trying to get them to change their policy and cooperate on the question of creating more disincentives. We tried many, many times privately to have a conversation...Sometimes if you say something publicly people then have to be accountable, then they have to say, okay well all right, we should do something on the disincentive side as well.⁴⁹⁴

British diplomats were privately furious at Charles' testimony, and informed their American counterparts of their displeasure. A British official commented 'we did not take kindly to our principal allies criticising us publicly', he further stated 'we got very pissed off when they did that...and we pushed back very robustly and said, bugger off we have the lead responsibility on this and you know we have expended an awful lot of political capital rightly supporting you in an attempt to prioritise, and you

⁴⁹² Ibid.

⁴⁹³ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁴ Author Interview with American Official (3), 7 March 2014.

are making life more difficult for us'.⁴⁹⁵ In public, however, most British officials demonstrated restraint as a Foreign Office Minister downplayed the conflict but did comment 'there have been some differences of emphases'.⁴⁹⁶ Not all officials thought the best course of action was to publicly downplay the rift, 'I often argued internally, that there is some political merit in airing some of that publically'.⁴⁹⁷ To do so, however, would inflame an already delicate situation between the State Department and British officials and cause more damage to the wider Anglo-American alliance, at a time when the coalition was fighting on two fronts, one of which was a widely unpopular conflict in Iraq. Moreover, a public discussion over the different approaches of the two allies would only lead to an escalation of the conflict and do little for the continuing counter narcotics campaign let alone public support for the war in general. Domestically, Robert B. Charles's comments were also not appreciated as 'he heard veiled and indirect complaints from the White House about [the] downbeat testimony he gave to Congress'.⁴⁹⁸

Notwithstanding, congressional political, 'pressure began to mount' over counter narcotics as Republicans in Congress led the calls for the United States to become active in the fight against drugs. Among others, Mark Souder the chairman of the criminal justice, drug policy and human resources sub-committee of the House of Government Reform Committee argued for increased action. Henry J Hyde chairman of The House of Representatives Committee of International Relations identified the connection between countering the drug trade and security 'only by addressing the Afghan drug challenge can we make Afghanistan more secure'. He further underscored his commitment to ignite American anti-drug efforts by writing to Defense Secretary Rumsfeld highlighting the link between the drug industry and insurgency.⁴⁹⁹ Adding to the pressure, 2004 was an American presidential year, and President Bush's Democratic challenger, John Kerry, sought to gain an advantage against the President by highlighting the administration's poor performance on the issue. As an Afghan policy expert commented, in 2004 security in Afghanistan was generally good so the main problem the democrats could criticise the administration

⁴⁹⁵ Author Interview with British Official (3), 23 April 2013.

⁴⁹⁶ Wintour, 'Battle Begins to Stem Afghan Opium Harvest'.

⁴⁹⁷ Author Interview with British Official (3), 23 April 2013.

⁴⁹⁸ James. Risen, *State of War*, p. 153.

⁴⁹⁹ Hearing before the Committee on International Relations House of Representatives, One Hundred Eighth Congress, *Afghanistan Drugs and Terrorism and U.S. Security Policy* (12 February 2004).

for was record levels of opium cultivation.⁵⁰⁰ Internationally, Antonio Maria Costa, the executive director of the UNODC, expressed his fears of the debilitating effect the drug industry would have on Afghanistan reconstruction: ‘opium cultivation, which has spread like wildfire throughout the country, could ultimately incinerate everything – democracy, reconstruction, and stability...The fear that Afghanistan might degenerate into a narco-state is slowly becoming a reality’.⁵⁰¹

Despite domestic and international pressure coalescing to force the Americans to develop a counter narcotics strategy, the issue proved to be controversial and divisive within the Bush administration and in the Anglo-American alliance. All within the United States government did not welcome the adoption of a strategy and it was reported that policymakers from the State Department, National Security Council and Pentagon were at odds on how best to proceed.⁵⁰² The key issue would remain aerial spraying and above all would prove a constant source of tension over the next four years causing bitter diplomatic exchanges over counter-narcotics policy within the American administration and in the wider Anglo-American alliance. There remained a degree of scepticism in some quarters in the American administration; particularly the Pentagon and much more widely in the United Kingdom and Afghanistan that forced eradication would prove an unsuccessful policy. It was felt that eradication could prove counter-productive by, increasing opium cultivation in subsequent years – to accrue the financial loss of poppy fields being eradicated - damaging the coalition’s military objectives and turn the local population against them. As a September 2004 British government report noted ‘if not targeted properly, eradication can have the reverse effect and encourage farmers to cultivate more poppy to pay off increased debts’.⁵⁰³ However, Charles was convinced of the need to employ an aggressive eradication campaign and took further steps to promote it.

He assembled a team of experts to travel to Afghanistan to sell his idea to President Karzai and demonstrate that a version of herbicide glyphosate, also known as Roundup - which is the most popular domestic herbicide in the America to kill

⁵⁰⁰ Author interview with Academic (1), 30 January 2014.

⁵⁰¹ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 141.

⁵⁰² Sonni Efron, ‘An Afghan Quandary for the U.S.’, *Los Angeles Times*, 2 January 2005.

⁵⁰³ Transnational Institute, *Drug Policy Briefing: Plan Afghanistan*, TNI Briefing Paper, (January 2005).

garden weeds - could deliver instant results with no serious health risks. President Karzai and his government were opposed to the use of aerial spraying for several reasons. Firstly, he claimed to American officials, if aerial eradication were implemented it would result in widespread discontent which would lead to a popular uprising resulting in him losing power.⁵⁰⁴ Secondly, it was contended that aerial spraying would result in a propaganda victory for the Taliban, as it would be reminiscent of the Soviet military campaign to destroy food crops and agricultural infrastructure.⁵⁰⁵ Thirdly, president Karzai was concerned that aerial eradication would cause damage to water supplies, livestock and other crops. Finally, there were concerns about possible health implications for Afghans if exposed to the spray.

Remarkably, Charles did not get the opportunity to brief President Karzai. United States Ambassador for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad – known as the American ‘viceroy’ in Afghanistan as a result of his influence over American policies in the country- along with Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz contrived to deny Charles entry to Afghanistan. Although, Khalilzad was in agreement that a more aggressive approach was needed in the fight against the drug industry, he objected to aerial spraying. One of Congress’s most active drug warriors, Republican Dana Rohrabacher, did however get the opportunity to brief President Karzai over the issue. Whilst on a visit to Afghanistan, Rohrabacher had broached the subject with President Karzai and asked him to sign a letter approving aerial eradication that could, if necessary, be presented before Congress to garner support. Rohrabacher also hinted that Congress might cut aid to Afghanistan if significant action was not taken to quash the opium trade.⁵⁰⁶ However, no conclusive action was taken and the issue stalled.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁴ Schweich, ‘Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?’.

⁵⁰⁵ Lee V. Barton (ed.), *Illegal Drugs and Government Policies* (New York, 2007) p. 125.

⁵⁰⁶ Ambassador Finn, ‘Congressman Rohrabacher’s April 16 Meeting with President Karzai’, Wikileaks Cable: 03KABUL1029.

⁵⁰⁷ Hearing before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred Tenth Congress, first session, *Counternarcotics strategy and police training in Afghanistan* (4 October 2007) page 8 Also See: Hearing before the Committee on International Relations House of Representatives, One Hundred Ninth Congress, First Session *U.S. Counter-narcotics Policy in Afghanistan: A time for leadership* (17th March 2005) pp. 26-29.

Secretary of State, Powell and Charles would have an equally difficult task convincing the Bush cabinet to agree to 'Plan Afghanistan'. In late 2004, Colin Powell tried to sell Robert Charles's new counter narcotics initiative to the newly re-elected President. Powell illustrated the drug problem in Afghanistan vividly and made a convincing argument for the State Department's plans to address the problem. President Bush seemed genuinely concerned about the opium problem and was encouraging of aerial eradication and an increased military role for tackling the opium trade. Bush was so taken by the argument he commented that he would not 'waste another American life on a narco-state'.⁵⁰⁸ Charles also present at the meeting was overjoyed at the President's response believing the administration would now action an aggressive campaign to curb what he saw as the destabilising problem of narcotics in Afghanistan. However, as noted in chapter 3, Donald Rumsfeld would use the President's declarations simply as the start of a debate. When objecting continuously failed to discourage the President from authorising the plan, the Secretary of Defense, continued his opposition 'through back channels'. Rumsfeld enlisted the help of his ally, Ambassador Khalilzad,⁵⁰⁹ who told the President that as the United States front man in Afghanistan, he needed a flexibility to deal with the narcotics issue, and that did not include aerial eradication.⁵¹⁰ Khalilzad's intervention proved crucial; Bush agreed not push aerial eradication and go along with Khalilzad's plan as long as significant strides against the opium industry were achieved.⁵¹¹ Despite believing in the merits of aerial eradication the President never entered the fray decisively to end the inter-departmental squabbling and in any case Congressional politics and alliance politics made the likelihood of decisiveness in this policy area elusive for anyone, even someone as powerful as the President. Also, with the Pentagon largely shaping Afghan policy and Rumsfeld's ability to politically outmanoeuvre his opponents, the probability of success in this area was constrained, so Bush 'did not push back against the Rumsfeld-led opposition'.⁵¹² Additionally, the President's decision not to override the Ambassador on this aspect of policy was also as much a result of his presidential style as anything else; as a United States official commented the President was results driven and less interested in the details of policy than achieving

⁵⁰⁸ Risen, *State of War*, p. 161.

⁵⁰⁹ Author Interview with American Official (3), 7 March 2014.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.162.

⁵¹¹ James. Risen, *State of War*, p. 162.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*

the overall goal. Notwithstanding, President Bush respected Karzai as a fellow politician and was extremely reluctant to overrule Karzai's judgment on a political matter.⁵¹³

Notwithstanding his reluctance to drive through the policy, the President over the coming years would reaffirm his support for aerial eradication, quoted as being a 'sprayin kind of guy',⁵¹⁴ and his backing for aerial eradication did not go unnoticed on the other side of the Atlantic. Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles noted that President Bush attempted to engender support for the policy by mentioning the issue – on more than one occasion - to the Prime Minister, 'urging us to support' the policy.⁵¹⁵ If the British were on side, it would help the President win the policy debate against the influential Pentagon naysayers. Interestingly, and adding to the tangled bureaucratic battleground over counter narcotics policy, Prime Minister Blair was also noted to advocate aerial eradication. As a British official commented: 'well he was basically in favour of spraying...and we had great difficulty in stopping him endorsing the American approach'. When questioned over why Blair supported this policy the official explained: 'it's like invading Iraq he thought it was a good thing in its own right but he was [also] under American pressure [he thought that it] really ... needed to be tackled decisively and spraying was the way to do it'.⁵¹⁶ Whether the threat was real or perceived British officials from the FCO were concerned that President Bush would convince Prime Minister Blair to endorse the policy.⁵¹⁷ The Prime Minister was, however, very much in the minority within the British government as a supporter of aerial spraying and as such it was much more difficult for him to influence the policy debate against the will of the majority. In saying that, there was a constant fear in FCO policy circles that Tony Blair would succumb to American pressure and endorse aerial spraying, especially as in 2004, when the numbers associated with opium cultivation reached record levels. That year, during a counter narcotics meeting at the Ministry of Defence, one of the Prime Minister's advisors indicated to the officials that 'Tony Blair supports aerial eradication'. There was no written instruction accompanying this pronouncement explaining what Tony Blair wanted -

⁵¹³ Author Interview with American Official (6), 21 October 2014.

⁵¹⁴ Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 84.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Author Interview with British Official (6), 3 July 2006.

⁵¹⁷ Author Interviews with British Official (10), 23 and 24 September 2014.

only a statement that hung in the air. What was left unsaid and open to interpretation was whether this statement was a formal request on behalf of the Prime Minister to adopt aerial eradication as British policy or merely an indication of the Prime Minister's view. The statement was enough to sway the argument for one or two of the officials present but the majority of officials stayed true to their original convictions over the policy and continued their objection to aerial eradication.⁵¹⁸

So with less than a month after Powell briefed the President, Charles was informed that his strategy, which commanded the President's approval during the cabinet meeting, had in fact been dropped and would be replaced with a watered down version, which would see aerial eradication abandoned in favour of manual eradication largely because of opposition orchestrated by Rumsfeld.

The three most common methods of forced eradication are: manually, which typically consists of striking poppy stalks with sticks or by hand; mechanically, driving tractors or other mechanical vehicles through opium fields or chemical eradication, spraying chemicals such as glyphosate or Agent Orange over poppy fields either by air or by using ground based spraying techniques. The implementation of eradication requires power and force not authority, which can lead to violence between eradicators on the one hand and those who have had their fields targeted on the other.⁵¹⁹ Manual and mechanical eradication can prove expensive in terms of loss to life, with numerous deaths to eradicators and police being besieged by irate farmers backed by the Taliban and drug traffickers. In many cases, eradication efforts have been marred by widespread corruption and patronage by targeting the poorest farmers who are unable to pay off eradication teams whilst simultaneously strengthening the position of the wealthiest and most powerful poppy growers. More importantly, political capital can be lost between the local populace and government where eradication is executed and alternative crops are lacking. This results in farmers viewing eradication as a corrupt practice, which is selectively used by those in power. Discontent with the government can range from antipathy towards the government to more nefarious cases where locals actively oppose the government and openly support

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

⁵¹⁹ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 157.

the insurgency.⁵²⁰ In some areas, the Taliban advertised protection of poppy fields against eradication. Eradication was also a financially expensive venture costing \$44,000 a hectare⁵²¹ to complete. A principal contractor of the United States government responsible for eradication, DynCorp International, was receiving \$35 to \$45 million per year to oversee the eradication process, which ‘paid Afghans a few dollars per day’.⁵²²

Charles outlined the American counter narcotics strategy, at a 17 November 2004 briefing. Even though he had failed with his efforts regarding aerial eradication, nevertheless, the new strategy represented an increased focus by the American administration on the issue of counter narcotics in Afghanistan. Additional improvements were made to the United States counter narcotics effort as they upgraded the infrastructure at the Kabul Embassy by establishing a Narcotics Affairs Section and appointed a dedicated Drug Tsar under the authority of American Ambassador Khalilzad.⁵²³ Funding for counter narcotics increased significantly in the 2004-2005 season. The United States spent \$782 million on counter narcotics in FY2005, up from \$130 million in 2004.⁵²⁴ Of the \$782 million, \$532 million was administered by the State Department and USAID, with the existing \$250 million delivered by the Defense Department and the DEA. A breakdown of State Department and USAID expenditures, as associated with each pillar of the American strategy, were as follows: \$180 million, alternative livelihoods; \$258 million, elimination and eradication; \$65 million, interdiction; \$24 million, law enforcement and justice reform; and \$5 million, public information. The Defense Department funds were directed almost exclusively on elimination and eradication.⁵²⁵

⁵²⁰ Testimony of David Mansfield, Independent Consultant and Fellow on the Afghanistan/Pakistan State Building and Human Rights Programme, Carr Centre, Kennedy School, Harvard University, Before the Sub Committee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, ‘*Challenging the Rhetoric: Supporting an Evidence Based Counter Narcotics Policy in Afghanistan*’, (1 October 2009) p. 6.

⁵²¹ Gretchen Peters, ‘Holbrooke’s drug war’, *Foreign Policy*, 10 August 2009.

⁵²² A Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate One Hundred Eleventh Congress, First Session, ‘*Afghanistan’s Narco War: Breaking the Link Between Drug Traffickers and Insurgents*’, (10 August 2009) p. 8.

⁵²³ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 186.

⁵²⁴ Burnett and Spiegel, ‘Fear of Fighting and Economic Ruin Hold Back Bid to Stamp out Opium’.

⁵²⁵ John Glaze, ‘*Opium and Afghanistan: Reassessing U.S. Counter Narcotics Strategy*’, Working Paper, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, (August 2007) p. 9.

Infrastructural changes were also made to existing Afghan counter narcotics institutions but the divisions in the Anglo-American alliance over policy and implementation methods remained as the United States and United Kingdom funded and implemented their policies through different Afghan organisations. In an organisational reshuffle, the Counter narcotics Directorate, the lead Afghan counter narcotics department,⁵²⁶ – which was established in 2002 with UK and UNODC funding, under the control of the Afghan National Security Council - was upgraded to the Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN) in December 2004. Assessing the MCN as an ineffective mechanism to conduct eradication in the provinces, the United States established an alternative command structure within the Ministry of Interior (MOI), working with Lieutenant General Mohammad Daoud, the Deputy Minister for Counter narcotics, an ex-warlord with reported connections to the drug trade.⁵²⁷ The United States, concerned by the British efforts to date, employed private contractors Dyncorp to deliver the eradication element of Plan Afghanistan. The United States had awarded Dyncorp a contract worth \$50 million to train the Afghan Central Poppy Eradication Force (CPEF) months earlier. The CPEF would report to the MOI, sidelining the MCN and the British. In concert with the Karzai government, the British formed the Central Eradication Planning Cell (CEPC), under the MOI, essentially to re-establish some authority over where and when the CPEF would be deployed as FCO Minister Bill Rammell commented: ‘to ensure that eradication by the CPEF is targeted in a way which takes account of alternative livelihoods’.⁵²⁸

Under pressure from the United States, President Karzai gave his resolute support to the America’s new drive against the drug industry. The Afghan President would publicly condemn the drug trade and declared a jihad against the opium at the opening of international counter narcotics conference in Kabul in December 2004. Hamid Karzai pledged to eliminate the drug industry in two years, describing it as a cancer more dangerous than the Soviet invasion or terrorism.⁵²⁹ The president highlighted the vital role provincial governors would play in the elimination of opium

⁵²⁶ The Department of State’s *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* (INCSR), Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (March 2003).

⁵²⁷ Transnational Institute, *Downward Spiral, Banning Opium in Afghanistan and Burma*, TNI Briefing Paper, (June 2005).

⁵²⁸ Ibid.

⁵²⁹ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 143.

cultivation and warned governors with dismissal if they did not comply with his presidential directive.⁵³⁰

A Renewed Counter Narcotics Effort (2004-05): Nangarhar Province

Nangarhar province would provide the testing ground for the increased American drug control efforts in the 2004-05 planting season. The province was both of significant strategic value to the Americans – given its proximity to the Pakistan border - and also one of the largest opium producing provinces in the years prior to and including 2004.⁵³¹ American forces had been active in the province in 2001, but levels of violence were relatively low, thus allowing coalition forces to concentrate on reconstruction and provide development help - Nangarhar became one the largest benefactors of international aid. With the establishment of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in 2003 many infrastructural improvements took place in the province including developments to roads, bridges, irrigation systems, health clinics and schools.⁵³² With ISAF confined to Kabul during the first two years of the conflict, PRT's were civilian-military units designed to spread the 'ISAF effect' into the provinces without formally extending ISAF throughout Afghanistan. Established in 2003, PRT's comprised of 60-100 military personnel, Afghan advisors and officials from civilians development agencies.⁵³³

It was against the backdrop of low levels of violence and high levels of development and reconstruction that the provincial governor, Haji Din Mohammed, would implement a successful opium ban in 2004-2005. A variety of external and internal factors coalesced to make the implementation of the ban achievable. There was strong international backing to make tangible progress in the fight against record levels of opium cultivation in 2004, with both the U.S. and UK pledging their support in Nangarhar to prevent a perceived failure in the state building project. Nationally, the Afghan government would reaffirmed its commitment by producing the Counter Narcotics Implementation Plan (2005), which would (in theory at least) provide the

⁵³⁰ David. Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 186.

⁵³¹ Ibid. p. 188.

⁵³² Jerry Meyerle, Megan Katt, and Jim Gavrilis, *On the Ground in Afghanistan: Counterinsurgency in Practice* (Quantico, 2012), p. 82.

⁵³³ Michael J. Mcnerney, 'Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are PRTs a Model or a Muddle?' *Parameters*, (Winter 2005-2006), pp. 32-46.

framework to accelerate the efforts of the Afghan and international community to tackle narcotics. The plan would consist of eight pillars: building institutions, information campaign, alternative livelihoods, interdiction and law enforcement, criminal justice, eradication, demand reduction and treatment of addicts and regional cooperation.⁵³⁴ Locally, the population was generally supportive of the Afghan government's state building project, playing their role in electing President Karzai in the fall elections. The 2004 presidential elections marked a high point of popular sentiment for the democratic process and more broadly the international community's engagement in Afghanistan. Culminating in enthusiasm that Afghans hoped would transform the political and economic landscape, ultimately improving their lives. Chris Jones of the British Embassy Drugs Team cautioned that any transformation would be slow and hard fought: 'It's going to be very difficult to match the expectations that farmers have. At the moment they are expecting to see their lives change dramatically in the next couple of years as a result of the international system...But the reality is, it's going to be many years...before their fundamental way of life is improved significantly.'⁵³⁵

The provincial governor fully embraced the President's pledge to eliminate opium cultivation and also his warning to dismiss any governor who did not comply with his anti-opium directive. Haji Din Mohammed then used the President's commination to encourage district leaders in the province to agree to the opium ban, reminding that their own positions would be in jeopardy if the prohibition were to fail. The prevailing economic environment also impacted on farmers decisions not to plant opium. Wheat prices had increased by 49 per cent in 2004, inducing concerns with the rural population over food insecurity; so all of these factors coalesced to provide the perfect circumstances to enable the ban.

The strategy employed by the governor to implement the prohibition was influenced by the Taliban's ban in 2000. As Mansfield states: 'formal and informal institutions [were] co-opted into the process. Negotiation and political bargaining

⁵³⁴ Rammell, Bill, Afghanistan Counter Narcotics Implementation Plan, Ministerial Statement, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, London 10 March 2005.

⁵³⁵ Programme Transcript, 'Britain's Heroin Fix', *BBC Panorama*, 24 July 2005, (available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/panorama/4328502.stm>).

were at the forefront of Haji Din Mohammed's strategy to reduce opium production and the reward of increased development assistance formed an integral part of the dialogue between the Governor and the rural population'.⁵³⁶ Emphasis was placed on preventing farmers from planting opium at the start of the season as opposed to over-emphasis on eradication and law enforcement measures once the poppy was planted. Eradication was utilised where the conditions allowed but targeted to prevent violent resistance.⁵³⁷ Of the 4,000 hectares eradicated in 2005, Nangarhar accounted for 46 per cent and Helmand 26 per cent.⁵³⁸ In order to acquiesce the population to agree to the ban, promises of development aid were made by the governor, central administration and international community.⁵³⁹ It was in this *quid pro quo* environment that the ban was successfully achieved. The ban decreased opium cultivation in the province by 96 per cent⁵⁴⁰ reducing cultivation from 28,213 hectares to 1,093 hectares.⁵⁴¹ American officials commented it was 'the most significant victory in the battle against narcotics in Afghanistan'.⁵⁴²

The United States and the United Kingdom also focused their efforts in the north-eastern province of Badakshan. Traditionally one of the poorest provinces in Afghanistan, Badakshan had a long history of opium cultivation and was the third largest opium producer in 2004 – producing 15,600 hectares – accounting for 12 per cent of the national area cultivated.⁵⁴³ The United Kingdom's strategy - to be implemented by the Department for International Development (DFID) - focused on creating alternative livelihoods for poppy farmers whilst improving the co-ordination and implementation of development and counter narcotics programmes.⁵⁴⁴ The UK funded a £4 million alternative livelihoods project; part of which constructed an irrigation canal⁵⁴⁵ to facilitate the transition to alternative crops. After Nangarhar,

⁵³⁶ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 190.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ UNODC and Government of Afghanistan Ministry of Counternarcotics. 'Afghanistan Opium Survey: Summary Findings', (Vienna and Kabul, November 2005), p. 53.

⁵³⁹ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p.191.

⁵⁴⁰ Meyerle, Katt, and Gavrilis, *On the Ground in Afghanistan*, p. 86.

⁵⁴¹ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 183.

⁵⁴² Meyerle, Katt, and Gavrilis, *On the Ground in Afghanistan*, p. 86.

⁵⁴³ Dorris Buddenberg and William Byrd, (ed.), *Afghanistan's Drugs Industry: Structure, functioning, dynamics and implications for counter narcotics policy*. (Kabul, UNODC/ World Bank 2006), pp. 170-71.

⁵⁴⁴ 10 March 2005 *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)* (House of Commons) col. WS37 (available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200405/ldhansrd/vo050310/text/50310-73.htm>).

⁵⁴⁵ Programme Transcript, 'Britain's Heroin Fix'.

Badakshan, was the second largest recipient of USAID development funding in 2005⁵⁴⁶ receiving \$47.3 million.⁵⁴⁷ The flow of development aid to the province and more importantly, the promise of future funding proved a significant factor in persuading farmers not to plant opium poppy. Little eradication was implemented in the province as the threat of eradication proved a potent enough deterrent, causing farmers to abstain from planting poppy in the first place.⁵⁴⁸ Compared to the previous year the province experienced a 53 per cent reduction in opium cultivation.

The successful reduction of cultivation in Nangarhar and Badakshan was replicated, to varying degrees, throughout Afghanistan. A reduction of cultivation was observed in 19 provinces⁵⁴⁹ and the overall amount of land dedicated to opium cultivation decreased 21 per cent from 2004 – although favourable weather conditions meant production was only down 2.4 per cent to 4,100 tonnes.⁵⁵⁰ The number of poppy free provinces increased from zero to nine. With the first reduction in opium cultivation since the 2001 intervention, a sense of optimism grew– at least in some quarters – that 2005 marked significant progress by the Afghan, British and American governments to address the illegal narcotics industry. One of the primary reasons for the success was the influence President Karzai was able to exert on governors to adhere to his nationwide opium ban, which was, for the first time backed by the entire Anglo-American alliance. Afghan officials, however, were buoyed by this reduction; confidently declaring opium cultivation was set to decrease for the second consecutive year. President Karzai committed the Afghan government to a 20 per cent decrease in cultivation in 2006⁵⁵¹ and the Afghan Deputy Minister for Counter narcotics boasted cultivation could be reduced as much as by 40 per cent in 2006. The Afghan official's optimism contradicted UNODC predictions that the 2006 opium crop would exceed 2005 levels. General Mohammad Daud the Deputy Minister for

⁵⁴⁶ United States Agency for International Development, Afghanistan. Fact Sheet, Kabul, September 2005 (available at: <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/rls/fs/2005/53382.htm>).

⁵⁴⁷ UNODC, 'Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005', p. iv.

⁵⁴⁸ Buddenberg and Byrd, *Afghanistan's Drugs Industry*, p. 171.

⁵⁴⁹ United Nations World Drug Report (United Nations Publications, 2006), p. 211.

⁵⁵⁰ Azimy, Yousuf, 'Drugs Finance Afghan Suicide Bombers – Karzai', Reuters, 24 January 2006.

⁵⁵¹ Ambassador Neumann. 'Karzai Promises Results on CN, Asks for Greater Commitment To AL', Wikileaks: 05KABUL5050.

Counter narcotics simply dismissed out of hand a UNODC report forewarning of an increase in cultivation.⁵⁵²

Accompanying the United States increase in counter narcotics activity and in direct response to the public condemnation of United Kingdom policies in the spring of 2004 prompted the British government to reinvigorate its approach to counter narcotics in Afghanistan. Recognising their efforts had not delivered acceptable progress, No 10 intervened to establish a new cross-agency interdepartmental unit – comprising of members from the FCO, DFID, HM Customs and Excise, the Home Office and Ministry of Defence (and later Serious Organised Crime Agency) - within the FCO to lead the government’s counter narcotics efforts, the Afghan Drugs Interdepartmental Unit (ADIDU). In Kabul, improvements were also made. Interagency Counter narcotics intelligence sharing within the Anglo-American alliance became formalised through the establishment of the Joint Narcotics Analysis Centre in early 2005, housed in the Old War Office in London.⁵⁵³ The centre sought to improve coordination and comprehension of the drugs trade and develop policies to disrupt it. The UK Embassy until 2004 did not have the resources or manpower to make a sufficient impact.⁵⁵⁴ The BEDT, the delivery of unit of ADIDU, increased the number of staff members to twenty by the end of 2006.⁵⁵⁵ The team also underwent restructuring being divided into two teams, one dedicated to counter narcotics and one to the Rule of Law, both teams worked under a Counsellor, who reported to the Ambassador in 2006.⁵⁵⁶

Tony Blair chaired a ministerial meeting in July 2005 that doubled the resources for counter narcotics budget for ADIDU increasing the yearly budget to £46.8 million from £25.3 million. This was part of an overall increase in the budget for counter narcotics committing £270 million over three years. The DfID delivered

⁵⁵² ‘Afghanistan aims to cut opium fields by 40 percent in 2006’, *Agence France Presse*, 2 January 2006.

⁵⁵³ Author Interview with British Military Officer (2), 13 February 2014.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁵ House of Commons Defence Committee *UK operations in Afghanistan, 2006-2007*, Written Evidence. Memorandum from the Afghan Drugs Inter-Departmental Unit.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

the remaining funds of £132 million, with £3.5 million contributed to the Counter narcotics Trust Fund.⁵⁵⁷

As will be discussed in the next chapter the optimism surrounding the 2005 reduction in opium cultivation would be short lived and 2006 would mark a new re-engagement by the international community in Afghanistan and the re-occurrence of tension within the Anglo-American alliance.

CONCLUSION

The early Anglo-American counter narcotics relationship was defined by the same characteristics that defined Anglo-American involvement in post-conflict Afghanistan; reluctance by the Americans to engage in anything resembling nation building and the UK playing a central role in the reconstruction effort. Occupying these contrasting policy positions, Tony Blair predicted that if the UK were able to effectively counter the Afghan drugs trade it would result in an enhancement of the UK's international standing and also produce a domestic success by *potentially* eliminating the source of UK heroin. This prediction resulted in the implementation of the first counter narcotics scheme of the intervention – compensated eradication. The scheme proved controversial, not least, because of the disunity it engineered within the UK government and wider international community. Conceptually flawed, the implementation of the policy was doomed from the outset and highlighted a number of difficulties that *were recurring* in many of the international community's counter narcotics policies in the succeeding years. The most fundamental problem with the scheme however, was it *accomplished* the opposite to what it set out to achieve: it incentivised farmers to plant more poppy. The plan and policy debate that underpinned it demonstrated the UK government's misplaced confidence in its ability to make light work of a very complex problem and a belief that eliminating the opium trade was a 'doable' problem.⁵⁵⁸ This optimism belied the true reality of tackling the

⁵⁵⁷ 'UK Announces Increased Funding For Afghanistan Counter Narcotics Work', *FCO Website*, 6 September 2005.

⁵⁵⁸ Author Interview with British Official (5), 13 June 2013.

illegal narcotics industry.⁵⁵⁹ More broadly, the scheme exemplified that early British Afghan policy was shaped in an informal policy environment in which the Prime Minister and his inner circle played a central role. The enthusiasm present in the Cabinet Office over involvement in the drugs trade led to the UK being assigned G8 ‘lead nation’ on counter narcotics. The implications of this were not fully comprehended at the time and as will be demonstrated below would complicate the UK’s overall mission in Afghanistan and its relations with the United States. Moreover, initial counter narcotics efforts were hampered by the lack of agreement in the Anglo-American alliance and divisions within the United States government - particularly the Pentagon’s refusal to support counter narcotics missions. These divisions would prove a constant throughout the first years of the war. Reluctant to devote attention away from their counterterrorism mission or become involved in nation building the United States allowed the resurgence and development of the opium industry in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the U.S. realised that their counterterrorism mission was heavily dependent upon their cooperation with regional strongmen who had ties to the opium industry. In what can be described as an extension of the policies that characterised the US’s involvement in Laos, Vietnam and Central America, the American government would ‘turn a blind eye’ to its foreign partner’s involvement in the illicit drugs trade in pursuit of higher priorities.

Despite British counter narcotics efforts since the intervention, 2004 saw opium cultivation spread to all of Afghanistan’s provinces. This perceived failure on the part of the United Kingdom and media attention questioning the United States involvement in countering the drugs trade forced the Bush administration to develop a counter narcotics policy. The formulation of a counter narcotics policy, however, would split the Bush administration as the State Department argued to implement an aggressive programme of aerial eradication of poppy crops. This was the result of an institutional view coursing through the State Department, which saw opium cultivation as a law enforcement issue – as opposed to a development issue - and required the implementation of strong measures. These tactics had their origins in Colombia where many State Department officials had served. The State Department was however, constrained by the Pentagon’s dominance of Afghanistan policy and the

⁵⁵⁹ Author Interview with Academic (2), 19 March 2013.

ability of Donald Rumsfeld to once again shape U.S.'s policy to coincide with the agenda of the Defense Department. The Pentagon had consistently argued against involvement in counter narcotics and for the first several years of the conflict had successfully managed to prevent scarce U.S. forces from being used for this purpose. As the Bush cabinet was forced to address the opium problem in 2004, the administration was divided over the issue. Rumsfeld was able to politically outmaneuver his State Department colleagues and limit the scope of their counter narcotics strategy. After his own objections to aerial eradication had failed to sway President Bush to drop aerial eradication, the Defense Secretary recruited Ambassador Khalilzad to win the argument in the Pentagon's favour. Although Bush was taken by Charles's proposal aerial eradication, Khalilzad's convinced the President that as Ambassador he needed full flexibility⁵⁶⁰ to deal with the issue, which not include aerial eradication. Rumsfeld had succeeded in torpedoing Charles's proposal and it was business as usual.

Nevertheless, the quest for stronger action against the drugs trade brought the State Department into conflict with the United Kingdom. The UK's inability to prevent record levels of opium cultivation and their approach that aimed to deliver alternative livelihoods before eradication was implemented – not vice versus as the many within the State Department advocated caused open diplomatic warfare. In a remarkable move, Robert B. Charles testified before a congressional committee critiquing the British attempts as weak and ineffective. This move was an attempt by Charles to force the issue into the public domain, which he predicted would compel the United Kingdom to accede to the State Department's demands. Despite causing consternation within the British government, this public condemnation prompted the UK to refocus its efforts and increase its funding for counter narcotics and although it remained opposed to widespread eradication if the conditions were not conducive. Notwithstanding, Tony Blair's support for aerial eradication was a cause for concern among policy-makers in Whitehall fortunately for the majority of the UK government, as alone proponent of this view the Prime Minister was unable to influence the decision-making. There was however, a fear from FCO officials that external factors may influence events with President Bush swaying the PM into

⁵⁶⁰ Risen, *State of War*, p. 162.

adopting aerial eradication. Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles noted that the President had raised the issue on several occasions with his opposite number.⁵⁶¹ Crucially though, the President did not even command the policy debate within the Whitehouse with the Pentagon shaping Afghan policy, it therefore, weakened his and the State Departments arguments to convince the UK government to adopt the proposal.

The increased American focus on counter narcotics would be put to the test in the 2004-05 planting season as the international community sought to make demonstrable progress in the fight against counter narcotics to protect the gains in what was seen as a positive state building project. Given the strategic military value to the United States, Nangarhar became the focus of their efforts where the Governor implemented a successful ban. The ban in Nangarhar was replicated in other provinces in Afghanistan as overall cultivation fell by 21 per cent. A chief motivating factor underpinning the success of the bans was the ability of President Karzai's to influence provincial governors. Governors responding to Karzai's threats of dismissal of the bans were not upheld. As we will see in the next chapter, the optimism that accompanied the reduction of opium cultivation in 2005 would be short-lived as the bans collapsed and opium cultivation reached record levels.

⁵⁶¹ Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 84.

CHAPTER FIVE

Allies at War: The Zenith of Anglo-American Tension over Aerial Eradication and the UK Struggles with its Twin Mission (2006-2008)

INTRODUCTION

A reduction in opium cultivation during the 2004/05 opium season provided the international community and the Afghan government with the first positive development in a much beleaguered counter narcotics campaign. What remained to be seen, however, was if the reduction in cultivation was a sustainable outcome of a rejuvenated counter narcotics campaign or a momentary triumph. The British government as G8 'lead nation' on counter narcotics had felt compelled to redoubled their resources and efforts after stinging criticism from their State Department counterparts over the record volumes of opium cultivation and what the American officials saw as a lacklustre performance on eradication prior to the success in 2004-5. That season also saw amplified White House attention on counter drug policies and increased resources dedicated to tackle the drug trade. Despite these positive developments the Afghan drug trade still posed the allies with intractable difficulties and threatened to destabilise their partnership further. As the conflict deepened and NATO expanded its role within Afghanistan so did the factors that complicated the counter narcotics campaign. Britain's deployment into Helmand province - Afghanistan's poppy capital - would open up areas of disagreement in the Anglo-American alliance and also internally within the respective governments. The recurring theme of disagreement would be the means and methods of eradication, with aerial eradication dominating the policy debate. The issue would divide the myriad of Anglo-American actors with some constituencies colluding with outside agencies to undermine their interdepartmental colleagues. As the State Department and White House increased the pressure for the British and Afghan governments to adopt aerial eradications, other proposals were advocated to stall the introduction of aerial spraying. The situation reached a crescendo during the summer/autumn of 2007 when the Americans made one last attempt to force aerial eradication onto the agenda compelling the British to fight a stubborn rear-guard action. The result was that the Anglo-American relationship was pushed to its limits.

The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section examines the United Kingdom's preparation to assume responsibility for Helmand province as part of NATO's expansion southwards. The section then audits the decision-making process that underpinned the decision and places it within the broader framework of

the United Kingdom's 'lead nation' role on counter narcotics. The analysis continues to examine the international community's commitment to Afghanistan during an international conference in London that redefined the terms of engagement with Afghanistan. The narrative then details the 2006 opium season and determines whether or not the positive developments of 2005 were maintained. A recurring theme re-presents itself: Anglo-American friction over aerial eradication, which leads to other proposals being suggested to prevent its introduction. A strand of narrative gains traction at this time among the counter narcotics community and is used to justify the potential introduction of aerial eradication. The section concludes with the UK's first year into Helmand province and highlights the challenges they faced and how this would constrain their hitherto primary mission: counter narcotics.

The second section opens with the debate in Washington regarding concerns over rising open cultivation of the opium poppy and the interagency process that re-evaluated the United States counter narcotics strategy. Issues on the ground in Helmand continued to present problems for the allies' objectives as the military resisted various counter narcotics measures. The narrative then continues to examine the zenith of the White House and State Department's pressure to force the UK and Afghan government to agree to aerial eradication in the 2007/08 growing season. These issues reached the highest echelons of the American, British and Afghan policy circle. Once again, the British, Afghans and Pentagon were left to fight it out with the State Department and White House over the issue. The section concludes with the UK's twin mission in Afghanistan: the stabilisation of Helmand and 'lead nation' on narcotics being brought into conflict resulting in a recalibration of the UK's priorities.

THE UNITED KINGDOM PREPARES TO MOVE INTO AFGHANISTAN'S OPIUM CAPITAL: HELMAND PROVINCE

Preparations were put in place in 2005 for NATO controlled ISAF to assume operational command for the whole of Afghanistan - as part of ISAF III and IV expansion phases - by the summer and fall of 2006. Hitherto, ISAF had only been responsible for Kabul and the northern and western regions, with the United States in

command of Afghanistan's southern and eastern provinces.⁵⁶² The American-led Operation Enduring Freedom's counter-terrorism mission would remain active in eastern Afghanistan in conjunction with the ISAF mission.⁵⁶³ During the same period, the United States reduced its forces in Afghanistan by transferring troops to the Iraq war.⁵⁶⁴ NATO's stabilisation project would involve deploying large numbers of troops to Afghanistan's southern provinces, which was in contrast to the minimal level of troops deployed by the United States in the first five years of the war. Notwithstanding, a permanent American presence at Kandahar Airfield, southern Afghanistan had relatively few troops, with only 147⁵⁶⁵ American personnel stationed in a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Lashkar Gah⁵⁶⁶ and Special Forces in a base north of Gereshk.⁵⁶⁷ Furthermore, development projects in the province such as reconstruction of roads and regeneration of electricity and water supplies were also limited despite the province being at the centre of the opium industry. Even when projects were due to commence or conclude the lack of security prevented the implementation of alternative livelihoods. A 2004, USAID, sponsored project costing \$130 million to rejuvenate agriculture in Helmand could not be fulfilled because of an unstable security environment. A year later, another USAID project was halted after the Taliban executed five labourers. The United States and United Kingdom donated \$119 million for alternative livelihoods but by 2005 only \$4 million in wages had been spent.⁵⁶⁸ Attempts to create a formal finance structure had also failed to materialise across the entire country leaving farmers to rely on the traditional sources of microfinance from moneylenders, family members and drug traffickers.⁵⁶⁹ Under NATO's expansion plan, the Dutch would take charge of Uruzgan; the Canadians would command Kandahar and the British would assume responsibility for Helmand.

With international optimism high that the situation in Iraq was gradually improving, there was concern among the British government and military hierarchy

⁵⁶² Thruelsen, Peter Dahl, 'Counterinsurgency and a Comprehensive Approach: Helmand Province, Afghanistan', *Small Wars Journal*, 4 No. 9, (September 2008).

⁵⁶³ House of Commons Defence Committee, 'UK Operations in Afghanistan', 2006-07, p. 8.

⁵⁶⁴ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p 45.

⁵⁶⁵ Author Interview with British Military Officer (2), 13 February 2014.

⁵⁶⁶ Thruelsen, 'Counterinsurgency and a Comprehensive Approach'.

⁵⁶⁷ Author Interview with British Military Officer (2), 13 February 2014.

⁵⁶⁸ Rashid, *Descent into Chaos*, p. 323.

⁵⁶⁹ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 145.

that the Afghan campaign had stagnated and the insurgency was gaining strength.⁵⁷⁰ The Taliban had managed to reorganise and re-emerge as a potent force in the years after 2003 but in 2005/2006 violence reached unprecedented levels. Neither the Afghan government nor the international community were prepared to deal with the intensity of violence from the insurgency or able to protect the rural population from the growing instability. Moreover, the government also failed to provide significant reconstruction and aid throughout southern Afghanistan with the result that communities fell into economic distress. It was predicted that ISAF's expansion into the south would halt these trends. When the alliance made the decision to expand southwards, the Canadians insisted that they would assume control of Kandahar, the South's most strategically significant province – not least because of being the spiritual home of the Taliban. Therefore, the British were left with Helmand – the South's second most strategically significant province and poppy capital of Afghanistan, which would complement the UK being G8 lead nation for counter narcotics.⁵⁷¹ Prime Minister Blair's eagerness to address the illegal narcotics trade was an important but secondary reason to deploy to Helmand. As Anthony Seldon comments: 'At a minimum, the narcotics issue gave Blair "a wonderful bid on an ethical foreign policy"'.⁵⁷² Assuming responsibility for Helmand - arguably Afghanistan's most troublesome province - was considered internally, as a befitting role for a country of United Kingdom's stature and military capacity.⁵⁷³ Additionally, there was a belief in some British quarters, that only United Kingdom could revive the faltering war and encourage a greater commitment from the Americans and other allies. Inspired by this assessment Tony Blair was convinced that the United Kingdom should increase its commitment and play a significant part in 'this new phase of the Afghan campaign'.⁵⁷⁴

The decision to deploy more troops to Afghanistan, while not politically straightforward was far less problematic than deploying additional troops to Iraq. The consensus across government was that the Afghan conflict was the *good war* and

⁵⁷⁰ Seldon, Snowdon and Collings, *Blair Unbound*, p. 391.

⁵⁷¹ House of Commons Defence Committee, 'UK Operations in Afghanistan's', Fourth Report of Session 2010-12, EV. 143.

⁵⁷² Seldon, Snowdon and Collings, *Blair Unbound*, p. 391.

⁵⁷³ Cavanagh, Matt, 'Ministerial Decision-Making in the Run-Up to the Helmand Deployment', *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 157, No. 2, (April/May 2012), pp. 48-54.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

public support was greater than for the Iraq war. There was also a view that the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan was far from a completed project and it was the responsibility of the international community to finish the task.⁵⁷⁵ Troop levels were intentionally set low at 3,300 to enable the Prime Minister to pass the policy through cabinet; there was also general agreement among senior military officials to cap the numbers to make the venture politically more viable. The most critical factor that limited the number of troops available for deployment to Helmand however, was Britain's commitment in Iraq. Unfortunately, the deployment to Helmand was characterised by poor leadership on the ground⁵⁷⁶ and insufficient and inadequate knowledge of the province. There was a dearth of information on the vital features of the province: the insurgency, the drug industry, tribal politics or the relationship between them. The minimal intelligence indicated a growing insurgency, which was then used to strengthen the argument for going to Helmand to invigorate the campaign before it was too late, but few if anyone really knew what awaited British forces there.⁵⁷⁷

In an attempt to facilitate a smooth entry into the province and remove what they saw as an impediment to good governance and a successful counter narcotics mission, the British petitioned President Karzai to remove the incumbent provincial governor, Sher Muhammad Akhundzada (SMA) on the grounds that he was alleged to be involved in the opium trade. The Governor was caught with nine tons of opium in his basement in 2005⁵⁷⁸ and as discussed in chapter 2, the Akhundzada family had long ties to the opium business dating back to the 1980s. Appointed as governor by President Karzai in the post-Taliban reconfiguration, Akhundzada, ran the province like his own personal fiefdom and with his associates engaged in unlawful activities including drug running, intimidating, killing, extorting, robbing and sexually abusing the local population.⁵⁷⁹ Despite his predatory behaviours, Akhundzada maintained the position of a close personal ally of the President – not least because his grip on the province prevented a full-scale return of the Taliban. Akhundzada was considered by

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ Author Interview with British Military Officer (2), 13 February 2014.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Damien McElroy, 'Afghan Governor Turned 3,000 men over to the Taliban', *The Guardian*, 20 November 2009.

⁵⁷⁹ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 40-43.

the Americans to be vital to maintaining stability within the province, and he subsequently worked closely with the American PRT. It was because of the stability Akhundzada was able to maintain in the province, that the Americans objected to the British forcing his removal.⁵⁸⁰ Far from improving stability in the province, replacing the governor would fuel insecurity as British General Sir David Richards contended: ‘They [the Taliban] were there – they were in a lot of those southern provinces – but there was a marriage of convenience between them and the drug lords and Akhundzada, and there was very little violence’.⁵⁸¹ As will be discussed shortly, SMA’s replacement as governor was unable to maintain this delicate balance. Engineer Daoud, a Helmandi technocrat and related through marriage to the minister for counter narcotics,⁵⁸² was considered by the British as a model governor - free from links to the drug trade and corruption. Whilst Daoud’s credentials were impeccable by western standards, by Afghan standards he lacked the necessary tribal affiliations to provide strong leadership in a province of extensive tribal networks.⁵⁸³ Furthermore, removing the previous governor highlighted a fundamental difference of approach in the Anglo-American alliance as former British army officer Frank Ledwidge comments:

To anyone with the slightest acquaintance with the history of the UK’s involvement in Helmand, the divergence of approach between the UK and US is plain. It continues. From the start, the US took the entirely pragmatic approach that some people were simply not going away. The obvious but not sole example was SMA...The British approach might essentially be summed up in the phrase “we want nothing to do with such people”.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸⁰ Frank Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars: British military failure in Iraq and Afghanistan* (New Haven, 2011), p. 66.

⁵⁸¹ James Fergusson, *A Million Bullets: The real story of the British Army in Afghanistan* (London, 2008), p.154.

⁵⁸² Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars*, p. 68.

⁵⁸³ Fergusson, *A Million Bullets*, pp., 153-154.

⁵⁸⁴ Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars*, p. 67.

By interfering with the political landscape before deploying to Helmand, the British had unwittingly made their mission in the province more difficult by upsetting the delicate balance of power. As will be examined later, assuming responsibility for the peacekeeping and reconstruction mission in Helmand would ultimately make the UK's task as G8 lead nation on counter narcotics more complex and not complement it - as was predicted in the planning phase. That being said, at the beginning of 2006 there was a degree of optimism present within international circles that the Afghan counter narcotics campaign had made an important breakthrough the previous year. These views were present when an international delegation convened at the 2006 London conference.

Optimism gives way to reality: The Afghanistan Compact and a Record Opium Crop (2006)

The air of optimism regarding counter narcotics was evident at the London Conference on 31-Januray-1 February 2006, when Afghan and international delegates spoke of the successful anti-opium campaign which culminated with a 21 per cent reduction in cultivation in 2005. Opened by Afghan President Hamid Karzai, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, the conference was also attended by over sixty international delegations.⁵⁸⁵

The conference was convened to redefine the framework for international collaboration with Afghanistan and inaugurate the Afghanistan Compact. The compact marked the end of the 2001 Bonn Agreement and set out a new five-year partnership between the Afghan government and international community focusing on security, governance, rule of law and human rights, economic and social development and the elimination of the narcotics industry. A Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board were established to oversee coordination and implementation of the political commitments of the Compact.⁵⁸⁶ The Compact set outcomes, benchmarks and

⁵⁸⁵The National Archives. The London Conference on Afghanistan Delegation Attendance (available at <http://collections.europarchive.org/tna/20080205132101/www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front%3Fpagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1136906408440>).

⁵⁸⁶“The Afghanistan Compact,” The London Conference on Afghanistan, January 31-1February 2006 p. 5.

timelines for delivery.⁵⁸⁷ The compact replaced the system of lead nations with partner nations, with Afghanistan assuming lead nation status with the international community in support.⁵⁸⁸ International donors pledged more than \$10bn (£5.7bn) in reconstruction aid over five years to Afghanistan. The United Kingdom, as ‘partner nation’ on counter narcotics, announced a £500 million aid package over the next three years.⁵⁸⁹

In addition, the conference launched the Afghan government’s new NDCS. The strategy fashioned first in 2003 then updated in 2006 (and subsequent years) had four priorities: disrupting the drug trade; strengthening and diversifying legal rural livelihoods; reducing the demand for illicit drugs and treatment of problem drug users; and developing state institutions at the central and provincial level. In addition to these principal elements, eight pillars were identified: public awareness; international and regional cooperation; alternative livelihoods; demand reduction; law enforcement; criminal justice; drug eradication; and institution building.⁵⁹⁰ The strategy presented a positive framework to tackle the drugs trade, highlighting some important requirements: a long-term timeline to tackle the problem, a requirement for alternative livelihoods to be present before eradication could be implemented and the complete rejection of aerial spraying⁵⁹¹ – a fact that would be ignored in the coming months and years by officials from the State Department and the White House.

The NDCS however failed in certain aspects. It did not take into consideration the regional variants of opium cultivation, nor did it target the most significant opium cultivating provinces. There was no provision for resource distribution or indeed resource approximation for correct execution of the strategy.⁵⁹² The strategy was criticised as a ‘wish list rather than a well-defined strategy, and ... it failed to

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

⁵⁸⁸ Schweich, Thomas (Compiled By). ‘U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan’, August 2007 (available at: <http://2001-2009.state.gov/documents/organization/90671.pdf>) page 20 Also see: House of Commons Defence Committee, ‘UK Operations in Afghanistan’, 2006-07, p. 37.

⁵⁸⁹ 13 February 2006 *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)* (House of Commons) col. WS49 (available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200506/ldhansrd/vo060213/text/60213-19.htm>).

⁵⁹⁰ Transnational Institute, ‘*Losing Ground: Drug Control and War in Afghanistan*’, Drugs & Conflict Debate Paper, No. 15, (December 2006), p.15.

⁵⁹¹ Byrd, ‘Responding to Afghanistan’s Opium Economy Challenge’, p. 15.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

prioritise and sequence its goals'.⁵⁹³ This to a certain extent stemmed from the disjointed approach to counter narcotics in Afghanistan and the competing agendas of the Afghan government and international community. The Afghan government sought to engender support for alternative livelihood programmes; whereas the State Department sought to launch an aggressive eradication campaign regardless of whether alternative livelihoods were present and the United Kingdom attempted to straddle a position that provided both the 'carrot and the stick'.⁵⁹⁴ These differences led to competing actors focusing on different elements and variable application of policies. For example, the American actors from the State Department pushed eradication as the main component of their strategy. Where the strategy was most needed, in the provinces of southern and eastern Afghanistan, it was rarely implemented or adhered to in the manner set forth in the NDCS. Edicts laid forth in policy documents in Kabul did not take into consideration the political realities present in the provinces where the government failed to extend its authority and a myriad of the local actors were also pursuing competing and often conflicting agendas.

One of the main challenges confronting the NDCS was the application of the aims and goals in practise. The first goal of the NDCS was to disrupt the drug trade through attacking powerful traffickers whilst recognising many poor farmers had little option but to participate in the drugs trade.⁵⁹⁵ However, the Afghan government's record on this was extremely poor, the government had failed to arrest, prosecute or remove from office high-level traffickers. The majority of those who were convicted or punished were low or mid-level drug traffickers with no political connections; whereas high-level drug traffickers with political connections were able to avoid arrest and punishment. Successful implementation required the Afghan government to display political will, which was lacking most evidently in their failure to stop protecting powerful drug traffickers.

⁵⁹³ Transnational Institute, *'Losing Ground: Drug Control and War in Afghanistan'*, Drugs & Conflict Debate Paper, No. 15, (December 2006), p.15.

⁵⁹⁴ Author interview with British Official (5), 13 June 2013.

⁵⁹⁵ Transnational Institute, *'Losing Ground: Drug Control and War in Afghanistan'*, Drugs & Conflict Debate Paper, No. 15, (December 2006), p.15.

The NDCS stipulated that alternative livelihoods would become available to farmers to alleviate the financial distress caused by the loss of earnings through adhering to governmental bans on poppy cultivation or eradication of poppy crop. However, like the corresponding elements of the strategy, what was set forth in the NDCS and what was implemented did not always coincide.⁵⁹⁶ However, as will become clear, in many cases those who had forgone poppy cultivation for the promise of alternative livelihoods were not rewarded with employment or financial reimbursement.

Furthermore, the NDCS acknowledged domestic drug use within Afghanistan as a problem and stated there was a need for an improvement in harm reduction policies and the improvement of services to help drug users. However, the Afghan government was slow to improve services and in some cases actually prevented new drug treatment services from being implemented. Publicly there was still a great deal of stigmatisation towards drug users, which was one reason why treatment and rehabilitation policies were given little priority. Rather unsurprisingly, drug use is now (2015) more prevalent than when the first and second NDCS were written.

The conference's triumphant official tagline was 'Building on Success'.⁵⁹⁷ However, this was more optimistic than realistic; especially as by 2006 evidence of a resurgent drug industry, rising violence, poor governance and rampant corruption were all apparent. The conference was, according to Thomas Schweich, the US Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary of INL, a 'grand event mired in deception, at least with respect to the drug situation.'⁵⁹⁸ As always in Afghanistan, success levels were contested or the longer-term trend questioned. Schweich complained those in attendance failed to face the reality of a predicted record opium harvest instead highlighted the reduction in cultivation the previous year.⁵⁹⁹

With eradication still constituting the main drive of the American counter narcotics effort, the Afghan government and President Karzai responded by promising

⁵⁹⁶ Author Interview with Academic (2), 19 March 2013.

⁵⁹⁷ "Lessons in Terror: Attacks on Education in Afghanistan", Human Rights Watch, Volume 18 No.6 (C), July 2006, p. 14.

⁵⁹⁸ Schweich, 'Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?'

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

an increased commitment to the 2006 spring eradication campaign and assured everyone that eradication efforts would significantly reduce production. The provincial governors also promised that the campaign would produce impressive results. American Ambassador Ronald Neumann, under pressure from the American administration to maintain the reduction of opium cultivation in 2005, visited Helmand prior to the commencement of the eradication operation to emphasise to the governor that a successful campaign would be crucial given the level of international scrutiny over poppy cultivation. The Ambassador's desire to achieve substantial progress with the eradication campaign was driven, in part, by domestic political realities; the Bush Cabinet, State Department and Congress were all pushing for more eradication (although not necessarily aerial eradication) and if progress was not achieved it would lend weight to calls for stronger action – namely aerial eradication. Therefore, the Ambassador, not for the first time in his two-year tenure would have to cajole the Afghans and the British for *just enough* eradication to keep Washington and Congress content⁶⁰⁰ but at the same time not inflame Afghan or British sensitivities over the issue.

Congress in particular was advocating intensification of eradication and given its role as the world's leading financial contributor to counter narcotics campaigns, it was able to promote eradication as the main component of the United States counter narcotics strategy by allocating it more funds than any other. Congress had also constrained the ability of the American administration to deliver financial aid to the Afghan government if it did not implement substantial eradication. Ambassador Neumann commented: 'there was a provision for a waiver that the administration was forced to use, but the congressional pressure to increase restrictions was real. Both our war-fighting and development efforts could be endangered if we did not make enough progress to keep these restrictions from being triggered'.⁶⁰¹ Congress, was for the most part, guided by the view that drugs was a public safety issue, which would affect their constituents or alternatively that drug proceeds were filling the coffers of terrorist organisations around the world.⁶⁰² Eradication was also seen as an important

⁶⁰⁰ Author Interview with American Official (6), 21 October 2014.

⁶⁰¹ Ronald Neumann, *The Other War: Winning and Losing in Afghanistan* (Virginia, 2010), p. 61.

⁶⁰² Barnett R. Rubin, and Alexandra Guaqueta, 'Fighting Drugs and Building Peace: Towards Policy Coherence between Counter-Narcotics and Peace Building', Occasional Papers, No 37 / November 2007 p. 16.

measure in determining whether or not the counter narcotics campaign was working: the logic dictated that if wide-scale eradication was conducted counter narcotics was succeeding.

During his visit to Helmand, the Ambassador indicated to Governor Daud that it was vital that the centrally controlled AEF partake in the campaign - as the United States had spent considerable money training and equipping the AEF and Congress was insistent that they be involved.⁶⁰³ The British Embassy Drugs Team and Ambassador Marsden, under instruction from London, were also anxious for the AEF to deploy, and crucially, to conduct operations in the zone stretching from northern Garmser District through the Helmand River area finishing in Central Helmand.⁶⁰⁴ It was agreed by the British and INL that the areas selected for eradication should be: 1: poppy fields directly benefiting from irrigation projects, 2: poppy fields exceeding one hectare (2.5 acres) in size, and 3: poppy fields being grown on government-owned land.⁶⁰⁵ Given the inflammatory and often discriminatory nature of the eradication campaigns, the British were anxious that the 2006 eradication campaign was conducted in the allocated zone to circumvent any hostile reactions their troops may face on their forthcoming arrival to Helmand. British troops arrived in Helmand in March 2006, during what was, to date, the most aggressive eradication campaign undertaken by the Afghan government and its international partners. The unfortunate timing of their arrival was used by anti-government elements to disseminate propaganda claiming the British *invaders* were in Helmand to eradicate the province's opium poppy crops. 'The British, the ones who oppressed you in the 1800s, are now coming here to take your livelihoods'.⁶⁰⁶ British General Sir Nicholas Houghton commented: 'That worked against us, in terms of strategic narrative'.⁶⁰⁷ Moreover, the British landed at the beginning of the traditional fighting season, which also coincided with the presence of 200,000 Pakistani farm labourers in Helmand to harvest poppy. The point being as General Houghton noted: 'They are very happy to stay on as guns for hire if there is a local tribal fight in which they can earn some

⁶⁰³ Charge d' Affaires, Richard Norland, 'Ambassador's Visit To Helmand; Poppy Eradication Efforts', Wikileaks cable: 06KABUL1267.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ Ambassador Neumann, 'PRT/ Lashkar Gah – Significant Challenges To Upcoming Eradication Campaign', Wikileaks Cable: 06KABUL962.

⁶⁰⁶ Sean Maloney, *Fighting for Afghanistan: A Rogue Historian at War* (Annapolis, 2011).

⁶⁰⁷ House of Commons Defence Committee, 'UK Operations in Afghanistan's', 2010-12 EV. 144.

money. We only need 2% or 3% to stay on and we have 4,000 fighters fighting a cause. In many ways, the poppy eradication gave them a cause'.⁶⁰⁸ From the outset, AGE used the historical narrative of Britain's colonial past and efforts as 'lead nation' on counter narcotics to foster anti-British feeling in the province. The negative historical legacy of Britain's previous involvements in Afghanistan is still present today with 'son of a Brit' used as a scathing insult in Helmand.⁶⁰⁹ Moreover, as will be discussed below, the arrival of United Kingdom troops to Helmand would prove another complicating factor in an already messy counter narcotics campaign and bring the UK's two primary objectives in Afghanistan – stabilisation of Helmand and counter narcotics – into direct conflict. This tension between the two missions would result in a rift manifesting itself between the British government and military over the implementation of counter narcotics policies and in the wider Anglo-American alliance over where and when to conduct forceful eradication.

More than 1,000 Afghan police conducted the 2006 eradication campaign with Britain providing logistical support and eighty tractors to the AEF⁶¹⁰ - and the United States military contractors Dyncorp also provided logistical support to the eradication team.⁶¹¹ The strong presence of Afghan and coalition troops lead to an increase in violent outbreaks.⁶¹² Whilst there were some improvements in the amount of poppy crop eradicated,⁶¹³ overall success was elusive and eradication did not occur on a wide scale. Several problems hindered the success of the campaign: the increase in insurgent activity in southern Afghanistan prevented eradication teams from commencing or finishing their work. The teams also suffered from a lack of force protection, which left eradication forces unprepared to deal with assaults. This was a consequence of Afghan Defense Minister General Wardak's reluctance to use the Afghan National Army as force protection for eradication teams. There was also poor coordination between the governor-led and centrally led eradication efforts and between the Afghan military and police units.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 49.

⁶¹⁰ House of Commons Defence Committee, 'UK Operations in Afghanistan's, 2006-07, EV. 19 Q.95.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., EV. 72 Q.350.

⁶¹² Pamela Constable, 'In Afghan Poppy Heartland, New Crops, Growing Danger', *The Washington Post*, 6 May 2006.

⁶¹³ UNODC and Government of Afghanistan Ministry of Counternarcotics. 'Afghanistan Opium Survey: Summary Findings', (Vienna and Kabul, October 2006) p. 52.

The counter narcotics ‘success’ of the previous year (2005) proved short-lived as the opium bans implemented across Afghanistan collapsed and eradication failed to make any significant progress. Following the drive by the international community and President Karzai to take firm action against the drug trade (in 2004-05 season), rural populations adhered to the national ban, in the most part, on the condition that development aid would be forthcoming and offset the financial hardship associated with forgoing opium cultivation. However, whilst alternative development programmes were initiated they failed to sufficiently compensate farmers. Many of the programmes were quick impact, cash-for-work schemes that were neither long-term nor provided a comparative level of income to opium cultivation, thus were unable to meet the financial demands of living costs and debt repayment. As discussed in chapter 4, most farmers borrowed money from drug traffickers during the pre-planting season using their harvested crop as collateral. If the farmer failed to pay their debt, the debt would accrue substantial interest. Furthermore, USAID planned cash-for-work programmes for the campaign were either late in starting or did not run for the projected duration of time or failed to provide Afghan farmers with significant loans.⁶¹⁴ All of which prevented the implementation of another nationwide opium ban in 2006 and resulted in opium cultivation rising by 59 per cent - setting a new record of 165,000 hectares.⁶¹⁵ Thomas Schweich, Deputy Assistant Secretary for INL summed up the failings:

The high cultivation rates...reflect problems with the implementation of the drug strategy by the Afghan government and the international community as it was executed in 2005 - the first real year of its existence. During 2005, there was very little eradication - 4% or 5% of the crop. There were low interdiction rates - less than 1% of all heroin produced - and there was no counter narcotics law or tribunal to bring traffickers to justice. Also during 2005, alternative livelihoods were in the early stages of

⁶¹⁴ United States Agency for International Development, Office of Inspector General Audit of USAID/Afghanistan’s Alternative Livelihoods Program-Eastern Region, Audit Report No. 5-306-07-002-P, 13 February 13 2007 pp. 5-8.

⁶¹⁵ Glaze, ‘Opium and Afghanistan: Reassessing U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy’, p. 4.

implementation and only reached a limited number of geographic areas. The statistics...are the delayed results of failures in the execution of our strategy in 2005-[2006].⁶¹⁶

The British Deploy to Helmand: Reality sets in

When the British force deployed to Helmand they planned to concentrate their efforts around the provincial capital, Lashkar Gah and Gereshk to create a ‘lozenge of security’. The strategy known as ink-spot, would in theory, allow the gradual distribution of development and reconstruction from the centre throughout the province (replicating the gradual expansion of an ink-spot) extending the authority of the Afghan government.⁶¹⁷ Marston contends: ‘the mission was originally presented as a peace support and counter-narcotics operation. This framing of the mission was primarily a matter of political expediency, but also showed a lack of understanding and historical knowledge of COIN on the part of both military and civilian officials’.⁶¹⁸ In essence, the military-civilian British strategy would be defensive rather than offensive by substituting pursuit of the Taliban for peacekeeping and stabilisation. Civilians would be tasked with building up the economy, justice and education systems, engendering support for the central government and lessening the appeal of the Taliban.⁶¹⁹ After being in Helmand for a matter of weeks, the commander of 16 Air Assault Brigade, Brigadier Ed Butler came under pressure by Governor Daoud and President Karzai to change strategies and deploy his forces to northern Helmand, in what has since been named the ‘platoon-house strategy’. The Afghans demanded the British re-establish government authority in the district centres of northern Helmand - areas rich in opium growing and trafficking - and regain

⁶¹⁶ Thomas A. Schweich, Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, Remarks at United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Press Event ‘Afghanistan Opium Survey 2006’, (12 September 2006) (available at: <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/inl/rls/rm/72067.htm>).

⁶¹⁷ 17 June 2008 *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)* (House of Commons) col. 177 WH and 178 WH (available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080617/halltext/80617h0001.htm>).

⁶¹⁸ Daniel Marston, ‘British Operations in Helmand Afghanistan’, *Small Wars Journal*, September 2008. Also see: House of Commons Defence Committee ‘The UK deployment to Afghanistan’, Fifth Report of Session 2005–06 p.16.

⁶¹⁹ John Ware, ‘UK’s original Helmand deployment plan examined’, *BBC News*, 22 June 2011.

control of districts that had fallen under Taliban influence.⁶²⁰ Brigadier Butler recounted Governor Daoud's rationale for deploying northwards:

We need you to support governance. We need you to protect us. You need to give us the freedom of movement. You must support me to be allowed to go round my own constituency. If I can't do that, why are you here?" [...] "If the black flag of Mullah Omar flies over any of the district centres, you may as well go home because we'll have lost our authority to govern in Helmand, and if we lose our authority to govern and our ability to govern, then that will threaten the south. Kandahar will be next. We'll lose the south before you've even started. What are you going to do about it?"⁶²¹

Given the limited resources on the ground, the military realised this plan was unsustainable but after all, Daoud was *their* man in the province so they had to give way to political pressure.⁶²² The re-formulated strategy deployed soldiers to the districts of Musa Qala, Now Zad, Kajaki and Sangin. From the outset, the British forces situated in northern Helmand came under intense daily attack from insurgents. The situation was compounded by the fact only 650 out of the 3,300 troops deployed were combat soldiers,⁶²³ the remaining troops were in Afghanistan to facilitate the key tasks of the mission: reconstruction and development. Poorly equipped, under-resourced and besieged by hundreds of insurgents,⁶²⁴ the level of attacks were so intense the British troops nearly exhausted their supply of ammunition.⁶²⁵ That was in stark contrast, to the well-documented and misinterpreted comment by British Defence Secretary John Reid, who hoped that British soldiers could complete their mission without firing a single shot.⁶²⁶ In fact, by the end of Britain's first year in

⁶²⁰ House of Commons Defence Committee, 'UK Operations in Afghanistan', 2006-07, EV. 14.

⁶²¹ House of Commons Defence Committee, 'UK Operations in Afghanistan', 2010-12 p. 26.

⁶²² John Ware, 'UK's original Helmand deployment plan examined', *BBC News*, 22 June 2011.

⁶²³ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 48-49.

⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 205.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 46.

Helmand they had expended four million bullets.⁶²⁷ The British - at the request of the Afghans - also moved a small team to southern Helmand to displace the resurgent Taliban. Given the ferociousness of the Taliban assault and the British lack of resources the UK forces had to rely on the use of airpower to halt the Taliban advance..⁶²⁸

One of the most evident intelligence failures by the British government before the deployment to Helmand was not conducting an accurate appraisal of the insurgency. The British were grossly unprepared for the level of resistance and the intensity of the violence they encountered. When questioned why the British were unable to predict the level of violence before deploying to Helmand, the Secretary of State for Defence Des Browne stated the limited numbers of American troops stationed in Helmand – approximately 100 American soldiers were stationed in Lashkar Gah - prior to the UK's force deployment had hindered effective intelligence gathering.⁶²⁹ Despite this political statement, the British were warned, however, by the Combined Joint Task Force that violence was likely.⁶³⁰ The original purpose of the mission – reconstruction - had been abandoned as British forces struggled to deal with intense insurgent activity. The weakness of state institutions in Helmand coupled with insecurity meant that state building was effectively postponed for two years.⁶³¹ The lack of development provided by the DFID led to growing tension between the military and civilian branches of the British efforts in Helmand. General David Richards accused DFID of 'not living up to our expectations and their own promises'.⁶³² DFID argued that development and reconstruction work was not implemented because the security environment did not permit such efforts.⁶³³ A senior British General described the problem: 'the military secure areas, but the

⁶²⁷ Ibid., pp. 49.

⁶²⁸ Theo Farrell and Antonio Giustozzi, 'The Taliban at war: inside the Helmand insurgency, 2004–2012', *International Affairs*, 89: 4 (2013) p. 851 Also see: Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 3-4.

⁶²⁹ House of Commons Defence Committee, 'UK Operations in Afghanistan, 2006-07 EV. 3.

⁶³⁰ Author Interview with British Military Officer (2), 13 February 2014.

⁶³¹ Cavanagh, Matt, 'Ministerial Decision-Making in the Run-Up to the Helmand Deployment', *RUSI Journal*, Vol. 157, No. 2, (April/May 2012), pp. 48-54.

⁶³² Richard Norton-Taylor, 'Full interview: General David Richards', *The Guardian*, 22 January 2007.

⁶³³ 17 June 2008 *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)* (House of Commons) col. 177 WH and 178 WH (available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080617/halltext/80617h0001.htm>).

civilians are way behind the military effort... we are lagging behind the rhetoric.... The problem is that DFID do not see themselves as part of our foreign policy'.⁶³⁴

One of the most controversial moments of the first year of the British in Helmand was their withdrawal from Musa Qaleh in October 2006. After experiencing months of intense fighting in the town, it was claimed that the British had come to an extraordinary agreement with the Taliban for both parties to create an exclusion zone and leave the town. In fact, Governor Daud had brokered a deal with the village elders to exclude both international forces and the Taliban from the town.⁶³⁵ As the movement of the British soldiers was restricted through platoon house strategy the Musa Qaleh agreement would give the British soldiers some respite and enable them to redeploy in a more mobile role. This would help to retake the advantage in the fight against the Taliban.⁶³⁶ Considered by some within the British military and diplomatic corps to be an achievement, the agreement lasted 143 days until 2nd February 2007 when the Taliban broke the accord and re-entered the town, which according to the British military was against the wishes of the local population.⁶³⁷ The British were criticised by the Americans over the agreement. Whilst the UK saw it as a way of allowing the local community to take control⁶³⁸ according to British General Richards, the Americans viewed the agreement as the UK surrendering to the Taliban.⁶³⁹ It would be late 2007 before the British, with the help of the Americans, launched an operation to recapture control of the town.

The Pentagon Continues To Obstruct Counter Narcotics And The Drug-Terrorist Nexus

As the undermanned and under-resourced British military became bogged down in Helmand fighting a rejuvenated insurgency, the American military remained committed to prevent their soldiers from entering into a drug war. Not only did the Pentagon refuse to become actively involved in countering the drugs trade, as Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld argued the issue was a 'law enforcement problem, not

⁶³⁴ Ibid.

⁶³⁵ House of Commons Defence Committee, 'UK Operations in Afghanistan's, 2006-07, EV. 84.

⁶³⁶ Ibid., EV 53.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., page 30.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., page 13.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., EV 53 and Author Interview with British Military Officer (2), 13 February 2014.

a military one',⁶⁴⁰ they refused to help their own US drug enforcement counterparts. DEA officials complained that their efforts in Afghanistan were severely hampered by the lack of inter-departmental cooperation, and urged the Pentagon to view counter narcotics as another facet of the security situation. What Donald Rumsfeld's argument neglected was that for law enforcement to succeed in a war-torn country, where the rule of law is absent, the military had to provide the foundations for law enforcement to launch operations. The lack of cooperation restricted the DEA's ability to perform significant work. As a consequence of the lack of military support the DEA were unable to access some of Afghanistan's most remote regions, through lack of helicopters or were unable to conduct operations against drug traffickers because they did not have sufficient agents or fire power. A United States official concluded, 'In the war environment, you don't get from point A to point B without military assistance'.⁶⁴¹ An official reported that there were 'situations where DEA sought [Pentagon] intelligence and it wasn't given to them...DEA would identify a lab to go hit or a storage facility and [the Pentagon] would find a reason to ground the helicopters'.⁶⁴² In Nangarhar province in 2006, two-star American general, Benjamin Freakley aborted all counter narcotics missions by the DEA and Afghan counter narcotics police, complaining the counter narcotics missions were obstructing military missions.⁶⁴³ DEA Administrator Karen Tandy reported before a congressional hearing that the DEA was limited in its results because the agency has had 'no operational infrastructure, assets or support to conduct operations'.⁶⁴⁴ Publicly the dispute between the DEA and Pentagon received limited attention, but it did not reflect the seriousness of the problem. In private, Tandy was critical of the Pentagon's lack of involvement and campaigned in Washington to improve relations between the departments. By late 2006, the Pentagon still refused to cooperate fully with their drug enforcement counterparts; prompting the chairmen of the Foreign Relations Committee, Congressmen Henry Hyde and Mark Kirk to write to Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld urging greater action in the fight against drugs and strongly

⁶⁴⁰ Josh Meyer, 'Pentagon Resists Pleas for Help in Afghan Opium Fight', *Los Angeles Times*, 5 December 2006.

⁶⁴¹ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p.187.

⁶⁴² Meyer, 'Pentagon Resists Pleas for Help in Afghan Opium Fight'.

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

arguing for increased cooperation on the issue among all actors. The overtures had little effect.⁶⁴⁵

A school of thought gained traction at this time and one that would shape INL's and the UNODC's interpretation of the drug problem: the emergence of a drug-insurgency nexus forming in Afghanistan and the significance of drug funding for the Taliban. INL had been pushing the drug-insurgency nexus since 2003⁶⁴⁶ but it was not until 2006/2007 that the theory gained popularity. Robert B. Charles's, replacement as Assistant Secretary of State for INL, Anne Patterson commented: 'we have seen increased reporting suggesting a relationship between narco-traffickers, Taliban, and other anti-government forces'.⁶⁴⁷ Much of the discourse that arose from this and pushed by the State Department was conditioned by their experience of combating the illegal narcotics trade in Colombia. The State Department predicted that Afghanistan's drug industry and insurgency would follow a similar trajectory to the one found in Colombia and it was this view that would robustly shape the INL's response to the narcotic problem in Afghanistan. One of the core features of this institutional view was the concept of a nexus between drug traffickers and insurgent groups; INL highlighted the financial relationship between the Taliban and the narcotics industry as evidence of this nexus replicating itself in Afghanistan. The financial links between drug traffickers and the Taliban was of chief concern for American anti-drug agencies, as opposed to the flow of Afghan heroin to the United States.⁶⁴⁸ To combat the drug-insurgent network, the INL contended, wholesale forced eradication would prevent the Taliban profiting from the drugs trade and result in bankruptcy. Patterson, herself a veteran of the Colombia campaign, warned Lt. Gen. Karl Eikenberry, commander of United States forces in Afghanistan, about Afghanistan becoming a fully-fledged narco-state – highlighting the similarities with Colombia. Eikenberry, in a previous meeting with Patterson acknowledged drugs were a problem, however, he then reverted to the standard military response since the

⁶⁴⁵ Peters, *Seeds of Terror*, p.184.

⁶⁴⁶ Author Interview with American Official (3), 7 March 2014.

⁶⁴⁷ Hearing before the Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations Export Financing and Related Programs. Statement of Anne W. Patterson, Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, 'Afghanistan Interdiction/Eradication of Illegal Narcotics and U.S. Lead Rebuilding Programs' (12 September 2006) (Available at: <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/inl/rls/rm/72241.htm>).

⁶⁴⁸ The vast majority of heroin found in the U.S. originates in Mexico or South America.

beginning of the war: drugs are *not* the military's problem.⁶⁴⁹ Thomas Schweich encountered similar arguments when he briefed Donald Rumsfeld about the illegal narcotics industry in Afghanistan. So while the State Department and officials in Kabul argued about the danger of this nexus, the American military still did not buy into it as an essential part of their strategy in Afghanistan.

It is important to note that, not all United States or British actors bought into this view. Whilst the State Department, UNODC, and some academics⁶⁵⁰ were convinced of the convergence of the insurgency and drug trafficking agenda, there was a dearth of evidence to conclusively support this view. Whilst evidence demonstrated that a nexus existed between drug traffickers and insurgents, this analysis proved over-simplistic and opaque.⁶⁵¹ It was contended that the Taliban received the majority of their funding through the drugs trade and widespread eradication would bankrupt the Taliban by taking away a key source of their income, however, officials at the State Department or UNDOC could not accurately estimate how much money the Taliban generated from drugs.⁶⁵² This highlighted the fact there was still much to learn about the drug-insurgency relationship. Nevertheless, convinced of their argument the State Department used this relationship as a justification for increased eradication.

Moreover, several other factors were used by INL and UNODC to support their drug-insurgency nexus theory: they pointed to reductions in opium cultivation in the north, where insurgent activity was minimal – and the increase of opium cultivation in southern Afghanistan (most notably Helmand) – where insurgent activity was most prominent – and that convinced some within the administration that Patterson's fears of a narco-insurgency... were well founded.⁶⁵³ At the same time, another argument was developed by INL to support their assumption; it argued contrary to previous theories and the protestations of poverty from President Karzai

⁶⁴⁹ Schweich, 'Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?'

⁶⁵⁰ Gretchen Peters author of *Seeds of Terror* was one of the most ardent academic proponents of this view.

⁶⁵¹ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 150.

⁶⁵² While there is very little concrete evidence, the figures \$70-500 million per year are commonly reported, highlighting the grave difficulty in producing accurate data.

⁶⁵³ Schweich, 'Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?'

about farmers⁶⁵⁴ that opium cultivation was not the domain of poor farmers with no choice to grow poppy to survive. Poor farmers were rejecting poppy cultivation: it was wealthy farmers concentrated in southern Afghanistan who were the main culprits. The evidence supporting this theory, according to State department officials, was that the provinces with zero or reduced opium cultivation were among the poorest in Afghanistan. Whereas, Helmand province accounted for 53 per cent of opium cultivation in Afghanistan, was one of the wealthiest. Furthermore, if Helmand were a country it would be the fifth largest beneficiary of American aid in the world⁶⁵⁵ receiving \$400 million between 2002-07.⁶⁵⁶ This view was underscored by the UNODC who would later claim a narco-insurgency was taking root in Afghanistan and proclaimed ‘opium cultivation in Afghanistan is no longer associated with poverty – quite the opposite’ and poverty was not the main driving factor in opium cultivation any more.⁶⁵⁷ Moreover, there was recognition that two components related to expansive opium cultivation were lack of security and the ineffectiveness of provincial governors in driving down opium cultivation. It was argued that because the Taliban were more active in the south; it created higher insecurity and less opportunity for law enforcement to take hold, which in turn allowed more expansive poppy cultivation.⁶⁵⁸ There appeared to be a greater commitment from governors in the North of the country to tackle opium cultivation compared to their southern counterparts. All of the above mentioned factors convinced the State Department and UNODC of a drug-insurgency nexus, which was particularly strong in southern Afghanistan. As will be demonstrated shortly, this would condition INL’s view of the problem and the solutions that they advocated.

The lesser of Two Evils: Ground Based Spraying in the 2006-2007 Season

The 2006 record crop would strengthen arguments made by officials in INL for stronger action – given the existing policies had failed - and once again push the issue

⁶⁵⁴ Charge d’ Affaires, ‘Christopher Dell, Scene-setter For Deputy Secretary Negroponte’s Visit To Kabul’, Wikileaks cable: 07KABUL2968.

⁶⁵⁵ Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Counternarcotics strategy and police training in Afghanistan* (4 October 2007) pp. 7-11.

⁶⁵⁶ Dell, ‘Scene-setter For Deputy Secretary Negroponte’s Visit To Kabul’.

⁶⁵⁷ Schweich, ‘Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?’.

⁶⁵⁸ Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Counternarcotics strategy and police training in Afghanistan* (4 October 2007) p. 8.

of aerial eradication to the forefront of the discussions within the Anglo-American relationship. As was the case in 2004, a record crop enabled State Department officials to petition their British counterparts for stronger action by pointing to the British failure to control opium cultivation. By late 2006, British officials were under immense pressure from their State Department counterparts to agree to some form of aerial eradication. Part of the problem was a degree of dissatisfaction from the American side that the British efforts to date had failed, and an underlying resentment about the British compensated eradication scheme several years previously. An American official illustrated the consensus at the time:

There was a lot of left over criticism of the British effort to buy the crop...it was old news, I think it added to the scrappiness because people were scoring points, I remember us actually having friction rather than intellectual debates about the past...there were issues about eradication. They were particularly issues about eradication in Helmand where we had to have consent from the British.⁶⁵⁹

The deployment of British troops to Helmand province during the spring of 2006 inserted another dynamic into Anglo-American discussions and would ultimately strengthen the UK's resolve to reject the introduction of aerial eradication and more generally wide scale forced eradication. The threat of aerial eradication in Helmand would also increase the internal tension between the British military and officials from ADIDU over counter narcotics policy. A British official explained: 'when we were in Helmand there was a lot more internal dispute about how to conduct the counter narcotics effort...suddenly you had the UK military, in large numbers and at senior levels, saying we must not stir things up with counter narcotics'.⁶⁶⁰ From the outset the British government on the whole (apart from Tony Blair and his aides) were opposed to wide-scale eradication but the introduction of British troops to the province bolstered the military's opposition to eradication. Like their American counterparts, the British military considered any policy that attacked farmer's livelihoods a recipe for increased unrest and insecurity and were fearful that

⁶⁵⁹ Author Interview with American Official (6), 21 October 2014.

⁶⁶⁰ Author Interview with British Official (8), 4th August 2014.

if the British military were to be associated with aggressively fighting the opium trade their soldiers would face violent reaction from the locals.⁶⁶¹ Another British official commented:

The same fault lines that you would see in the American government absolutely existed in the UK and you know the military was basically always suspicious of counter narcotics...there was never an entirely consistent view across...government whether or not we should be involved in the counter narcotics effort. So the military obviously had a rather different view to No.10...So there were always parts of the government...who were not fully signed up to doing CN. The military, ideally would have downgraded our counter narcotics to zero if they had their way'.⁶⁶²

The Afghans too, were equally opposed to the introduction of aerial spraying. In a September 2006 meeting with American Ambassador Neumann, President Karzai was reportedly 'vehemently against aerial spraying'.⁶⁶³ Condoleezza Rice noted President Karzai's objection to aerial eradication: 'He did not want to even acknowledge the possibility of dramatic measures such as crop destruction through aerial spraying. This issue would be a source of tension between our two countries for the remainder of the President's [Bush's] term'.⁶⁶⁴

As the battle intensified between the allies, other solutions were sought to reach a compromise. American Ambassador Neumann attempted to offer a more palatable option by suggesting the introduction of an experimental ground based spraying (GBS) programme. The scheme would be a middle ground between the previously unsuccessful manual eradication and the much opposed aerial eradication. Ambassador Neumann championed the proposal in the hope that if successful, it

⁶⁶¹ Author interview with British Official (5), 13 June 2013.

⁶⁶² Author interview with British Official (5) 22 October 2014.

⁶⁶³ Ambassador Ronald Neumann. 'Karzai Comments on Counter Narcotics Policy', Wikileaks Cable: 06KABUL4005.

⁶⁶⁴ Condoleezza. Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York, 2011), p. 446.

would provide a bulwark against the aerial eradication zealots in the State Department. Pressure was building in Washington that wide scale eradication *must* take place, and Ambassador Neumann attempted to contain the tide of INL and Congressional pressure by demonstrating sufficient progress through GBS. While the broader direction of policy was formulated in Washington, Ambassador Neumann had to some extent, a degree of autonomy over implementation of details.⁶⁶⁵

In an attempt to pressure the Afghans to agree to GBS, National Security Advisor (NSA) Stephen Hadley was directed to discuss the issue with President Karzai on his November 2006 trip to Afghanistan. At the meeting Hadley was to impress on President Karzai the need to adopt ground based spraying focusing largely on Helmand province and persuade the President to sell the idea to both the Afghan public and the British.⁶⁶⁶ The United States Kabul Embassy also wanted Hadley to use this opportunity to gain agreement for the idea from Habibullah Qaderi the Afghan Minister of Counter Narcotics and to find out the best way to get President Karzai to approve ground based spraying.⁶⁶⁷ Once an agreement was reached with the stakeholders, President Karzai would be approached to approve the plan. The bureaucratic battleground over the issue became more entangled, as Tony Blair and his staffers from the cabinet office once again intervened to pressure officials from ADIDU and Embassy officials in Kabul to agree to some form of spraying. When it was evident that counter narcotics policies had failed to make a significant dent in the illegal narcotics trade Prime Minister Blair was ‘depressed’ by the lack of progress⁶⁶⁸ and the PM was in the words of a British official ‘attracted to a policy that might deliver results more quickly’.⁶⁶⁹ British Ambassador Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles recounts: ‘As the debate raged back and forth...[there was] pressure from 10 Downing Street for us to agree to some spraying’.⁶⁷⁰ Officials at ADIDU, aware of the mounting tensions at home, Washington and Kabul were running out of options and could not indefinitely fend off the State Department’s pressure to introduce aerial

⁶⁶⁵ Author Interview with American Official (6) 21 October 2014.

⁶⁶⁶ Ambassador Neumann. ‘Scenesetter For NSA Hadley Visit To Afghanistan’, Wikileaks cable: 06KABUL5277 Also See: House of Commons Defence Committee, ‘UK Operations in Afghanistan’s, 2006-07, EV. 19 Q.94.

⁶⁶⁷ Ambassador Neumann, ‘Scenesetter For NSA Hadley Visit To Afghanistan’.

⁶⁶⁸ Seldon, Snowden and Collings, *Blair Unbound*, p. 562.

⁶⁶⁹ Author interview with British Official (5), 5 July 2013.

⁶⁷⁰ Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 84.

eradication. By agreeing to the GBS pilot scheme, British officials hoped that it would at the very least postpone the introduction of aerial eradication and at best prove sufficiently successful to eliminate aerial eradication as a policy option. The British interactions with their State Department's counterparts since 2004 were characterised by 'tempering bad policy' and trying to exercise damage control⁶⁷¹ and the discussions over the introduction of GBS followed a similar trajectory. A British official commented:

It...seem[ed] an extension of other forms of ground-based eradication. It was not radically different to going into fields with machetes. What we agreed to do was a pilot...not a full campaign and the point about the pilot was to test if it would work. I was taking a similar kind of calculation...I couldn't see how...when we thought about it...the UK could resist ground based spraying because the impact was not going to be that different to the impact of any other ground eradication. We knew there was going to be a show down over aerial spraying at some point ...so it seemed a way of at least postponing it. It might have been if we ran a pilot the pilot might well not have worked which was a possibility that it might kill it. Our policy through all of this was frankly was to avoid aerial spraying.⁶⁷²

Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs, Richard Boucher complained while the British did agree to ground based spraying in December 2006, they would not support a pilot in Helmand: it had to be elsewhere. Assistant Secretary of State Boucher concluded while it was reasonable that the UK was concerned about Helmand, they should view the bigger picture and not just concentrate on 'their own' province. Afghan National Security Advisor Rassoul believed that the UK's attitude was indicative of the narrow focus of NATO countries towards 'their' provinces, unlike the wider focus of the coalition.⁶⁷³ President Karzai also complained about the British narrow focus on Helmand in a meeting with

⁶⁷¹ Author interview with British Official (10), 23 September 2014.

⁶⁷² Author interview with British Official (5), 22 October 2014.

⁶⁷³ Ambassador Neumann. 'A/s Boucher Meeting With Afghan NSA Rassoul', Wikileaks cable: 07KABUL184.

Assistant Secretary Boucher.⁶⁷⁴ Although President Karzai and the British were united against the State Department's attempts to introduce aerial eradication, President Karzai was unimpressed by the United Kingdom's attempts to pacify Helmand and the rising violence in the province. President Karzai would use the triangular policy relationship between himself, the United Kingdom and United States to suit his own ends. When under the pressure from the State Department and the White House to agree to aerial eradication he would use the United Kingdom's reluctance to strengthen his own case against adopting the policy.⁶⁷⁵ The proposal of GBS came to a conclusion when an American delegation headed by Ambassador Neumann and British officials met with President Karzai and his cabinet officials in January 2007 to discuss its introduction. The Afghan cabinet were swayed by the arguments of the minister for public health, Faizullah Kakar. Kakar, western educated and holding a degree in toxicology⁶⁷⁶ put forward a convincing case arguing Glyphosate use would result in health and environmental consequences.⁶⁷⁷ It was reported that convincing the public health minister and Mr Ramin, the agricultural minister - two of the main opponents of spray-based eradication – were vital in convincing the Afghan government to sanction spraying.⁶⁷⁸

With the GBS proposal vetoed by the Afghan cabinet, Ambassador Neumann still needed to demonstrate progress on eradication to placate the Bush cabinet and Congress. Neumann devised a plan to eradicate 10,000 hectares⁶⁷⁹ - the target of 10,000 hectares was devised as it was deemed a politically viable number that the Ambassador could peddle in Washington not because the amount of eradication would make a sizeable dent in overall cultivation. The eradication campaign would be nationwide but a considerable campaign was to be launched in central Helmand, focusing on territories that were under government control. Helmand's new provincial governor Wafa demanded that eradication also take place in Taliban controlled districts and towns in Northern Helmand and not exclusively focus on 'friends of the

⁶⁷⁴ Ambassador Neumann. 'Boucher, Mosbacher And Karzai Talk Energy, Investment, Pakistan And Comprehensive Strategy', Wikileaks cable: 07KABUL185.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁶ Neumann, *The Other War*, p.148.

⁶⁷⁷ Semple, Kirk and Golden, Tim. 'Afghans Pressed by U.S. on Plan to Spray Poppies', *The New York Times*, 8 October 2007.

⁶⁷⁸ Semple, Kirk. 'Afghanistan Seeks Review of Herbicides in Poppy War', *The New York Times*, 22 October 2007.

⁶⁷⁹ Neumann, *The Other War*, p. 193.

government'. To do that, however, would have required a significant military operation and given the limited reach of the Afghan government and coalition forces in Helmand such an operation could not be mobilised without significant planning.⁶⁸⁰ The eradication campaign would once again bring the Americans into conflict with the British, as the British feared improperly targeted eradication would drive insecurity. Commander of ISAF, British General David Richards, originally wanted to defer eradication for a year to prevent an increase in violence and allow alternative livelihood programmes to reach more farmers. However, Ambassador Neumann declined the General's suggestion, as he feared it would destabilise eradication programmes throughout the country – and of course, incur the wrath of Congress. With the Ambassador pushing for eradication the British military sought to limit where and when the AEF could deploy and according to an American official were obstructive throughout the planning phase of the operation:

There were questions about where they [Afghan Eradication Force] could operate. There were a lot of discussions with the British military about this and every time they said not that area not this area. There was a no to every proposal but no counter proposals...In terms of the British there was probably an underlying unhappiness about eradication in general. We would be pushing for eradication with individual locations.⁶⁸¹

With American officials from the Kabul Embassy being stonewalled during meetings with the British military, Ambassador Neumann was forced to mediate and take the issue to General David Richards. The Ambassador explained to the General that he needed to make progress with eradication to satisfy domestic political pressures from the White House and Congress. The pressures emanating from Congress were driven by concerns of the drug-insurgency nexus. As a Congressional Committee on Foreign Relations commented: 'the real problem for U.S. and coalition forces is the amount of drug profits being paid in taxes and protection money to the

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., p.190.

⁶⁸¹ Author Interview with American Official (6), 21 October 2014.

Taliban and other insurgents'.⁶⁸² After Richards's intervention a compromise was reached and the British agreed to allow the AEF to operate in certain locations.⁶⁸³

ALARM MOUNTS IN WASHINGTON: OUR COUNTER NARCOTICS POLICY HAS FAILED

Back in Washington alarm was mounting regarding the burgeoning opium cultivation. The prospect of a successive record opium crop resulted in a crisis cabinet meeting at the White House in January 2007. Given the impending situation and the fact that the drug industry was now valued at an estimated \$3 billion (out of Afghanistan's \$8 billion gross national product);⁶⁸⁴ it was acknowledged that the previous counter narcotics strategy had failed and Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte and Drug Czar John Walters were tasked with assembling an interagency committee to reformulate the strategy. The committee comprised the Department of State, Defense, Justice, Agriculture, and Treasury; DEA, Office of National Drug Control Policy; and USAID to evaluate the current strategy for tackling the Afghan drugs trade.⁶⁸⁵ The man tasked with fronting the interagency strategy was INL's Thomas A. Schweich - who was promoted to ambassadorial rank. Schweich's zeal for advocating an aggressive approach to the Afghan opium problem, specifically aerial eradication, would result in several confrontations with his British counterparts, in London, Kabul and Washington.⁶⁸⁶ The Ambassador, convinced of the drug-insurgency nexus, would come to be regarded as the one of the most ardent champions of aerial eradication. Members of Congress had written a letter in February 2007 to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Robert Gates imploring the administration to appoint a high profile figure to coordinate American and international agencies in the fight against the Afghan drugs trade. The congressional note also underscored the need for unity both domestically and internationally to succeed. Once again, differences on strategy, both formulation and

⁶⁸² Committee on Foreign Relations, *'Afghanistan's Narco War'*, p. 3.

⁶⁸³ Author Interview with American Official (6), 21 October 2014.

⁶⁸⁴ Jason Burke, *The 9/11 Wars* (London, 2011).

⁶⁸⁵ Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Counternarcotics strategy and police training in Afghanistan* (4 October 2007) p. 6.

⁶⁸⁶ Author interviews with British Official (5), 5 July 2013; British Military Officer (2), 13 February 2014; and British Official (10), 24 September 2014.

implementation continued to stall effective cooperation between the Anglo-American allies over counter narcotics issues.

The open and public dispute with our British allies on opium eradication methods, along with the many different and often conflicting views of NATO, our Defense Department (DoD), the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and other U.S. agencies on how to best handle the narcotics challenge, does not bode well for success in taking on a major source of the financing for the Taliban and other anti-coalition militants.⁶⁸⁷

Despite congressional concerns that Ambassador Schweich lacked experience as an ambassador and was not a high profile appointment;⁶⁸⁸ Schweich and his team set about explaining to top United States officials that a narco-insurgency nexus existed and thus appropriate counter narcotics policies needed to be incorporated into an overall war strategy. Whilst Schweich and his team set about developing their new strategy, recurring difficulties were still present on the ground in Helmand.

The complexity of balancing the UK's twin mission in Afghanistan was again brought to the fore when the continued resentment of the British military to eradication exploded in 2007. UK Task Force Helmand, were fearful of local anger over eradication distributed pamphlets and commissioned radio announcements in March and April 2007 that stated the British military was not involved in the anti-poppy campaign.⁶⁸⁹ These announcements were launched during Operation Achilles. The leaflet read:

Dear respectful and noble residents of Helmand province, ANA and ISAF are military forces and work

⁶⁸⁷ Representative Tom Lantos and Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen Letter to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, 7 February 2007 (available at: <http://publicpolicypress.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/letter-02-07-2007.pdf>).

⁶⁸⁸ Richard Weitz, 'Afghanistan: US and EU Anti-Drugs Strategies are Diverging', *EurasiaNet*, 3 April 2007.

⁶⁸⁹ Schweich, 'Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?'

for Afghan government. ANA and ISAF will not destroy your poppy fields. Poppies serve as the only tool of economy and benefits for the farmers and we don't want to stop your source of feeding and income. A radio announcement further stated: that ISAF and the ANA know that many Afghans have no choice but to grow poppy and ISAF and the ANA do not want to affect their livelihoods.⁶⁹⁰

The messages invoked condemnation from the MOI and President Karzai who said they had 'undermined the GOA's counter-narcotics operation'. The Afghan government protested that the messages implied ISAF permitted opium cultivation, and as ISAF were in Afghanistan 'supporting the GAO'; they had a responsibility to declare opium cultivation would not be tolerated and it contravened Afghan law. ISAF later explained that the communications were designed to inform farmers that the purpose of Operation Achilles was to conduct military offensives against the insurgency not against poppy fields.⁶⁹¹ Consequently, the misjudged messages, according to the diaries of former Minister Chris Mullin 'led to a dust-up with the Americans resulting in our having to apologise'.⁶⁹² Moreover, the leaflets added to the growing tension between ADIDU and the British military over the UK's twin mission in Afghanistan. A former British official commented: 'they did basically put out a very silly leaflet around...[our]...involvement in counter narcotics...and the commander got severely told off for it...[it] sa[id] don't blame us...and he got hauled over the coals for it but it was absolutely out of line'.⁶⁹³

More broadly, this incident served to highlight a growing discord between the British military and their American counterparts over the former's role in Helmand. Once again, British policies would be seen as deeply wanting by their American counterparts when the newly appointed Commander of ISAF, General Dan McNeill met with US Drugs Czar John Walters in spring 2007. General McNeill said he was

⁶⁹⁰ Ambassador Wood. 'GOA Tells ISAF That Its IO Campaign Undermines Counter-narcotics Activities', Wikileaks cable: 07KABUL1420 Also see: Leithead, Alastair. 'NATO Criticised for Afghan Advert', *BBC News*, 24 April 2007.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid.

⁶⁹² Mullin, Chris, *Decline and Fall: Diaries 2005-2010, Mullin Diaries 2* (London, 2011), p. 178.

⁶⁹³ Author Interview with British Official (5), 13 June 2013.

‘dismayed by the British effort’ and that they had ‘made a mess of things in Helmand’. Citing the failed Musa Qala agreement – where the British reached a deal with the Taliban for both sides to leave the town, only for the Taliban to later return - McNeill stated: ‘That agreement opened the door to narco-traffickers in that area, and now it was impossible to tell the difference between the traffickers and the insurgents’. Moreover, given the responsibility the British had in Helmand their efforts needed to be vastly improved.⁶⁹⁴

In the same meeting McNeill also raised concerns about President Karzai’s commitment to counter narcotics and described him as ‘the missing ingredient’. McNeill complained the President failed to seriously tackle the trade in an attempt to appease many of his supporters in southern and western Afghanistan who were implicated in the opium industry. American and British officials thought that President Karzai was at best wilfully ambivalent to the drugs trade or at worst deliberately obstructive. Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, Britain’s new Ambassador to Afghanistan, thought that Karzai’s rhetoric on drugs was shallow. Even though he talked of it being against Afghan and Islamic law he considered it be more of a Western than an Afghan problem and therefore, the onus lay with the international community to tackle it not the Afghans.⁶⁹⁵ Moreover, failure to take decisive action sent a message that opium cultivation was acceptable. General McNeill, however, stated that whilst not ideal the counter narcotics campaign needed Afghan ownership so President Karzai was the best person to do this.⁶⁹⁶

This was not the first time that the Americans questioned President Karzai’s resolve to tackle the opium issue. Publicly, Karzai continued to declare that opium cultivation contravened Afghan and Islamic law and acknowledged the corrosive effects of the illegal narcotics industry on the Afghan state. The President would also make similar statements privately when meeting with western officials. Condoleezza Rice noted after discussions with President Karzai regarding the drug problem that the President was so upbeat that he put a positive spin on his assessment of the issue, ‘we are making real progress’. This was a case of Karzai’s political charm ignoring the

⁶⁹⁴ Ambassador Neumann. ‘ONDCP Director Walters’ March 17-20 Visit To Afghanistan’, Wikileaks cable: 07KABUL1132.

⁶⁹⁵ Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 82.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid.

hard evidence. Karzai's contentions left Condoleezza Rice unsure whether: '[President] Karzai believed what he was saying or just thought that we might.'⁶⁹⁷ However, despite his statements about fighting the drugs trade he took very little action to seriously address the issue.

President Karzai's inability to address the opium industry and support full eradication was a result of the delicate political environment where many of the President's supporters and political allies were involved in the illegal narcotics industry. As noted in chapter 2, power in Afghanistan, even for the President, was subject to support and was conditional depending on a whole host of factors. President Karzai had to rely on the use of patronage as an important tool to cement his powerbase and that meant turning a blind eye to some of his followers' connections to the drug industry. Additionally, if serious action was taken against the opium poppy farmers through wide scale eradication, the government's barely functioning writ in the southern and eastern provinces would completely disintegrate; farmers would be driven into economic distress and potentially into the arms of the insurgency and the Afghan economy would be destabilised. The IMF and World Bank noted if successful action was taken against the illegal narcotics trade, it could have potentially adverse 'effect[s] on Afghanistan's overall balance of payments, net GDP growth and government revenue'⁶⁹⁸ As has been previously noted, opium cultivation was a symptom of the larger problem, therefore, President Karzai was restricted in his movements against the drugs trade until a comprehensive structure was in place to deal with the issues of poor governance, corruption, security, rule of law and economic development. The lack of unity of action within the alliance to coordinate and agree on the best methods to counter the drugs trade allowed President Karzai to forgo stronger action. This was a catch-22 situation. Karzai could not afford to suppress narcotics until a viable economy and system of governance were in place, but for them to function effectively strides against the narcotics industry were needed.

The Showdown Over Aerial Eradication: The Zenith of American Pressure to Force Aerial Eradication onto the Counter Narcotics Agenda April-November 2007

⁶⁹⁷ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, p. 446.

⁶⁹⁸ Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan*, p.127.

The pressure to force the issue of aerial eradication back onto the agenda for Afghanistan intensified when, another Colombia veteran, William Wood was posted to Afghanistan as Ambassador in April 2007. Ambassador Wood had overseen one of America's largest anti-drug programmes in Colombia and championed aerial eradication as an effective tool in the fight against illegal narcotics. His appointment was a statement of intent by the State Department and many proponents of aerial eradication were optimistic at his arrival.⁶⁹⁹ Wood believed that drug traffickers and insurgents had complementary objectives and there was the potential for the political agenda of insurgents groups to become corrupted by drug traffickers once the narco-insurgent nexus had been established – as was the case in Colombia.⁷⁰⁰ Ambassador Wood also believed that opium cultivation needed to be tackled regardless if poppy farmers were poor or rich.⁷⁰¹ Coinciding with Ambassador Wood's arrival was the appointment of Sir Sherard Cowper Coles as the new British Ambassador to Afghanistan. The arrival of Ambassador Cowper-Coles signalled an escalation in the attention dedicated to the Afghan campaign from the United Kingdom; the government wanted a diplomatic heavyweight to preside over a sharp increase in civilian resources to complement Britain's increase in military resources to Helmand.⁷⁰² The task facing the new Ambassador was made more complex by the fact that the campaign had turned into full-scale conflict (prior to 2006, the general consensus dictated it was not a full-scale war);⁷⁰³ and the drug issue would consume most of the Ambassador's first year in Kabul. During Cowper-Coles first meeting with his American counterpart, William Wood discussed replicating, what he saw as the successful aerial eradication programme implemented by the State Department in Colombia. Ambassador Wood was so assured of the safety of Glyphosate he offered to have himself sprayed to demonstrate its harmlessness.⁷⁰⁴ The next day ambassador Wood laid forth the United States drug eradication proposal for Helmand promoting wide scale eradication to destroy 80,000 hectares of opium⁷⁰⁵ in an e-mail message to

⁶⁹⁹ Schweich, 'Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?'

⁷⁰⁰ Author interview with American Official (2), 25 June 2013.

⁷⁰¹ Schweich, 'Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?'

⁷⁰² Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 3.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷⁰⁴ Tom Coghlan, 'US step up pressure on Afghan drug war', *The Telegraph*, 9 October 2007.

Also see: Kirk Semple, and Tim Golden, 'Afghans Pressed by U.S. on Plan to Spray Poppies', *The New York Times*, 8 October 2007.

⁷⁰⁵ Schweich, 'Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?'

the British Ambassador.⁷⁰⁶ Relations between both Ambassadors would be extremely cordial but over the coming months the British Ambassador would be under intense pressure from his American counterpart to agree to aerial eradication. As Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles commented: ‘He [Ambassador Wood] looked to me to swing HMG behind such an approach’.⁷⁰⁷ A British official further commented: ‘most times Sir Sherard met with Ambassador Wood he had to be prepared to defend his position’.⁷⁰⁸ This would be the beginning of mounting pressure from various actors within the American administration to convince their British allies to agree to aerial spraying. A British official commented: in the coming weeks and months there was an enormous ‘amount of activity which went up to ministerial level on our side...from their side and there were conversations at foreign secretary level about it’.⁷⁰⁹

Meanwhile Tom Schweich’s new U.S. counter narcotics strategy was developing in Washington and in an effort to make INL’s new strategy policy, Anthony Harriman, the senior director for Afghanistan at the National Security Council, submitted it to the Deputies Committee headed by Lt. General Douglas Lute, President Bush’s war czar in May 2007. At that point, Harriman also instructed Schweich to compose an unclassified version⁷¹⁰ for publicity purposes to try to get political support. The Defense Department’s reaction was predictable: it attempted to derail policy’s rite of passage and stall the release of the unclassified version. Members of the Defense Department threatened Tom Schweich with professional retribution if he disclosed the unclassified version to the public. When the Pentagon failed to prevent the release, they used back channel methods to attempt to kill off the policy by allegedly disclosing the classified version to the British Defence Attaché and Head of British Defence Staff in Washington, Major General Peter Gilchrist. The British, of course, had consistently opposed this kind of aerial eradication and word reached Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles on 26 July 2007 that the Americans were preparing to push through aerial eradication against the wishes of Afghan and British governments. The Ambassador revealed the British play to stall the implementation of aerial eradication: ‘We had a fight on our hands, a fight which we would win only by

⁷⁰⁶ Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 19.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁸ Author Interview with British Official (10), 23 September 2014.

⁷⁰⁹ Author Interview with British Official (5) 5 July 2013.

⁷¹⁰ Schweich, ‘Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?’.

telling the Afghan Government that HMG would support it in resisting US pressure to agree to spraying'.⁷¹¹ The new British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown also intervened in the discussion when he reportedly telephoned President Bush to ask him not to coerce President Karzai to accept aerial eradication before President Karzai's visit to America in early August 2007.⁷¹² The relationship between both leaders was not as close as it had been under Bush and Blair. The period saw a cooling in Anglo-American relations, as the new partnership got off to a laboured start. At Brown's first visit to Camp David in July 2007, relations between the President and Prime Minister were tense as Brown indicated a shift in the relationship by distancing himself from the overtly friendly relations displayed by his predecessor.⁷¹³ Despite the President's praise for the PM publicly at the conference, it was later reported by *The Telegraph* that the President had in fact serious concerns about Brown's suitability as UK PM - after the latter berated Condoleezza Rice in a previous encounter. The President's concerns were so pronounced he shared his thoughts with Tony Blair before Brown assumed office.⁷¹⁴ The early coolness in the relationship was compounded by Brown's decision to reduce the UK commitment in Iraq, at the time of the U.S. 'surge'.⁷¹⁵

Notwithstanding, the cool relations between Bush and Brown, these developments illustrate clearly the dynamics of the complex policy formulation process in the Anglo-American alliance in Afghanistan. There was a veritable roundabout of pressures from the State Department to the Pentagon to the British and on to the Karzai Government with several pressure flows back onto the US government not to adopt aerial spraying. In detail this involved the State Department battling the British and Afghan governments to adopt its policy proposal. At the same time it had domestic constituencies undermining its attempts, notably the Pentagon, which in turn on this occasion found a marriage of convenience with the British

⁷¹¹ Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 51.

⁷¹² Kirk Semple, and Tim Golden, 'Afghans Pressed by U.S. on Plan to Spray Poppies', *The New York Times*, 8 October 2007.

⁷¹³ Graeme Wilson and Toby Harnden, 'Gordon Brown plots on course in Iraq', *The Telegraph*, 31 July 2007.

⁷¹⁴ Patrick Hennessy and Andrew Alderson, 'How Bush and Blair plotted in secret to stop Brown', *The Telegraph*, 28 August 2010.

⁷¹⁵ Graeme Wilson, 'Gordon Brown and George Bush are distant', *The Telegraph*, 13 September 2007.

helpful in the Washington bureaucratic turf war as both were opposed to the introduction of aerial spraying.

The United States interagency team, headed by Ambassador Schweich, published the unclassified Counter Narcotics Strategy in August 2007. The strategy supported the first five points of the Afghan National Drug Control Strategy (public information, alternative development, eradication, interdiction/law enforcement, prosecution/criminal justice reform).⁷¹⁶ The strategy highlighted that poppy cultivation was not uniform across Afghanistan instead followed a north-south divide; with cultivation lowest in the north and highest in the south, with Helmand province being of particular concern.⁷¹⁷ The strategy emphasised the necessity to dramatically increase development assistance to incentivize licit development while simultaneously amplifying the scope and intensity of both interdiction and eradication operations.⁷¹⁸ To meet this need, a new programme was to be established in conjunction with the UK government, to donate financial aid to provinces that reduced poppy cultivation significantly or completely. A further incentive would be to deliver development aid to compliant governors. The budget would be between \$25 million and \$50 million compared to ‘\$21 million in fiscal year 2007 and \$6 million the previous year’.⁷¹⁹ Of the total \$10 billion budget for 2007 to deal with the problem that was Afghanistan, \$600 million was earmarked for counter narcotics.⁷²⁰ Improvements in the agricultural sector were to be implemented to give Afghan farmers access to markets and better facilities.

The Pentagon’s plan to derail aerial eradication from the new strategy by feeding information to the British had yet to come to fruition. Unsurprisingly, the revised strategy advocated a robust eradication plan, with the option of reintroducing aerial eradication:

⁷¹⁶ Schweich, ‘U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan’, p. 17.

⁷¹⁷ Richard Weitz, ‘New U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan Leaves Critics Dissatisfied’, *World Politics Review*, 15 August 2007.

⁷¹⁸ Schweich, ‘U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan’, p. 2.

⁷¹⁹ Mohammed, Arshad. ‘U.S. Unveils Carrot and Stick Afghan Drugs Strategy’, *Reuters*, 9 August 2007.

⁷²⁰ Weitz, ‘New U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan Leaves Critics Dissatisfied’.

No herbicidal spray program would be implemented without the consent of the GOA. This being said, in order to ensure that eradication is equitable, efficient, and capable of eradicating poppy on a sufficient scale, the USG advocates a policy of GOA-led non-negotiated forced eradication. One method of implementing forced eradication would entail the deployment of force-protected ground-based spray (GBS) teams...Another way to accomplish the objective of non-negotiated forced eradication would be to employ aerial spray.⁷²¹

Schweich was critical of the Afghan government's record on eradication and stated that manual or mechanical techniques could only eradicate 10 per cent of the overall crop, a figure Schweich – and UNODC officials - contended would have to increase to 25 per cent to act as a tipping point for success.⁷²² High value targets and corrupt government officials were to be the targets of increased eradication and law enforcement activities. Moreover, the process of eradication was to become non-negotiable – farmers would not be able to haggle with eradication teams about eradication sites.⁷²³ Schweich wanted to double the amount of poppy free provinces from six to twelve by the following year and concluded that it would take five years to make substantial progress with eradication in southern Afghanistan.⁷²⁴

In reality, the strategy differed very little from Bush's first administration counter narcotics strategy⁷²⁵ and notably one that had already failed to produce significant reductions in the level of opium cultivation. The lack of differentiation from the previous strategy drew criticism from congressional subcommittee hearings and analysts.⁷²⁶ Senior members of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Chairman, Representative Tom Lantos and Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen were even more scathing in the criticism and called into question the immediacy of

⁷²¹ Schweich, 'U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan', p. 51.

⁷²² Richard Weitz, 'Ambassador: Washington Will Change its Afghan Counternarcotics Programs', *EurasiaNet*, 30 July 2007.

⁷²³ Ibid.

⁷²⁴ Weitz, 'Afghanistan: US and EU Anti-Drugs Strategies are Diverging'.

⁷²⁵ The first strategy has been outlined in previous chapters.

⁷²⁶ Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, *Counternarcotics strategy and police training in Afghanistan* (4 October 2007) p.2. Also see: Arshad. Mohammed, 'U.S. Unveils Carrot and Stick Afghan Drugs Strategy', *Reuters*, 9 August 2007.

approach: ‘that Afghanistan is approaching a crisis point, and that immediate action is required to eliminate the threat of drug kingpins and cartels allied with terrorists so we can reverse the country's steady slide into a potential failed narco-state’.⁷²⁷ The new strategy represented a shift in tactics as opposed to a shift in strategy. This was a criticism that the Deputy Director for INL Lee Brown acknowledged, ‘I have heard the U.S. strategy described as being an inventory of tactics rather than a classic strategy. In a formal sense, I have to agree’.⁷²⁸ All this was beginning to look like a political quagmire that was sucking away the energy required for developing effective policies and the upcoming UNODC annual report confirm another record opium crop.

The zenith of American pressure to force aerial eradication onto the policy agenda was in the lead up to the 2007-2008 season after the UNODC announced a record 193,000 hectares of opium was planted. The announcement would begin several months of intense activity⁷²⁹ by American officials to finally push aerial eradication onto the agenda. The case for aerial eradication had continued to be pushed by the INL throughout 2005 and 2006 but without any real success. In part, the problem was a lack of senior officials in the American administration that supported the policy and stiff resistance from their Afghan and European counterparts. In addition, the American military’s refusal to participate in counter narcotics activities, particularly eradication (of any persuasion), killed any hope of implementing an aggressive strategy. However, a second successive record crop in 2007, plus growing congressional, media and international attention triggered one last attempt by the State Department to have aerial spraying adopted as policy and it pushed the issue up the United States agenda.⁷³⁰ Furthermore, criticism of British counter narcotics policies, which had failed to quell the burgeoning narcotic industry strengthened the argument to introduce aerial spraying. A British military commander recalled State Department officials contending: ‘we have given you every chance...you have completely failed. Ground eradication isn’t working, alternative livelihoods isn’t working, criminal justice system is not convicting enough people, and interdiction is doing well but not well enough what are you going to do about

⁷²⁷ Weitz, ‘New U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan Leaves Critics Dissatisfied’.

⁷²⁸ Embassy of the United States Press Release. ‘U.S. Embassy Deputy Director for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement, Lee “Rusty” Brown’s Remarks at the Paris Pact Conference in Kabul’, 20 November 2007.

⁷²⁹ Author interview with British Official (5), 5 July 2013.

⁷³⁰ Author interview with British Official (5), 13 June 2013.

it?⁷³¹ State Department officials were as equally scathing of British efforts when discussing the issue with another British official they claimed: ‘your set of balanced approaches aren’t working so we have to do something big and dramatic’.⁷³² The State Department’s argument was simple, everything to date had failed and 2007 saw another record crop. Therefore, quick impact solutions were needed to prevent the derailment of the Afghan state building project. By September, State Department and White House officials began ramping up the pressure on their European and Afghan allies over the issue. On one such occasion, Ambassador Wood pressed the subject during a meeting with European Union officials in Brussels.⁷³³ INL were throwing considerable weight behind the drive to introduce aerial eradication and spent \$6 million dollars researching the herbicidal eradication techniques and purchasing spray equipment.⁷³⁴

President Karzai and his government, like the British and Europeans, had been under heavy pressure from U.S. officials to support aerial eradication and were spoken to several times by members of the Bush administration including President Bush himself, Ambassador Wood, Condoleezza Rice, National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley, the director of national drug control policy John P. Walters,⁷³⁵ Tom Schweich and others to agree to aerial spraying. During a September meeting with President Karzai, Assistant Secretary of State Boucher suggested conducting aerial spraying in Taliban controlled territories and manual eradication in government-controlled territories. President Karzai attempting to evade the issue ‘gave no reaction’.⁷³⁶ After it was clear that President Karzai would not be drawn into a discussion regarding aerial eradication, the Americans suggested introducing GBS - despite the Afghan government vetoing the proposal in January - to persuade the

⁷³¹ Author Interview with British Military Officer (2), 13 February 2014.

⁷³² Author interview with British Official (5), 13 June 2013.

⁷³³ Gray, ‘Amb Wood Discusses EU’s Work in Afghanistan’, Wikileaks cable: 07BRUSSELS3037.

⁷³⁴ Department of State, Inspector General ‘Status of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Counternarcotics Programs in Afghanistan’, Performance Audit Report Number MERO-A-10-02, December 2009 page 28.

⁷³⁵ Kirschke, Joseph, ‘State Department Pushing Aerial Poppy Eradication in Afghanistan’, *Transnational Institute*, 29 February 2008.

⁷³⁶ Charge d’ Affaires, Christopher Dell, ‘Boucher And Karzai, Spanta On Jirgas, Drugs, Econ Cooperation, Governance, Iran’, Wikileaks cable: 07KABUL2998.

Afghans of the effectiveness and safety of aerial eradication. President Karzai remained unenthusiastic about the idea.⁷³⁷

The plan for aerial eradication had gained so much traction within the American administration by late 2007 that the Bush National Security Council approved the destruction of poppy fields by aerial spraying. President Bush had remained a firmer supporter of aerial eradication⁷³⁸ since the then Secretary of Defense Colin Powell, pitched him Robert B. Charles 'Plan Afghanistan' in 2004. A Wikileaks cable reported that the USG had 'reached internal consensus' over the issue. The plan was to launch a pilot programme of aerial eradication in Nangarhar province, where the U.S. had a significant presence. The scheme would aim to destroy 4-5,000 hectares whilst informing the public the plan would only be utilised against rich, corrupt farmers. The pilot programme would then be rolled out across Afghanistan.⁷³⁹ The United States government aimed to coerce President Karzai and his government to agree to the plan then use this compliance to defeat opposition from the American military and British government.⁷⁴⁰

The British, however, had other ideas. From the moment officials at the Pentagon informed British General Peter Gilchrist of the State Department's and White House intention to force through aerial eradication, the British launched their own rear-guard action. Their plan was simple but effective; they forewarned President Karzai of the developments and pledged their support against the introduction of aerial eradication. General Peter Gilchrist informed Ambassador Schweich that Britain would not support the proposal. A British official commented: 'I think this was aimed by the DoD to kill aerial eradication once and for all'.⁷⁴¹ The Pentagon's plan worked: Britain did not agree with the strategy and lobbied President Karzai to discard it. When Secretary Rice and Ambassador Wood pressed President Karzai to support the new policy, the disunity gave the President the perfect excuse to refuse by

⁷³⁷ Ambassador Wood. 'Scenesetter for Undersecretary Edelman's November 7-8 Visit to Afghanistan', Wikileaks cable: 07KABUL3765 and Dell, 'Boucher And Karzai, Spanta On Jirgas, Drugs, Econ Cooperation, Governance, Iran'.

⁷³⁸ Schweich, 'Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?'.

⁷³⁹ Ambassador Arnall. 'Netherlands/Afghanistan: Dutch Positive on Counternarcotics Message', 07THEHAGUE2048.

⁷⁴⁰ Chandrasekaran, Rajiv, 'Administration Is Keeping Ally at Arm's Length', *The Washington Post*, 6 May 2009.

⁷⁴¹ Author Interview with British Military Officer (2), 13 February 2014.

pointing to British opposition.⁷⁴² Karzai's tactic was especially effective as Britain was supposed to be a 'partner nation' on counter narcotics strategy. The feud over the new policy led to dissent in Kabul as a British official recounted: 'Ambassador Wood himself complained because we told president Karzai what was coming without telling the Americans and the Americans got upset, I think there was quite significant pressure'.⁷⁴³ When President Bush raised the matter for the final time with President Karzai during a videoconference, it was clear by the Afghan's reaction that spraying could and would not be tolerated as President Karzai said the sight of spray planes 'would look like chemical warfare'. An American official commented: 'He [President Bush] had come to the point where he related so closely to Karzai that he yielded to his instincts...when it becomes personal, and it becomes more like partnership edging toward friendship, the personal dynamics are such that it's harder to put the heat on.'

744

Ultimately, several factors defeated the State Department's; supported by the White House, push for aerial eradication. Firstly, the United States was the only NATO member advocating aerial eradication and as such had no support from the international community. Resistance from the U.S.'s European allies, particularly Britain thwarted or at least hindered America's plans with the UK fighting an embattled position every planting season to prevent the introduction of aerial spraying. The UK's opposition to aerial eradication became more pronounced when British troops deployed to Helmand province and the British military argued such a move would jeopardise the safety of their soldiers. Secondly, the Pentagon was ardently opposed to aerial eradication and did all within their power to prevent its introduction – even colluding with the British against their own colleagues in the State Department. The Defense Department's opposition to aerial eradication was a reflection of a broader opposition to become involved in counter narcotics, and especially aerial eradication which was considered the most damaging counter narcotics policy to 'winning hearts and minds'. Another key reason, which deflated the State Department's plan, was at the same time – autumn of 2007 – 'just at the point [at which] ... the U.S. reached absolute peak pressure in Afghanistan – the

⁷⁴² Ibid.

⁷⁴³ Author Interview with British Official (6), 3July 2013.

⁷⁴⁴ Chandrasekaran, 'Administration Is Keeping Ally at Arm's Length'.

Colombian government abandoned aerial eradication⁷⁴⁵ as the largest aerial spraying campaign (2006) had failed to reduce the expansion and increase of coca cultivation in 2007.⁷⁴⁶ As a British official commented: ‘it therefore, became very difficult for the Americans to claim this had been a success in Colombia as they had done previously.’⁷⁴⁷ Most importantly, however, was Afghan resistance to the issue. President Karzai was crucial in preventing the U.S. plans,⁷⁴⁸ and his opposition to the issue was bolstered by British support – who were after all, the designated international lead counter narcotics. It would have been politically unviable and extremely controversial for the Americans to override the Afghan government wishes given the drive to Afghanise policy. One official made a very interesting point concerning the dynamics of counter narcotics policy formulation in Afghanistan: ‘if you turn that around, if the U.S. had got Karzai’s support it would have become difficult for us to argue that you should not do it’.⁷⁴⁹ By December 2007, aerial eradication had been defeated; however, a spokesperson for the State Department said that America was still in discussions with the Afghan government over a plan to implement ground based spraying⁷⁵⁰ - this also was never implemented.

With the State Department’s aerial eradication plan dead in the water, Afghan and international efforts to make progress against the record crop would rely on manual eradication and the ability of provincial governors to implement an effective opium ban. The ability and ‘political will’ of the provincial governor was considered, particularly by the U.S., as an extremely important component in the application of a successful counter narcotics campaign – as reductions in other provinces of Afghanistan demonstrated⁷⁵¹ Notwithstanding, two provinces, would once again dominate the counter narcotics policy landscape: Helmand and Nangarhar. The latter had successfully implemented an opium prohibition during the 2004/2005 season but

⁷⁴⁵ Author Interview with British Official (5), 5 July 2013.

⁷⁴⁶ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 158.

⁷⁴⁷ Author Interview with British Official (5), 5 July 2013.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁰ Bawden, Anna. ‘US Backs Down Over Afghan Poppy Fields’, *The Guardian*, 7 December 2007.

⁷⁵¹ In 2007, Balkh was declared ‘poppy free’ and in Badakhshan opium cultivation reduced dramatically. Both reductions were attributed to a strong governor-led counter narcotics campaign Pain, Adam. ‘*Opium Poppy Strikes Back: The 2011 Return of Opium in Balkh and Badakhshan Provinces*’, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation unit (July 2011).

by 2007 opium cultivation rebounded in the province to 18,739 hectares.⁷⁵² Given the presence of a large contingent of American troops in Nangarhar, the United States had a vested interest in the successful application of an opium ban. The United States were aided in their quest by having the support of a willing partner in provincial Governor Gul Aga Shirzai. The governor proved to be firm supporter of counter narcotic measures in the knowledge that such support would increase his standing with the international community – as governors who oversaw reductions in opium cultivation were regarded as ‘good’ governors - and further his chances at career progression.⁷⁵³ As an outsider to the province, Shirzai’s ability to enforce the ban was completely contingent upon his relations with local powerbrokers in the local government and rural tribes. Since his arrival in 2005, the governor had cultivated connections with influential former mujahideen, businessmen and tribal elders⁷⁵⁴ which enabled him to negotiate a successful ban in 2007. The governor’s efforts were reinforced by the influx of American and Afghan troops to the province that year, as part of the broader counterinsurgency mission to reverse the gains of an insurgency in the ascendancy. By the end of 2007, the number of insurgent attacks totalled approximately 6,000, an increase from 4,542 in 2006 and 1,558 in 2005.⁷⁵⁵ The broader counter insurgency measures would have practical benefits for the implementation of the counter narcotics strategy; with an expansion of checkpoints and house searches projecting the authority of the government into rural spaces, which had hitherto, being ungoverned. The governor was also able to manipulate the perceptions of farmers by implying that U.S. forces were in the province for counter narcotics purposes not counterinsurgency ones.⁷⁵⁶ Accompanying the uptick in American forces was an increase in development aid to the province, delivered by both the military and USAID. Moreover, the development assistance started a several years previously was coming to fruition, with several roads providing good transport links to central markets. Lastly, opium prices plummeted to 1990s levels and food prices rose considerably raising concerns about food shortages.⁷⁵⁷ All of these factors coalesced to produce a successful reduction in opium cultivation in Nangarhar in the 2007/2008 season. Success was so pronounced, the UNODC declared the province

⁷⁵² Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 194.

⁷⁵³ Ibid. p. 197.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid. pp., 197-8.

⁷⁵⁵ Kirschke, ‘State Department Pushing Aerial Poppy Eradication in Afghanistan’.

⁷⁵⁶ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, pp., 200-1.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 199.

opium free in 2008.⁷⁵⁸ The reduction of opium cultivation in Nangarhar province reflected the national trend during the 2007/08 season. Throughout Afghanistan, opium cultivation declined 19 per cent to 153, 000 hectares and the number of poppy free provinces rose from 13 to 18.⁷⁵⁹ Helmand province stood in sharp contrast in Nangarhar, with opium cultivation rising to a record 103,500 hectares, which accounted for two-thirds (66%) of the total opium cultivated in Afghanistan.⁷⁶⁰

With the security situation deteriorating and opium cultivation rising unabated in Helmand, there were few positive developments for the Afghan government or international community. This was to change in March 2008 when a new governor was appointed.⁷⁶¹ Gulab Mangal, a technocrat with a proven record as governor, signalled from his first moments in office that he was committed to tackle the drug trade and drug barons that were ubiquitous in Helmand. The governor indicated that the importance of merging the counter narcotics effort with the overall counterinsurgency mission and reconstruction agenda. The governor with the help of his international advisors produced a counter narcotics strategy in July 2008 for the upcoming growing season. The strategy, which would come to be known as the 'Food Zone Program' (FZP), proscribed a variety of incentives and disincentives based around alternative livelihoods, beefed up interdiction and eradication and public awareness campaigns.⁷⁶² The FZP was designed to reduce opium cultivation within a targeted area within the central region of Helmand province – Lashkar Gah districts, Nad-i-Ali, Nawa Barakzai, Garmsir, Nahre Seraj districts, (and latterly) Musa Qala, Marjeh, Khan Nishin, Sangin, and Nawzad districts.⁷⁶³ The programmes objective was to deliver development aid, such as wheat seed⁷⁶⁴ and fertiliser in exchange for farmers consenting to halt opium production. Farmers were required to sign an agreement to this effect and those who broke it would be punished by eradication. The

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 201.

⁷⁵⁹ Samira Shackle, 'Helmand bucks Afghanistan trend with rise in opium production, says UN', *The Guardian*, 26 August 2008.

⁷⁶⁰ UNODC and Government of Afghanistan Ministry of Counternarcotics. 'Afghanistan Opium Survey: Summary Findings', (Vienna and Kabul, August 2008) p. 5.

⁷⁶¹ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p.251.

⁷⁶² Ibid. pp., 269-70.

⁷⁶³ David Mansfield, Alcis Ltd., and OSDR, *Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risks: Explaining the Reductions in Opium Production in Central Helmand between 2008 and 2011*, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation unit (August 2011) p. 18.

⁷⁶⁴ Alternatives to wheat seed have on occasion been available, such vegetable seeds, grape vine, saplings and fertilisers and polytunnles.

delivery of wheat seed was meant to transition farmers away from opium cultivation by offering an alternative form of income. During its first year the programme delivered wheat seed to 33,000 households. The programme provided farmers, who lived in the target area and were on the beneficiary list, with wheat seed at subsidised prices.⁷⁶⁵ Embraced by the British-led PRT and international community, the FZP provided a roadmap to address the significant quantities of opium cultivation in Helmand province. The governor also fully embraced the programme and demonstrated significant commitment in the successful application of the programme – this commitment was not always present with previous Helmand governors. Despite the governors willingness to address the drug industry, Governor Mangal's hold on power was precarious – the governor, unlike several of his predecessors was not personally close to President Karzai – and he knew if he were able to demonstrate significant progress on counter narcotics it would help to bolster his position as governor with the British and American governments. President Karzai equated the rising violence in the province to the dismissal of former governor Sher Mohammed Akhundzada, at the British request in 2005. President Karzai favoured returning Akhundzada to the governorship at Mangal's expense but British and American support for the latter made this politically difficult.

Helmand, like Nangarhar, became the focus of international attention during the 2007/08 opium season. The province was the epicentre of both a resurgent insurgency and the largest area of opium cultivation in the world. The lack of significant progress in both areas brought the British effort into serious question given the UK military was heading the reconstruction effort in the province whilst the UK government was simultaneously holding 'partner nation' status on counter narcotics. By this time it was well established that the British military had failed in Basra, therefore, success in Helmand took on another level of importance to restore British pride and competence in the eyes of the United States.⁷⁶⁶

To address these problems the level of international commitment to the province increased substantially during 2008. British troop numbers increased to

⁷⁶⁵ Mansfield, Alcis, and OSDR, *Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risks* p. 19.

⁷⁶⁶ Theo, Farrell, F. Osinga, and J. Russell, *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan* (California, 2013), pp., 121-122.

8,500, with the deployment of a further 500 armoured patrol vehicles. The increase in military resources was matched by an increase in civilian staff with the number rising to 80 by 2009. The United States also deployed additional troops to the province in April 2008 to support their British counterparts.⁷⁶⁷

This period also witnessed an evolution in tactics by the British military; the focus shifted from operations based on hard military power designed to decimate the insurgency to reconstruction activities – one of the original stated aims of British involvement in the province.⁷⁶⁸ 52 Infantry Brigade first developed this shift in tactics, which focused on a ‘population-centric approach’, this style was continued with the arrival 16 Air Assault Brigade in April 2008.⁷⁶⁹ The units aimed to effect the local population winning their consent whilst at the same time undermining the Taliban’s sphere of influence. They also endeavoured to reduce violence and minimise civilian casualties and displacement when engaging Taliban forces – or if possible, avoid large-scale engagement with Taliban forces.⁷⁷⁰ Another important change in the British operational approach was a concentration of forces in central Helmand – the area originally earmarked for deployment in Spring 2006 - as opposed a focus on northern and southern Helmand.⁷⁷¹ This change in direction was implemented by the newly installed 3 Commando Brigade during the later part of 2008. Despite these positive developments, British efforts in the province were criticised by the Afghan government and by their transatlantic partner. The Afghan Foreign minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta complained to Ambassador William Wood in November 2008 that the British were not as effective as American troops and questioned their ‘will’ to fight.⁷⁷² The following month President Karzai shared this view when he met with senators John McCain, Joe Lieberman and Lindsey Graham. The President recounted a woman asking him to ‘take the British away and give us back the Americans’.⁷⁷³ The President told senator McCain that he was grateful

⁷⁶⁷ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 258.

⁷⁶⁸ Martin, *An Intimate War*, p. 175.

⁷⁶⁹ Farrell, Osinga, and Russell, *Military Adaptation in Afghanistan*, pp., 113-114.

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid.* pp., 114-115.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 118.

⁷⁷² Assinder, Nick. ‘WikiLeaks: U.S. Criticized British Troops on Afghanistan’, *Time Magazine*, 3 December 2010.

⁷⁷³ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 206-207.

American Marines were being sent to Helmand.⁷⁷⁴ William Wood was even more forceful in his criticism stating in a cable ‘we and Karzai agree that the British are not up to the task of securing Helmand’.⁷⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the refocusing on central Helmand and deployment of additional resources was designed to stall a resurgent Taliban, but as the conflict deepened there was recognition within the British government that success in the counterinsurgency campaign took precedence over success in counter narcotics.

De-prioritisation of Counter narcotics

By late 2008 early 2009, counter narcotics had slipped down the agenda of the United Kingdom, as a former British official noted: ‘I think there’s no question the priority of counter narcotics declined for the UK...by...2008...counter narcotics had gone from being one of our top priorities to be in Afghanistan to definitely and pretty explicitly a second order priority for us’.⁷⁷⁶ The major reason for this shift in priorities was the UK’s deployment to Helmand. A British Defence Committee Report warned prior to deployment in 2006, ‘There is a fundamental tension between the UK’s objective of promoting stability and security and its aim of implementing an effective counter-narcotics strategy’.⁷⁷⁷ As the conflict intensified between 2006-08, there was recognition that Afghanistan had moved to full-scale war, and the British military were stationed in one of Afghanistan’s most troublesome provinces. The immediate objective, therefore became to quell the rising violence in Helmand and minimise British casualties. A British official commented: ‘When we deployed to Helmand in large numbers, the most important objective in Afghanistan became to limit the damage to UK forces...and the goal of aggressively pursuing a counter narcotics effort was inconsistent with that.’⁷⁷⁸ During the first two years of deployment to Helmand province the undermanned and under-resourced British forces were pinned back by a resurgent insurgency, leaving little time or resources to focus on their original tasks of reconstruction. So much so, the UK’s initial reconstruction budget

⁷⁷⁴ Assinder, ‘WikiLeaks: U.S. Criticized British Troops on Afghanistan’.

⁷⁷⁵ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 207.

⁷⁷⁶ Author interview with British Official (5), 13 June 2013.

⁷⁷⁷ House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee, ‘Foreign Policy Aspects of the War Against Terrorism, Fourth Report of Session 2005-06 p. 139.

⁷⁷⁸ Author Interview with British Official (8), 4th August 2014.

that totalled \$51 million had to be reduced and the focused primarily on areas close to the provincial capital Lashkar Gah. This period has been characterised as ‘18 months of strategic drift’.⁷⁷⁹ This inevitably had an impact on resources and focus, as the official further comments:

We had...a lot of buying resources; human intelligence...satellites that pick up phone calls can only focus on a certain number of targets. So intelligence resources were one thing that were moved onto the protection of British forces rather than focusing big drug barons. Programme funds were less so...we built the capacity of a high-end special counter narcotics force, which was increasingly, used for general counterinsurgency aims rather than purely...counter narcotics ones.⁷⁸⁰

Furthermore, there was a recognition from the British government - after deploying to Helmand - that the drugs problem was more serious than first imagined and that the drug industry was a symptom of the disorder not the cause and without tackling the insurgency, security situation, rural economy, rule of law, corruption and governance a solution to the opium problem would be unachievable. This recognition led to a reordering of priorities. As a former British official stated dealing with counter narcotics ‘might shift the furniture around but we wouldn’t really deal with the fundamental problem’.⁷⁸¹ The shift in policy was initially, more of an informal recognition that it would be vital to succeed in Helmand first before any progress could be made with counter narcotics rather than a formalised policy change. A British official commented that the de-emphasization of counter narcotics was: ‘informal; you would never get a document that set out the priorities like that. You can just infer it from the way that scarce resources are allocated between different parts’.⁷⁸² A subsidiary factor that contributed to the de-emphasization of counter narcotics was No. 10’s decreased interest in counter narcotics activity when Gordon Brown replaced Tony Blair as Prime Minister. This is not to say that Gordon Brown

⁷⁷⁹ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 258.

⁷⁸⁰ Author Interview with British Official (8), 4th August 2014.

⁷⁸¹ Author Interview with British Official (6), 3 July 2013.

⁷⁸² Author Interview with British Official (8), 4th August 2014.

was not concerned about making progress against the Afghan drugs trade but he did not exhibit the same zeal as Tony Blair. Tony Blair had after all, made counter narcotics the number two priority of the UK in Afghanistan during his tenure and was ‘personally invested’ in the counter narcotics mission.⁷⁸³ Gordon Brown, however, was more focused on the Afghan mission in a broader sense as opposed to counter narcotics as a specific priority. As two former British officials noted the Prime Ministers views and ambitions, were highly influential on what ‘officials thought’.⁷⁸⁴ An official offered further explanation ‘to some degree, that’s what civil servants are called to do...they may decide on [policy after] the prime minister tells them [his views], so to some degree that is not necessarily that surprising that people’s view changed when the prime minister’s view changed’.⁷⁸⁵ Moreover, with the ministerial focus drifting from counter narcotics, it gave those who opposed counter narcotics originally an opportunity to become more vocal in their criticism of the UK’s role as G8 ‘lead nation’. There was always criticism present regarding counter narcotics policy throughout Tony Blair’s tenure, particularly but not exclusively from the military. However, any such criticism failed to win the debate because of the PM’s personal investment in counter narcotics.⁷⁸⁶

Additionally, as the years and campaign progressed a more holistic view governed the reconstruction of agenda of Afghanistan, with counter narcotics being incorporated into the broader reconstruction framework.⁷⁸⁷ As the UK shifted focus in Afghanistan, U.S. officials expressed doubts about Gordon Brown’s leadership credentials. U.S. London Embassy cables revealed that officials considered the Prime Minister to have an ‘abysmal track record’ and he lurched from ‘political disaster to political disaster’. The cables further predicted Brown’s tenure, as Labour leader would be short-lived. In the year since Brown became leader, the broader Anglo-American relationship had altered. The PM had wanted to distance himself from the closeness of his predecessor’s relationship with Bush but he failed to do so successfully, instead he alienated himself from Bush and his officials. American officials on both sides of the Atlantic had from the moment Brown assumed office,

⁷⁸³ Author interview with British Official (5), 22 October 2014.

⁷⁸⁴ Author interviews with British Official (5), 22 October 2014 and British Official (14) 27 April 2015.

⁷⁸⁵ Author interview with British Official (5), 22 October 2014.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁷ Author interview with British Official (7), 21 February 2014.

questioned his suitability and noted that the Labour ‘party seemed increasingly to miss Blair’s charisma’.⁷⁸⁸

Meanwhile, in the United States, there was a greater acknowledgment by the Pentagon that the drug-insurgency nexus existed and action should be taken against it. Several factors facilitated this shift in policy. Firstly, Donald Rumsfeld’s departure as Secretary of Defense removed one of the greatest obstacles to this theory gaining traction in the Pentagon. The theory had, by 2008, risen up the policy agenda, with its supporters claiming greater evidence of its existence. A Department of State, Office of Inspector General report stated that the ‘links between poppy cultivation, the resulting narcotics trade, and funding of insurgency groups became more evident in 2008’.⁷⁸⁹ This view was supplemented by the UNODC’s 2008 annual survey, which stated: ‘98 per cent of all of Afghanistan’s opium is grown in just seven provinces in the south-west (Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Farah, Nimroz, and to a lesser extent Daykundi and Zabul), where there are permanent Taliban settlements, and where organized crime groups profit from the instability’.⁷⁹⁰ Donald Rumsfeld’s successor Robert Gates placed more veracity in these arguments and contended: ‘if we have the opportunity to go after drug lords and drug laboratories and try to interrupt this flow of cash to the Taliban, that seems to me like a legitimate security endeavour’.⁷⁹¹ These developments led to NATO authorising ISAF forces to take action against insurgency-linked narcotics targets at an Alliance meeting October 2008⁷⁹² in Bucharest. Secretary of Defense Gates was described as ‘extremely pleased that...NATO has decided to allow ISAF forces to take on the drug traffickers who are fuelling the insurgency, stabilizing Afghanistan, and killing our troops’.⁷⁹³ This was

⁷⁸⁸ Nicholas Watt, ‘WikiLeaks Cables: Gordon Brown an ‘abysmal’ Prime Minister’, *The Guardian*, 2 December 2010

⁷⁸⁹ Department of State, Inspector General ‘Status of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs Counternarcotics Programs in Afghanistan’, Performance Audit Report Number MERO-A-10-02, December 2009, p. 12.

⁷⁹⁰ UNODC and Government of Afghanistan Ministry of Counternarcotics. ‘Afghanistan Opium Survey: Summary Findings’, (Vienna and Kabul, August 2008), p. vii.

⁷⁹¹ Julian Borger and Richard Norton-Taylor, ‘US faces downward spiral in Afghan war, says leaked intelligence report’, *The Guardian*, 10 October 2008.

⁷⁹² Blanchard, Christopher M., ‘*Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy*’, Congressional Research Service, Report RL32686, (21 April 2009), p.15.

⁷⁹³ *Ibid.*

followed by a change in U.S. policy in December 2008 or early 2009,⁷⁹⁴ as the Defense Department altered its rules of engagement permitting the military's involvement in counter narcotics missions and the targeting of drug traffickers who provided the insurgency with material support.⁷⁹⁵ The next chapter will examine how the United States counter narcotics strategy would also undergo major revision under the incoming Obama administration in 2009.

CONCLUSION

As NATO expanded their stabilisation mission to Afghanistan's western and southern provinces, the alliance quickly found itself embattled by a resurgent Taliban and dragged into a full-scale conflict. The undermanned and under-resourced British military responsible for Helmand province, was ill equipped to deal with the intensity of the insurgency. Consequently, the original mission of reconstruction and peacekeeping was abandoned as the UK struggled to regain control of the province. The deployment to Helmand and the challenges that the UK military faced led to an escalation of the internal struggle between the military and officials at ADIDU over counter narcotics that had been present since the beginning of the campaign. The reluctance of the military to deal in counter narcotics was brought into sharp focus after gaining responsibility for Afghanistan's opium capital. Convinced that aggressive counter narcotics measures would increase the level of danger to British troops, the military were unenthusiastic for eradication to take place.

At the same time a strand of narrative began to gain traction in INL and the UNODC and this view would shape their interpretation of the drug problem. The view dictated that a drug-terrorist network was forming in Afghanistan, as had been the case in Colombia, and the best way to deal with this nexus was by employing aerial eradication to bankrupt the insurgency. With eradication forming the main component of the United States counter narcotics campaign, officials from the White House and Congress demanded significant progress on eradication to curb record levels of opium cultivation. As the drive for eradication emanating in Washington

⁷⁹⁴ It is unclear whether the Pentagon changed their rule of engagement in December 2008 as noted in <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32686.pdf> or in early 2009 cited in Committee on Foreign Relations, *'Afghanistan's Narco War'*, p. 1.

⁷⁹⁵ Committee on Foreign Relations, *'Afghanistan's Narco War'*, p. 1.

intensified, officials at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul were under increasing pressure to cajole their British and Afghan allies into agreeing to more eradication – something both objected to – to quell domestic political realities. Record levels of opium cultivation in 2006 and 2007 strengthen the arguments of those who advocated aerial eradication. As State Department officials contended to their British allies: we have tried your approach and it has failed. It was not only British officials resisting the State Departments attempts to introduce aerial eradication but both American officials in Kabul and the Pentagon continued to object to its introduction. This staunch resistance led to alternative policies being proposed. With pressure mounting on ADIDU from Tony Blair’s office and Washington to agree to some form of aerial eradication, officials at ADIDU conceded and supported the introduction of GBS as an alternative to aerial eradication. The British, concerned by the aggressiveness of the approach advocated by the State Department and White House officials sought to temper bad policy⁷⁹⁶ and support the least harmful strategy in the hope it would postpone or eliminate aerial eradication. However, even spraying from the ground was deemed to politically dangerous by the Afghan government and not suitable for the rugged farmland.

Predictions of another record opium crop in 2007 pushed the issue of aerial eradication up the American agenda. This resulted in Tom Schweich being appointed to head an interagency team to revise the American counter narcotics strategy. Along with the newly appointed American Ambassador to Kabul, William Wood, both actors ensured a crescendo of peak pressure to force both the British and Afghan government to agree to aerial spraying. British counter narcotics and diplomatic officials contended that a large proportion of their interactions with State Department and White House officials during this period centred on trying to stop the United States implementing aerial eradication. At the same time those who supported aerial eradication began gaining traction in the White House with President Bush supportive of the policy. Such was the concern in Washington regarding the unprecedented volumes of opium cultivation and its effect on the Afghan State building project, subsequently, the Bush NSC approved the introduction of aerial eradication. Despite consensus being reached within the White House over the issue, other actors would

⁷⁹⁶ Author interview with British Official (10), 23 September 2014.

fight to keep aerial eradication off the policy agenda. The Pentagon, had previously sought to derail the plan by informing the British that the American administration aimed to force aerial eradication into policy by coercing President Karzai to agree, then using Karzai's agreement to force the UK to approve the policy. The British armed with this information made it clear to President Karzai that the UK would support the Afghan government in rejecting the proposal. The Pentagon had, remarkably, used an outside agency to help kill off the State Department and White House policy. The British were only too willing to participate in this political skulduggery to kill off aerial eradication once and for all. The proposal ultimately was defeated by a number of factors. The United States administration remained divided over the issue, with the Pentagon consistently arguing against the introduction of aerial eradication. This lack of unity weakened the State Department and White House's case by allowing British and Afghan officials to use the disunity as a reason not to support the policy. It was not only the Pentagon, the State Department, the White House and British who were fighting over the issue, no other NATO ally supported aerial eradication. Just at the point the issue peaked, the Colombian government abandoned the proposal, further weakening the argument of the State Department that aerial eradication was successful. Supported by the United Kingdom, Afghanistan was the strongest opponent of the policy. As the move to Afghanise policies intensified the ability of the United States to implement a controversial policy diminished. The issue of forced eradication would not completely vanish in the coming years. As the Obama administration came to power, the United States counter narcotics strategy was revised and American support for forced eradication lessened significantly.

By 2008/09 counter insurgency had replaced counter narcotics as Britain's priority mission in Afghanistan. With security deteriorating in Helmand the focus became on protecting British soldiers and quelling the violence. The British government did not have the resources or manpower to concentrate on both the counterinsurgency campaign and counter narcotics with equal intensity. There was also recognition that for effective counter narcotics measures to be successful it would require progress in many overlapping areas: security, economic development, governance and stability. Therefore, an informal policy decision was taken to de-

emphasis counter narcotics to concentrate on getting Helmand ‘right’.⁷⁹⁷ Part of this decision was driven by the new Prime Minister’s apathy to counter narcotics as one of the UK’s main strategic priorities in Afghanistan. As the UK’s focus on counter narcotics shifted, so did the emphasis Gordon Brown placed on maintaining close personal relations with his American counterpart. The arrival of President Obama did little to improve these developments.

⁷⁹⁷ Author Interview with British Official (8), 4th August 2014.

CHAPTER SIX

A Re-evaluation of the Afghan Conflict and Counter narcotics Strategy under the Obama Administration and Re-defined Anglo-American Relations 2009-2011

INTRODUCTION

Several problems confronted the United States in Afghanistan as Obama came into office: all hinged on the fact that the situation remained unresolved and was deteriorating. For several years, the insurgency had intensified its efforts in the south, east and north of the country and the military proved incapable of significantly halting their progress. Insecurity had reached levels not seen since 2001 and in the summer of 2008 security incidents doubled to 200 a month in the south alone. Governance was becoming progressively worse with corruption endemic throughout all levels of society. Opium cultivation had reached a record high and the illegal narcotic trade was fuelling corruption, undermining governance and was of financial benefit to the insurgency. Contributing to these problems was the lack of resources dedicated to the Afghan conflict by the Bush administration; 38,000 American troops and 29,000 NATO troops were deployed to Afghanistan, compared to 150,000 troops in Iraq. The first problem confronting Obama had a clear political dimension, but it would also impact on strategy choices. This was, namely, decisions regarding the volume of available resources and troop levels to be authorised. The second problem concerned the leadership in Afghanistan and actual strategies to be employed. These were primarily military issues, but they were also affected by politics in terms of resource decisions and the choice of commanders to be assigned to Afghanistan. American policy in Afghanistan, therefore, underwent revision as the Obama administration reassessed both strategy and resources. The review impacted both the broader strategic goals for Afghanistan and the counter narcotics campaign and thrust the province of Helmand even more emphatically into the centre of Anglo-American policies.

The arrival of the Obama administration ushered in a new chapter in Anglo-American relations. From the outset the British anticipated that they would continue their position as the U.S.'s most valued and trusted ally and exert continuing influence over the new administration's Afghan policy. British Ambassador Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles commented: 'we soon concluded that our best bet was to seek to influence the incoming U.S. administration, which seemed almost bound to be

Democratic, and more open to reason on Afghanistan than Bush was'.⁷⁹⁸ Relations between the Anglo-American allies had cooled somewhat after Gordon Brown replaced Tony Blair as Prime Minister and this was followed by a further recalibration of relations after Obama replaced Bush as President. Partly this was because Barack Obama and Gordon Brown did not share the same close personal relationship and personal investment in the conflict as their predecessors had. Furthermore, decisions at the strategic level were now conducted through both countries Special Representatives for Afghanistan and Pakistan as opposed to at President-Prime Minister level.

As part of the review process, the Obama administration re-evaluated, what had been without doubt, the unsuccessful counter narcotics policies during the Bush administration. Opium cultivation had expanded to unprecedented levels increasing from 74,045 hectares in 2002⁷⁹⁹ to a peak of 193,000 hectares in 2007.⁸⁰⁰ Since 2004, the State Department backed by the White House, had championed an aggressive eradication campaign, which brought them into conflict with the Pentagon and other power groups in Washington as well as their British and Afghan allies. The Obama administration initiated a new strategy to deal with the narcotics industry and it appeared at first glance like a radical departure from the Bush administration's line involving a rather ironic shift of emphasis and this shift directly impacted on Anglo-American counter narcotics relations. The Americans moved sharply away from eradication and in fact too sharply for many British officials who wanted to maintain an eradication policy, but not one as aggressive as the previous U.S. policy or as passive as the new one. Notwithstanding these differences, the outcome was that the British and Americans actually moved closer together on counter narcotics policies and there was greater harmonisation as the bitter diplomatic exchanges experienced under the Bush administration dissipated.

The period (2009-11) saw a sustained reduction in the levels of opium cultivation – although not uniformly across all areas. But once again the picture was complex and what was not automatically apparent was if this was the result of a

⁷⁹⁸ Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 179.

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 290.

⁸⁰⁰ UNODC and Government of Afghanistan Ministry of Counternarcotics. 'Afghanistan Opium Survey: Summary Findings', (Vienna and Kabul, August 2007), p. iv.

successful counter narcotics strategy, external factors or a combination of both. Despite what appeared to be a successful counter narcotics campaign, the United Kingdom's counter narcotics strategy underwent revision during this period. Faced with a complicated mission in Helmand, which was constrained by inadequate resources and the stark reality of how long a successful counter narcotics campaign would take, the British government was forced to re-evaluate its goals and priorities in Afghanistan.

With both the focus of the U.S. and UK firmly on Helmand, new opportunities and problems were created for the partners. Military cooperation increased as UK and U.S. forces launched joint operations against the insurgents to improve security. However, American Marines criticised what they saw as a British policy of appeasement, which allowed insurgents to operate freely close to district centres. Moreover, outnumbered by 20,000 United States Marines, the United Kingdom would lose its role as the lead decision maker in the province. By 2009, war-weary British officials were looking to pull back on their commitment in Afghanistan and the arrival of the Marines facilitated this move.

THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION'S FIRST AFGHANISTAN REVIEW

After playing a central focus in his election campaign, President Obama sought to positively redefine the United States engagement in Afghanistan by refocusing policy and resources from Iraq to Afghanistan. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen conceded the war effort under the Bush administration had been under-resourced, conducted with no real direction and to be successful required an injection of resources and manpower.⁸⁰¹ Before any decision was taken on strategy or resources the President announced the appointment of veteran diplomat Richard Holbrooke, as Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAP).⁸⁰² Holbrooke would hold considerable sway over the decision-making process and prove influential over U.S. counter narcotics strategy. The United Kingdom followed the United States lead and appointed a Special Representative - who would act as

⁸⁰¹ Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars: The Inside Story* (London, 2010), p. 34.

⁸⁰² Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 206.

Holbrooke's British equivalent. The man assigned to this task was the incumbent British Ambassador to Kabul, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles.⁸⁰³

Reacting to the worsening security environment, General David McKiernan Commander of ISAF, petitioned President Bush towards the end of his second term to deploy an additional 30,000 American troops to quell the violence. Given the politically sensitive nature of the request and the limited time left of his term, President Bush opted to leave the decision to the incoming Democratic Administration. President Obama campaigned to send more troops to Afghanistan during the presidential election but wanted to contextualise any troop deployment in a broader strategy for the war, and argued the 'ultimate strategy must explain the logic for adding more troops'.⁸⁰⁴ President Obama commissioned Bruce Riedel, a former CIA official and academic at the Brookings Institute - whose expertise included Islamic extremism, Afghanistan and Pakistan - to conduct a 60-day strategic review of U.S. policy in Afghanistan.⁸⁰⁵ As the Obama administration reviewed its Afghanistan strategy, the United Kingdom sought to continue close coordination with its transatlantic partner and attempted to influence the review process.

Former Special Representative Cowper-Coles reflected that his 'first, and overriding priority' at this time was to influence Richard Holbrooke and the Obama administration's thinking on Afghanistan. This would involve numerous visits to the United States and European capitals to meet with Holbrooke and other important figures in this embryonic stage of Obama's planning for Afghanistan. Among those that Cowper-Coles and his aide Foreign Office Political Director Sir Adam Thomson met with was Professor Barney Rubin of New York University. Rubin a distinguished Afghan expert was a close confidant of Holbrooke and was responsible for shaping the American Special Representative's thinking - especially on counter narcotics policies. Cowper-Coles wanted to impress on his American counterparts that improving governance at national, (and in particular) provincial and district level - where the fight against the insurgency was most critical - and improving coordination with Afghanistan's regional partners was vital to success. Cowper-Coles engaged in a

⁸⁰³ Ibid. pp. 204.

⁸⁰⁴ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 80.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid. pp. 88.

series of meetings, and written communication with his American counterparts to further his objectives. He wanted to: ‘persuade [the] Obama administration...to adopt a more political approach to Afghanistan. Just plunging on with a strategy of pouring in more troops and more money, without doing something about governance and about the political offer to the Afghan people, and something to engage the regional players, was a recipe for eventual failure’. The British Special Representative also briefed Ministers and officials before verbal and written interaction with United States officials but he struggled to persuade even them: ‘seldom if ever did we get much by the way of reaction or reply’.⁸⁰⁶ Cowper-Coles struggled to convince both British and U.S. officials of his position, was symptomatic of a broader shift in relations. Firstly, the close personal connection that characterised the Anglo-American alliance under the leadership of George Bush and Tony Blair faded as Gordon Brown assumed office. Relations became even cooler after Obama became President and several issues - unrelated to the war in Afghanistan but - made the new relationship tense, namely, a divergence of views over the BP oil spill and the release of the Lockerbie bomber. Further complicating matters was several public relations disasters (again not directly related to the conflict) at a series of high-profile meetings during 2009.⁸⁰⁷ The UK would, naturally, remain the U.S.’s closest partner in the conflict but the special relationship was far more muted than had previously been the case. Secondly, Gordon Brown and Barack Obama were far less personally invested in the Afghan campaign than their predecessors and left much of the strategic relationship to their respective SRAPs.⁸⁰⁸

Before the Riedel review was complete Admiral Mike Mullen advised President Obama’s team if General McKiernan’s troop request was not fulfilled, the 2009 Afghan Presidential Elections would be in peril of being cancelled due to lack of security because Afghan forces would be unable to contain the predicted disruptive and violent tactics of the Taliban. Both President Obama and Bruce Riedel accepted the argument that without more troops the election would be jeopardized. On the 17

⁸⁰⁶ Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 219.

⁸⁰⁷ The president made negative remarks about the Prime Minister’s conduct with his underlings at the G-20 London summit in April 2009. In September 2009, Brown had ‘virtually stalked’ Obama in the United Nations building in New York, eventually accosting him in the kitchen. John Dumbrell, ‘David Cameron, Barack Obama, and the “US-UK Special Relationship”’, *LSE Blog*, 14 March 2012, (available at: <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/special-relationship-dumbrell/>).

⁸⁰⁸ Author interview with British Official (14), 27 April 2015.

February 2009, President Obama announced 17,000 new troops would be deployed to Afghanistan.⁸⁰⁹ The President later endorsed sending a further 4,000 extra troops to train the Afghan National Army (ANA) coupled with another 10,000 deployment later in the year, which would satisfy General McKiernan's overall troop request. Of the original 17,000, the first 8,000 Marines were sent to rural Helmand. Accompanying the increase in U.S. military personnel would be a substantial increase in civilian officials from State Department, USAID, DOJ, FBI, the Departments of Agriculture, Treasury, Homeland Security (DHS), Transportation, and Health and Human Services, as well as the Federal Aviation Administration and DEA.⁸¹⁰

The Riedel review concluded it was essential for the United States to reorient policy towards both Afghanistan and Pakistan (AfPak) - as Pakistan harboured and enabled extremists who were active in Afghanistan. The review ascertained it was imperative to eventually defeat al-Qaeda and their extremist brethren and reverse the Taliban momentum within a year.⁸¹¹ It further stated the U.S. should execute and resource an integrated civilian-military counterinsurgency strategy.⁸¹² According to the review, the United States would need to improve governance and cut back on corruption, provide more troops to train the Afghan National Police (ANP) and ANA, and provide resources for the civilian effort.⁸¹³ On the 27th March 2009, President Obama spoke in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building outlining his vision for the conflict in Afghanistan: 'we have a clear and focused goal: to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country... To succeed...we must reverse the Taliban's gains, and promote a more capable and accountable Afghan government.'⁸¹⁴

During his speech, the President also identified the destabilising effect the drug industry had on Afghanistan, 'Afghanistan has an elected government, but it is undermined by corruption...the economy is undercut by a booming narcotics trade

⁸⁰⁹ Remarks by the President, White House, 17 February 2009.

⁸¹⁰ Ambassador Eikenberry, 'Scenesetter For Codel Langevin', Wikileaks cable: 09KABUL1321

⁸¹¹ Ibid., p. 107.

⁸¹² Ibid., p.99.

⁸¹³ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 51.

⁸¹⁴ Remarks by the President, 'On a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan', White House, 27 March 2009.

that encourages criminality and funds the insurgency'.⁸¹⁵ As part of the strategic review process, the Bush administration's counter narcotics policies also underwent re-evaluation. Given unprecedented levels of opium cultivation since the fall of the Taliban it was evident that despite spending \$2.5 billion on counter narcotics the Bush administration had failed to stem the tide of opium cultivation or address the pervasive effects the illegal narcotic industry had on good governance, government related corruption and the overall stabilization project. One of the most outspoken critics since 2006 of the previous administrations record on counter narcotics was Richard Holbrooke.⁸¹⁶ Speaking at a conference in Brussels in March 2009, Holbrooke stated that: the Bush administration's counter narcotics and Alternative Livelihoods policies, which totalled \$3 billion from 2005 to 2008,⁸¹⁷ '[was] the most wasteful and ineffective programme I've seen in over 40 years in and out of the government'.⁸¹⁸ Moreover, Holbrooke indicated that the contentious practise of eradication was not effective policy and proved counterproductive to 'winning the hearts and minds' of farmers:

It is true that some [hectareage of the] opium crop has been destroyed, but it hasn't hurt the Taliban one iota because whatever money they're getting from the drug trade, they get whatever they need whether we reduce the acreage or not and by forced eradication we're often pushing farmers into the Taliban hands.⁸¹⁹

The Riedel review concluded that a key objective of the new strategy was to break the link between narcotics and the insurgency; as narcotics was inextricably connected to the insurgency as well as driving corruption and distorting the legal economy. To accomplish this the administration aimed to improve agricultural development, which it complained had been neglected under the Bush administration. 'Crop substitution and alternative livelihood programs that are a key pillar of effectively countering narcotics have been disastrously underdeveloped and under-resourced'. The interagency White Paper argued that 'in a country that is 70 per cent

⁸¹⁵ Ibid.

⁸¹⁶ Richard Holbrooke, 'Afghanistan: the Long Road Ahead', *The Washington Post*, 2 April 2006

⁸¹⁷ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 107.

⁸¹⁸ 'Afghanistan and Pakistan: What Will it Take to Get it Right?' The German Marshall Fund of the United States Conference, Brussels Form, (21 March 2009).

⁸¹⁹ Ibid.

rural, and where the Taliban recruiting base is primarily among under-employed youths, a complete overhaul of our civilian assistance strategy is necessary; agricultural sector job creation is an essential first step to undercutting the appeal of al Qaeda and its allies'. Moreover, the review indicated that interdiction operations against narco-traffickers rather than eradication would become the focus of American law enforcement activities against the drug trade.⁸²⁰ Counter narcotics would be integrated into the broader counterinsurgency framework and there would be a stronger focus on the drug-insurgency nexus. The new strategy was designed to incorporate economic development – partly to reduce the economic importance of the illegal narcotics trade - and governance to support the security gains. The points espoused in the Riedel Review and the views shared by Holbrooke (Holbrooke was the co-chair of Riedel Review committee)⁸²¹ would provide the framework for the forthcoming United States counter narcotics strategy. The President concluded by warning the United States commitment would not be indefinite and progress would be measured:

We will not blindly stay the course. Instead, we will set clear metrics to measure progress and hold ourselves accountable. We'll consistently assess our efforts to train Afghan security forces and our progress in combating insurgents. We will measure the growth of Afghanistan's economy, and its illicit narcotics production.⁸²²

Meanwhile, at the Pentagon, there was growing scepticism among the upper echelons that General McKiernan was the correct man to lead the Afghanistan mission.⁸²³ Shortly after the deployment of 21,000 troops had been authorised, Secretary of Defense Gates replaced General McKiernan with General Stanley McChrystal a general both men believed could successfully implement and request resources for a COIN strategy. McChrystal had forged his reputation, as the head of the U.S.'s military's secretive Special Operations unit, which had been employed

⁸²⁰ The United States, White Paper of the Interagency Policy Group's Report on U.S. Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan (2009).

⁸²¹ Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, p. 90.

⁸²² Remarks by the President, '*On a New Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan*'.

⁸²³ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 52.

during the Iraq conflict. The arrival of General McChrystal as leader of the Afghan campaign prompted debate concerning the wisdom of deploying the initial marine brigade to Helmand instead of – as some thought the more strategic province - Kandahar. However, it was decided it was not politically tenable to re-route the brigade. General McKiernan, on the advice of his subordinate officers chose to send the troops to Helmand not Kandahar for several reasons. Most importantly, the American General did not want to offend and embarrass his Canadian counterparts by sending an influx of troops into the province under their control. General McKiernan and his officers were also warned by Afghan officials that given the cultural and religious significance of Kandahar, a massive presence of foreign troops would not be prudent. In addition, Helmand was highlighted as the province in which the Taliban was most active and it was also the poppy capital of Afghanistan.⁸²⁴ Thus, while General McKiernan had been removed his plan remained.⁸²⁵

During his confirmation hearing General McChrystal had indicated that the additional 21,000 commissioned for deployment by President Obama three months previously may not prove adequate to reverse the gains of a growing insurgency. By saying this, General McChrystal indicated that the Pentagon had begun another round of lobbying for more troops. This was actually in contradiction of an existing internal agreement, which forbade the Pentagon requesting more troops for twelve months. To prevent political fallout between the White House and Pentagon over a new request for troops so soon after the Riedel Review, General McChrystal was instructed to conduct his own ‘60-day initial assessment’ of the war. This would allow General McChrystal to evaluate both strategy and current troops levels and effectively challenge the existing agreement on no further troop deployment.⁸²⁶

DESIGN AND GOALS OF THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION’S NEW COUNTER NARCOTICS STRATEGY (JUNE 2009)

SRAP Holbrooke crystallised the blueprint for the United States new Counter Narcotics strategy during remarks made to a House of Representatives Committee on

⁸²⁴ Ibid., pp. 62-63.

⁸²⁵ Woodward, *Obama’s Wars*, p. 120.

⁸²⁶ Ibid., pp. 123-4.

Oversight and Government Reform in June 2009 and comments made several days later at a G8 meeting in Italy. The Special Representatives statements developed the points made in the Interagency White Paper three months previously. The new strategy would not be finalised into a policy document until March 2010;⁸²⁷ but in essence, the strategy contained three main points: to break the narco-insurgent nexus by refocusing interdiction of big drug lords; increase assistance to farmers and integrate alternative development programmes into general agricultural assistance and de-emphasis eradication.⁸²⁸ Unlike previous policies the new strategy recognized and attempted to address the link between counter narcotics and counterinsurgency, and the wider process of stabilization, economic policy and rule of law efforts in Afghanistan.⁸²⁹ Speaking before the House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, SPRAP Holbrooke commented:

If I had to give a headline, I would say, a massive increase in agriculture and a continued focus on stopping the drug trade. But within that...we are downgrading our efforts to eradicate crops...a policy we think was totally ineffectual...but we are going to increase efforts on interdiction and going after the drug lords. So we are not downgrading narcotics. We are downgrading crop eradication and upgrading agriculture.⁸³⁰

Ostensibly, the most dramatic shift in counter narcotics policy under the Obama administration was to ‘down-grade’⁸³¹ forced eradication and defund the Centrally Led Eradication Unit; the picture, however, was more nuanced, with a variety of actors adopting various positions regarding widespread forced eradication.

⁸²⁷ The official *U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan* Document would not be finalised and published until March 2010 but would be constructed around the concepts developed in the Riedel Review and comments made by Richard Holbrooke during March-June 2009.

⁸²⁸ Report to Congressional Addressees United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) Afghanistan Drug Control ‘*Strategy Evolving and Progress Reported but Interim Performance Targets and Evaluation of Justice Reform Efforts Needed*’, (March 2010), p. 10.

⁸²⁹ Vanda Felbab-Brown, Afghanistan Trip Report VI: *Counternarcotics Policy in Afghanistan: A Good Strategy Poorly Implemented*, (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 10 May 2012), p. 1.

⁸³⁰ Hearing before the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred Eleventh Congress, ‘*Afghanistan and Pakistan: Oversight of A New Interagency Strategy*’, (24 June 2009).

⁸³¹ Ibid.

The shift to move away from U.S. funded eradication was orchestrated by Richard Holbrooke and his advisor Afghan expert Professor Barney Rubin both of whom considered eradication as a fruitless and counterproductive exercise. In his 2008 paper, '*Counter-Narcotics to Stabilize Afghanistan: The False Promise of Crop Eradication*', Rubin set out his objections to forced eradication:

Implementation of “forced eradication” where these [alternative livelihood] opportunities are not available will strengthen insurgency while weakening and corrupting the Afghan government rather than reduce narcotics production and trafficking...Poppy eradication does not reduce the amount of drug money available to fund insurgency, terrorism, and corruption. On the contrary, eradication raises the price of opium, thereby making more money available for insurgency, and causes cultivation to migrate to more remote areas⁸³²

Although eradication was only one aspect of a five-pillar plan (public information, judicial reform, alternative livelihoods development, interdiction, and eradication)⁸³³ adopted by the United States from 2004 until early 2008, it had essentially constituted the main drive of their counter narcotics campaign with the other aspects receiving very little attention. In addition to an unequal focus on eradication the U.S. counter narcotics strategy had been isolated from the larger U.S. goals and objectives – nation building and defeating the insurgency.⁸³⁴ The shift away from the eradication as the main focus of American counter narcotics efforts, had in fact, begun towards the tail end of the Bush administration when senior officials in INL had realised that eradication was highly ineffective yet financially expensive. Once again under Obama, policy was shaped as much by individual agency than by institutional view. Just as Robert B. Charles, Tom Schweich and William Wood (among others) had championed Colombian style eradication as the panacea to Afghanistan's opium problems, Anne Patterson's replacement as Assistant Secretary of State for INL, David Johnson believed eradication to be an expensive waste of

⁸³² Rubin R. Barnett and Jake Sherman, '*Counter-Narcotics to Stabilise Afghanistan: The False Promise of Crop Eradication*', Centre on International Cooperation, (February 2008) p. 5.

⁸³³ Blanchard, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy*, 2009, p. 40.

⁸³⁴ Committee on Foreign Relations, '*Afghanistan's Narco War*', p. 6.

resources. Such views chimed well with arguments put forward by Holbrooke. An American official commented:

The poppy eradication force itself was already being curtailed at the end of the Bush administration; mostly for reasons that it was not believed to be that effective and...particularly for the amount of funds being expended, it appeared not a good way of going about it. There was already a significant shift in the direction to Governor-led Eradication [GLE]...it was not a cut off; it was more a turning of the valve in a slightly different direction... Was it [eradication] the best way we could spend scarce resources...it wasn't [an] economically effective way to spend taxpayers bucks.⁸³⁵

The Obama administration's 'down-grading' of forced eradication did not however signal a complete end to the practice. The United States only defunded the Centrally Led Eradication Unit. Enshrined in the Afghan National Drug Control Strategy, eradication was still conducted through the Ministry of Counternarcotics and GLE – to which the British-led Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team contributed funds.⁸³⁶ Special Representative Cowper-Coles recounted Holbrooke's concerns regarding the Afghan authorities ability to implement eradication '[he] reluctantly...conceded that he would not stand in the way of Governor Led Eradication'.⁸³⁷ United States Ambassador General Karl Eikenberry summed up the philosophy of the administration towards Afghan policies, our motto is: 'Afghan leadership, Afghan capacity, Afghan sustainability'.⁸³⁸

In this complex myriad of policy changes, and in a paradoxical reversal of events, some British officials felt that the Obama administration's stance on eradication was too passive.⁸³⁹ This proved particularly ironic as, for four years the issue of aggressive forced eradication had proven a source of bitter tension within the

⁸³⁵ Author Interview with United States Official (5), 6 October 2014.

⁸³⁶ Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team, Regional Command (South West) and the Regional Platform (South West), *Helmand Annual Review* (2010).

⁸³⁷ Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 87.

⁸³⁸ Eikenberry, 'Scenesetter For Codel Langevin'.

⁸³⁹ Author interview with British Official (14), 27 April 2015.

Anglo-American alliance with British officials stating their time during that period was spent preventing the Americans from adopting aggressive eradication policies and more generally ‘tempering bad American policy’.⁸⁴⁰ Overly aggressive eradication was one thing the British had never wanted, but many British officials also thought that properly used eradication was a useful tool. With the United States downgrading eradication, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles stated: ‘the Obama administration...wanting to end all eradication...depriv[ed] us of a secondary, but nevertheless important, tool for deterring the poppy cultivators’.⁸⁴¹ A UK official commented the flaws with defunding eradication: ‘which I thought was wrong there was some balance in the middle...I thought totally removing all the threat of eradication was wrong; there was some people who needed it they couldn’t just get away with it scot free - it was a symbolic thing’.⁸⁴² Moreover, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles complained that there was little consultation over the new policy and ‘Britain had reluctantly to go along with these virtual unilateral changes’.⁸⁴³ However, whilst there was some difference of opinion between the allies on the correct amount of eradication,⁸⁴⁴ it is important to note that the shift in policy actually brought the Anglo-American relationship on counter narcotics closer than had been the case under the Bush administration. As another British official commented the reversal of policy under the Obama administration led to a harmonisation of strategy and the removal of the major issue of contention. As the official explained the U.S. switch in policy:

Removed one of the differences of view between us at policy level...eradication...was quite a big issue...so the Americans, if you want to put it this way: they were falling into line on our view on eradication or the rest of the world’s view on eradication, [that] took

⁸⁴⁰ Author Interview with British Official (10) 23 and 24 September 2014.

⁸⁴¹ Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 87.

⁸⁴² Author Interview with British Official (6), 3 July 2013.

⁸⁴³ Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 87.

⁸⁴⁴ Russia has also been one of the most vocal critics of the Obama administrations opposition to eradication calling for the U.S. to restart its eradication programme as contends the increase in heroin addiction in Russia is a consequence of plentiful supply. Twenty per cent of Afghan opium ends up on the streets of Russia, which has caused an increase in drug addiction – the UN estimate the drug addiction figure could be as high as 2 per cent - resulting in 30,000 annual deaths blamed on heroin overdoses. See: Matthew C. DuPee, ‘Cooperation, but No Solutions on Afghanistan Narcotics’, *World Politics Review*, 7 October 2011; Richard Weitz, ‘Global Insights: U.S. Drawdown Raises Russia’s Fears on Afghan Narcotics’, *World Politics Review*, 26 July 2011; Matthew C. Dupee, and Sara Kauffman, ‘In Afghanistan, Poppy Eradication Pits Russia vs. NATO’, *World Politics Review*, 20 April 2010.

away one of the bones of contention...To put it in simplistic terms the question of eradication was eradicated from the agenda of the bi-annual meetings.⁸⁴⁵

In order to break the link between narcotics, the insurgency and corruption (a key objective outlined in the Riedel Review) Holbrooke contended the United States would ‘redistribute the money intended for eradication to interdiction, rule of law, going after the big guys, and those involved people in the government’.⁸⁴⁶ The acknowledgment of the narcotic-insurgency nexus as a key element of the overall interagency United States strategy in Afghanistan stood in sharp contrast to previous Pentagon policies – as outlined in chapters 3, 4 and 5. The new strategy represented a significant shift in attitude with the Defense Department altering its rules of engagement to permit the military’s involvement in counter narcotics missions and the targeting of drug traffickers who provided the insurgency with material support.⁸⁴⁷ Thus, the rationale of attacking the narcotics industry would help to weaken the insurgency by reducing the funding, support, intimidation and corruption that fuelled the insurgency.⁸⁴⁸ Furthermore, a controversial decision was taken to locate drug traffickers with ties to the insurgency on an official ‘kill list’ called the joint integrated prioritized target list. It was reported by the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations that 50 top drug traffickers who contributed funds to the insurgency were placed on the list in 2009.⁸⁴⁹ A Pentagon spokesman said that ‘there is a positive, well-known connection between the drug trade and financing for the insurgency and terrorism and, it is important to clarify that we are targeting terrorists with links to the drug trade, rather than targeting drug traffickers with links to terrorism’.⁸⁵⁰ The United States also established an intelligence centre to investigate drug funding to the insurgency and Afghan government officials.

The final key component of the strategy that was highlighted in the Riedel Review and championed by Special Representative Holbrook was a massive increase

⁸⁴⁵ Author Interview with British Official (9), 11 August 2014.

⁸⁴⁶ Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, *Afghanistan and Pakistan: Oversight of A New Interagency Strategy*.

⁸⁴⁷ Committee on Foreign Relations, *Afghanistan’s Narco War*, p. 1.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid., p.16.

⁸⁵⁰ Blanchard, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy*, 2009, p. 16.

in agricultural assistance aimed to bolster the legal economy and provide alternative employment to potential Taliban recruits. Holbrooke's enthusiasm was not shared in the wider Anglo-American alliance, as British Special Representative Cowper-Coles remained sceptical that building up agriculture was the solution to opium cultivation or preventing rural unemployed men for joining the insurgency. Cowper-Coles recounted a meeting with Holbrooke before a SRAP meeting that summer Holbrooke asked:

Holbrooke: 'Guess what the most important issue for the SRAP meeting [will] be?

Cowper-Coles: 'Reconciliation'.

Holbrooke: 'Wrong'.

Cowper-Coles: 'Governance'.

Holbrooke: 'Wrong again. Its agriculture Sherard. We must all put all our efforts into building up the Afghan agriculture this year: that is how we are going to be beat the insurgency'.

Cowper-Coles noted: 'I was frankly flabbergasted. All our efforts to persuade Holbrooke that the fundamental problem in Afghanistan was political seemed to have made no impact.'⁸⁵¹ Whilst outwardly, the new counter narcotics strategy developed by the Obama administration was dissimilar to its predecessor, in reality it was not a radical departure to that of the Bush administration's. The key difference was a focus on interdiction of Taliban linked traffickers, a move away from eradication and being more competent at delivering alternative livelihoods to the rural Afghans. Compared to the counterinsurgency strategy, the new counter narcotics strategy would benefit from an increase of resources and refocusing. A former United States official supported this view contending the shift in counter narcotics strategy was more nuanced than dramatic:

In some of the rhetoric...[there was] a very clear a pivot away from a clear U.S. support for an independent or focused eradication effort to a focus on institution building and

⁸⁵¹ Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 230.

interdiction...So, if you think of counter narcotics policy beginning and ending with eradication there was a huge change but if you look at it more broadly the shift was more focused on a move away from that element of the policy and not so much in other realms.⁸⁵²

The Conflict Intensifies And The Anglo-American Landscape In Helmand Alters, June-July 2009

The summer of 2009 marked the beginning of an intensification of the conflict as 4,000 U.S. Marines (and 600 ANSF) were deployed on operation in southern Helmand and their British allies deployed 3,000 soldiers (and 1,480 coalition forces) on operation in central Helmand. The influx of Major General Larry Nicholson's Marines to the province, however, would also signal a redress of the power structure in the province between the Anglo-American partners as the Marines outnumbered British forces by 10,672⁸⁵³ to 8,000.⁸⁵⁴ Relations at least initially, were to remain cordial between the partners; however, that was not to last as several areas of disagreement began to arise. The Marines with their 'can do attitude' deplored the British acceptance of insurgent controlled territory and believed that the British military's appeasement allowed the insurgency to gain momentum.⁸⁵⁵ Conflict with the British-led PRT was even more pronounced, as the PRT and the Marines vision for the reconstruction of Helmand did not coincide. This was brought into conflict as being numerically the dominant partner; the Marines wanted 'the voting rights'⁸⁵⁶ about where and when to apply military attention. The British PRT opposed the Marines first mission Operation 'Strike of the Sword'⁸⁵⁷ into Nawa (then Garmser and Khan Neshin), which was due to commence in July. They petitioned Marine Major General Nicholson about the wisdom of conducting a counterinsurgency mission in a remote, poverty stricken area where there was very little intelligence and minimal

⁸⁵² Author Interview with United States Official (5), 6 October 2014.

⁸⁵³ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 208.

⁸⁵⁴ Gordon Rayner, 'British Armed Forces in Helmand Province: a timeline', *The Telegraph*, 2 April 2014.

⁸⁵⁵ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 209.

⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁸⁵⁷ Jeffrey A. Dressler, 'Securing Helmand Understanding and Responding to the Enemy', Afghanistan Report 2, Institute for the Study of War, (September 2009), p. 38.

British and Afghan presence. The British judged the mission to be a forlorn hope considering the non-existent reach of the government and lack of reconstruction projects in the area. Major General Nicholson argued that Governor Mangal identified the town as strategically important – as the Taliban used it as a staging post on route across the border from Pakistan – therefore; the Marines would support the governor’s wishes and retake the town. The tension between the Marines and British-led PRT over where to conduct operations represented a key difference of approach to the conflict. American Marines saw this as the British troops policy of appeasement and unwillingness to engage the enemy and the British viewed the Marines as having a ‘gung-ho’ attitude. As an American official noted: ‘Marines...tend to sprint, while my sense of UK forces is that they had a marathon mind-set’.⁸⁵⁸

Before the commencement of the American operation, the British launched operation ‘Panther’s Claw’⁸⁵⁹ in late June. British Lt. Col. Nick Richardson reported the operation was designed to ‘clear and hold one of the few remaining Taliban strongholds...[the area between Lashkar Gah and Gereshk] with the end result [to] provide lasting security for the local population’. One of the first attacks of the operation was the destruction of a Taliban-linked drug bazaar.⁸⁶⁰ Meanwhile in early July, the American Marines went ahead with their original plan and launched operation ‘Strike of the Sword’ in the southern districts of Nawa, Garmser and Khan Neshin. The U.S. Marines were instructed to conduct the offensive using COIN as a framework. The COIN strategy employed by the Marines was designed to restore government rule to areas long under the control of insurgent forces, minimise civilian casualties, protect the local populace from insurgent groups and sever the relationship between the insurgents and drug businesses in the most volatile regions of Helmand.⁸⁶¹ The Marines and Afghan troops landed with heavy numbers, which allowed the troops the ability to station men between each village and make their presence felt by conducting routine patrols to meet and greet the villagers.⁸⁶² Significantly, the visible physical presence of coalition forces – checkpoints, roadblocks and military bases – with a strong Governor-led counter narcotics message

⁸⁵⁸ Author Interview with United States Official (1), 10 June 2013.

⁸⁵⁹ Richard Norton-Taylor, ‘Deadly, and maybe decisive. Officers hail Panthers Claw’, *The Guardian*, 27 July 2009.

⁸⁶⁰ Dressler, ‘Securing Helmand Understanding and Responding to the Enemy’, p. 35.

⁸⁶¹ Committee on Foreign Relations, *Afghanistan’s Narco War*, p. 12.

⁸⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 70.

had a direct impact on reducing opium cultivation in Nawa and Garmser in the 2009/10 planting season.⁸⁶³ A key component of the plan was to remain in the areas after the insurgents were ‘cleared’ allowing the Afghan government the space and time to deliver basic services to the southern population – ‘to show that government could do more for the people than the Taliban could’⁸⁶⁴ and by securing the areas it would allow civilian experts to establish bases and work with the local population on alternative livelihoods.⁸⁶⁵ Development aid streamed into the province in the wake of the military operations with USAID expanding the Afghanistan Voucher for Increased Production in Agriculture (AVIPA - Plus) – a programme distributing agricultural resources. During the fall of 2009, the programme ‘expanded to provide counterinsurgency stability programming in Helmand and Kandahar provinces within an agricultural framework’.⁸⁶⁶ There was also substantial investment from the British government as DFID funded a ‘US\$ 45 million programme of investments in infrastructure and private sector development, aimed at promoting economic growth - the Helmand Growth Programme, and the Commanders Emergency Response Programme’.⁸⁶⁷

With U.S. military commanders now fully behind breaking the link between narcotics and the insurgency, American military aircraft and helicopters bombed an estimated 300 tonnes of poppy seeds in July.⁸⁶⁸ The military attack against the opium industry was part of a broader intensification of counter narcotics efforts to interdict Taliban-linked traffickers and drug facilities to enable this the administration announced during the summer of 2009 it would increase DEA personnel in Afghanistan from 13 to 68 by September 2009 and 81 by 2010.⁸⁶⁹ This influx of American troops and personnel over the summer of 2009 (coupled to a rise in the

⁸⁶³ Mansfield, Alcis, and OSD, *Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risks*, p. 3.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid., p.71.

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁶ United States Agency for International Development, Afghanistan. Fact Sheet, *‘Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture - Plus (AVIPA Plus)’* Kabul, December 2010 (available at: http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1871/Fact_Sheet_AVIPA_Plus_FINAL_Dec_2010.pdf).

⁸⁶⁷ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 259.

⁸⁶⁸ Committee on Foreign Relations, *‘Afghanistan’s Narco War’*, p. 12.

⁸⁶⁹ Josh Meyer, ‘U.S. increasing counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan’, *Los Angeles Times*, 20 July 2009.

price of wheat and fall in the price of opium in 2007/08⁸⁷⁰ - outlined in chapter 5) would set the conditions that would contribute significantly to opium cultivation being reduced in Helmand in the coming years.

General McChrystal's 60-Day Review August 2009

General McChrystal's assessment concluded the war was reaching a critical point; and if the coalition did not halt the insurgent's momentum within the next twelve months, winning the war might no longer be achievable: 'there is potential for 'mission failure' unless a fully resourced, comprehensive counter-insurgency strategy is pursued and reverses Taliban momentum within 12-18 months'.⁸⁷¹ McChrystal advocated a reorientation of the metrics of success: an improvement in the life of civilians, ease of road travel and participation in civil society were more important than the number of insurgents killed⁸⁷² and called for improvements in governance and lessening of corruption.⁸⁷³

General McChrystal had previously argued for COIN to be successful it would require 40,000⁸⁷⁴ additional troops on top of the 21,000 approved in March 2009.⁸⁷⁵ Obama's inner circle, top officials and military hierarchy were divided over the issue. In the autumn of 2009, Obama conducted his second review of policy within 6 months.. Key to the dilemma was protecting American national interests, turning the tide of insurgent momentum whilst not becoming involved in an even longer war with no end in sight.⁸⁷⁶ A major concern of the President and others was the diminishing attention paid to Al-Qaeda. After the Riedel review Obama stated Al-Qaeda was still the foremost focus of the United States mission, however, General McChrystal's

⁸⁷⁰ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 250.

⁸⁷¹ Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, "Commander's Initial Assessment", Commander NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Afghanistan, U.S. Forces, Afghanistan (Reference Secretary of Defence Memorandum, 26 June 2009; Subject: Initial United States Forces- Afghanistan) 30 August 2009 available at http://media.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf.

⁸⁷² Ibid.

⁸⁷³ Vanda, Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence: Strategies and Realities of Counterinsurgency and State Building in Afghanistan* (Washington, 2013), p. 101.

⁸⁷⁴ During his troop request McChrystal presented three options: 11,000, 40,000, or 85,000. The two end options were placed to make the middle option more attractive.

⁸⁷⁵ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 76.

⁸⁷⁶ Catherine Dale, 'War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Operations and Issues for Congress', Congressional Research Service, Report RL40156, (9 March 2011), p. 9.

proposed performing a large COIN operation in the southern provinces of Afghanistan to weaken the Taliban and strengthen the writ of the government leaving largely alone the remaining handful of Al-Qaeda operatives in the east of the country.⁸⁷⁷

On 1st December 2009, after three months and 10 meetings⁸⁷⁸ President Obama announced in a speech at West Point, that the United States would deploy an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan. He authorised Defense Secretary Gates to send a further 3,000 troops if it was deemed necessary – the Defense Secretary did. The new strategy was a hybrid between full-blown counterinsurgency and a narrow counterterrorism effort.⁸⁷⁹ Obama stated that the strategy was not nation building: it was narrower than that but aimed to achieve the U.S. key objectives ‘to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future... [and] revers[ing] the Taliban’s momentum and deny[ing] it the ability to overthrow the government’. The President pointed out that the Taliban had taken over large areas of Afghanistan and were engaged in terrorist activities in Pakistan. In order to achieve these goals the United States would need to greatly increase their financial resources to Afghanistan, which would enable a greater military effort and a civilian ‘surge’ – a move that would triple the number of American civilian personnel in the country to 1,100.⁸⁸⁰ However, during the same speech the President announced a timetable for withdrawing American troops – the withdrawal would commence July 2011. Under this timetable U.S. troops would clear insurgent areas then transfer the responsibility to ANSF within 18 to 24 months.⁸⁸¹ In contrast to the Bush administration, president Obama would place Afghanistan at the heart of the American foreign policy agenda. The conflict would, for the first time, receive vastly improved attention and resources to enable the implementation of a COIN strategy.

⁸⁷⁷ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 120.

⁸⁷⁸ ‘Barack Obama orders 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan’, *BBC News*, 2 December 2009.

⁸⁷⁹ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 128.

⁸⁸⁰ Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 288.

⁸⁸¹ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 128.

A COUNTER NARCOTICS SUCCESS? And A REFOCUSED MISSION: THE TRANSITION OF ‘PARTNER NATION’ ON COUNTER NARCOTICS (SEPTEMBER - DECEMBER 2009)

As outlined in the previous chapter, both the United States and United Kingdom considered the establishment of the Helmand Food Zone by Governor Mangal – aided by British and American support - during the fall of 2008 as a positive development in the fight against opium cultivation. The results of the scheme, however, would not be confirmed until the fall of 2009. The UNODC announced that opium cultivation had decreased for the second consecutive year - by 22 per cent from 157,000 hectares in 2008 to 123,000 hectares in 2009.⁸⁸² The UNODC’s 2009 *Afghanistan Opium Survey* confidently declared: ‘the bottom is starting to fall out of the Afghan opium market’ and linked the reduction to strong counter narcotics measures and competent provincial leadership.

In Helmand alone, cultivation declined by a third, to less than 70,000 hectares...the dramatic turnaround in Helmand can be attributed to an effective mix of sticks and carrots: governor leadership; a more aggressive counter-narcotics offensive; terms of trade more favourable to legal crops; and the (related) successful introduction of food zones to promote licit farming.⁸⁸³

It was perhaps unsurprising that the Helmand Food Zone received international plaudits⁸⁸⁴ given it was the first time that opium cultivation had been reduced in the province since 2003. However, solely attributing the success in Helmand to the governor and his counter narcotics efforts oversimplified the prevailing economic situation at the time; furthermore it overinflated the ability of the provincial governor to enforce the ban.⁸⁸⁵ A study conducted by Cranfield University

⁸⁸² UNODC and Government of Afghanistan Ministry of Counternarcotics. ‘Afghanistan Opium Survey: Summary Findings’, (Vienna and Kabul, September 2009), Commentary by the Executive Director.

⁸⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁸⁴ Joel Hafvenstein, ‘The Helmand Food Zone Fiasco’, 26 August 2010, (available at <http://www.registan.net/index.php/2010/08/26/helmand-food-zone-fiasco/>).

⁸⁸⁵ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 252.

concluded the programme had decreased opium cultivation whilst at the same time raising wheat cultivation in 2009. ‘Within the targeted area, the acreage under poppy cultivation dropped by 37 per cent, compared to an 8 per cent increase outside the zone’.⁸⁸⁶ However, the survey provided a narrow picture of the switch from poppy to wheat. In the two years prior to 2009, wheat prices rose causing an increase in the levels of cultivation of wheat to circumvent food shortages. The amount of land dedicated to wheat rose by 50 per cent between 2008 and 2009 throughout Helmand, even in districts where wheat seed and fertiliser were not available from provincial authorities and where eradication was unlikely. Due to the shortage of land in the canal command areas this increase in wheat cultivation replaced opium cultivation. In subsequent years farmers still opted to cultivate wheat at the expense of opium to offset wheat shortages leading to a decline in opium production.⁸⁸⁷

Implementation issues also hampered the FZP. The public information campaign (one of three pillars of the FZP – with the eradication and alternative developments constituting the remaining pillars) proved less effective in 2009 than in subsequent years. Given the lack of security in Helmand, Governor Mangal was unable to move freely around the province to deliver his public awareness campaign without a foreign military presence. The fact that the governor had to rely upon the foreign military transportation conveyed to the locals that the governor and central authority were unable to exert their authority in the province. Additionally, this resulted in tribal elders not disseminating the governor’s public information message through out districts where the Taliban was present for fear that the government could not protect them for insurgent retribution.⁸⁸⁸

The alternative development aspect of the programme also ran into difficulties during the first year of its inception. The lack of security throughout the province meant there was difficulty in dispensing seeds throughout the FZP target area; with centers limited to Lashkar Gah and Gereshk. However, distribution centers expand throughout the area in the fall of 2009, as the security environment improved because

⁸⁸⁶ Hafvenstein, ‘The Helmand Food Zone Fiasco’.

⁸⁸⁷ Mansfield, Alcis, and OSDR, *Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risks*, pp. 2-3.

⁸⁸⁸ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 275.

of the military operations conducted by American and British forces that summer.⁸⁸⁹ Whilst Governor-led eradication was less affected by bribery and corruption than previous campaigns had been, its implementation was hampered by a focus on remote, marginal areas. This was to improve in subsequent seasons.⁸⁹⁰

Pervasive corruption marred the distribution of the development aid. It was reported that the provincial and governmental authorities did not allocate aid in a fair manner, instead they charged recipients a percentage of their aid or only delivered aid to those with connections. Officials levied an effective tax of 50% on the relief recipients and officials would then sell on stolen aid in the bazaar. Consequently, the most secure way of acquiring assistance was to have a contact in the authorities as the list of beneficiaries to receive the seed and fertiliser were rigged to favour those with connections to the Governor.⁸⁹¹ The programme was brought into disrepute as many of its employees were engulfed in a corruption scandal. It was discovered that fraudulent claims made by officials resulted in illicit profits of tens of thousands of pounds. It was also alleged that members of the project had replaced high quality seed with low quality seed whilst charging the funders for premium grade and stealing the difference.⁸⁹² The seed was reportedly of such poor quality many who received did not plant it. As the international community were quick to attribute the success of the decrease in opium cultivation to the FZP, the British government launched a review of their own counter narcotics position as G8 'partner nation' on counter narcotics.

Whilst the Anglo-American allies were making some improvements in counterinsurgency and counter narcotics terms, the overall security picture remained less positive. The insurgency, especially in the south, showed little sign of abating with violence reaching 2001 levels⁸⁹³ In July 2009, the UK suffered their bloodiest month of the conflict and the following month British total fatalities in Afghanistan reached 200.⁸⁹⁴ As the conflict intensified and media attention focused on the rising

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 276.

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 22-23.

⁸⁹¹ David Mansfield, *'Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Counter-narcotics efforts and their effects in Nangarhar and Helmand in the 2010-11 growing season'*, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation unit (October 2011) p. 32.

⁸⁹² Jean, MacKenzie, 'Could Helmand be the Dubai of Afghanistan?' *Foreign Policy*, 19 March 2010

⁸⁹³ Ambassador Eikenberry, 'Welcome to Afghanistan', Wikileaks cable: 09KABUL3677

⁸⁹⁴ Rayner, 'British Armed Forces in Helmand Province: a timeline'.

number of casualties, the British government was forced to re-evaluate their priorities and goals in Afghanistan, as it was proving impossible to sustain the same level of commitment to their twin mission of stabilising Helmand and ‘partner nation’ on counter narcotics. Primarily, this was driven by resource constraints, namely, financial, personnel and intellectual⁸⁹⁵ but in some cases both missions collided in direct conflict. During 2009, British officers stationed in Nad-e-Ali took an unusual step - to allay farmers concerns that their mission did not include opium eradication - by participating in an ‘informal lesson’ in opium harvesting. The officers reasoned if the farmers were convinced that it was not in the remit of the British military to eradicate opium fields, the likelihood of an attack by outraged farmers would be lessened. Former British officer Mike Martin recalls:

Later, when the story was recounted informally to the counter narcotics team at the FCO in London, they were appalled’. How could British troops, representing the lead on counter-narcotics in the international coalition, do such a thing? It was gently explained to them how conflicted the twin policies of counterinsurgency (aim: win the population) and counter narcotics (result: drive the population away) were.⁸⁹⁶

As counter narcotics decreased in strategic importance and the focus on stabilising Helmand reached a crescendo, British officials explored avenues, which would allow them to transition their role as ‘partner nation’ on counter narcotics. Informal discussions over the issue had commenced in 2008 but it was not until the end of 2009, that the decision was taken to begin the policymaking process in order to effectively transition the UK’s role as G8 ‘partner nation’. The decision making process was complex and involved various actors within the British government motivated by different concerns. Several distinct but not unrelated policy positions dominated the debate that can be characterised as realistic, negative and positive.

Firstly, there was the realisation that success in counter narcotics would take a generation to come to fruition – which far exceeded the UK’s initial timeline set in

⁸⁹⁵ Author Interview with British Official (5), 22 October 2014.

⁸⁹⁶ Martin, *An Intimate War*, p. 189.

2002/03 to curb opium cultivation by 2013 - and success in counter narcotics was also dependent upon a range of other measures taking hold: economic development, improvements in security and governance and a lessening of criminality and corruption. A UK official noted: ‘when you began to...recognise this was going to take a lot longer...I think it became much more likely that we would look for a transition, that we were not going to stick with this if we got the opportunity.’⁸⁹⁷ Underpinning the policy standpoint was a lack of commitment to utilise precious resources – given the UK’s military difficulties in Helmand - on a mission that would take a generation to succeed; as a UK official stated ‘there was zero commitment to resource being the partner nation’⁸⁹⁸ during this period.

There was also a more negative view present within some government circles that the UK had very obviously failed as G8 ‘partner nation’ on counter narcotics as opium cultivation had reached record levels since the UK was appointed head of the international counter narcotics effort. The UK’s reputation had therefore been tarnished by their inability to control opium cultivation – their military reputation was also being called into question over their inability to pacify Helmand - and to avoid further embarrassment it should relinquish their role as G8 ‘partner nation’ as quickly as possible. This view dictated that a successful counter narcotics mission was an impossible task and was ultimately seen as a ‘poisoned chalice’.⁸⁹⁹ A report by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee best exemplified this view and made a blunt assessment of the situation:

We conclude that in accepting the role of Afghanistan's ‘lead’ international partner in respect of counter-narcotics, the UK has taken on a poisoned chalice. There is little evidence to suggest that recent reductions in poppy cultivation are the result of the policies adopted by the UK, other international partners or the Afghan government. While the British Government is to be commended for its broad-ranging, holistic approach to tackling narcotics in Afghanistan, it is clear that success depends on a

⁸⁹⁷ Author interview with British Official (5), 22 October 2014.

⁸⁹⁸ Author interview with British Official (14), 27 April 2015.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid.

range of factors which lie far beyond the control and resource of the UK alone. The scale of the problem, the drugs trade's importance to Afghanistan's economy and its connection to corruption makes any early achievement of the aspirations set out in the Bonn Agreement highly unlikely. We further conclude that the lead international role on counter-narcotics should be transferred away from the UK, and that the Afghan Government should instead be partnered at an international level by the United Nations and ISAF which are better equipped to co-ordinate international efforts.⁹⁰⁰

Finally, some UK officials held the view that, the UK had performed sufficiently well under difficult circumstances but it was the responsibility of the UK to not to walk completely away from counter narcotics⁹⁰¹ without putting counter narcotics, in the words of the British official: 'on a more sustainable footing'.⁹⁰² The most obvious choice to take over the role from the UK was the UNODC – given their background in international drug control - and the UK had to facilitate a move to the UNODC as opposed to completely washing its hands of the issue. This transition, would of course, alter the UK's role within the wider conflict and alter relations within the Anglo-American alliance. UK officials from ADIDU informed their American counterparts of their decision at a meeting in Washington at the end of 2009. At the meeting were officials from the Department of State and Defense, members of INL and USAID. A UK official recalled that the Americans did not 'voice any strong objections' to the UK relinquishing its role as 'partner nation' to the UNODC but they were concerned that this move signalled a reduced commitment by the UK; as the official further noted: 'I think they were just concerned that we would sustain our existing commitments'. Officials from the Department of Defense were particularly concerned because they valued the UK's support on breaking the drug-insurgency nexus.⁹⁰³ The UK did sustain their commitments in the short-term but would then slowly reduce their resources to counter narcotics. In 2008-2009 the

⁹⁰⁰ House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *Global Security: Afghanistan and Pakistan*, Eighth Report Session of 2008-09, p. 11.

⁹⁰¹ Author interview with British Official (14), 27 April 2015.

⁹⁰² Author Interview with British Official (9), 11 August 2014.

⁹⁰³ Author interview with British Official (14), 27 April 2015.

British counter narcotics programme totalled £49.2 million, the following year it decreased to £36.7 million⁹⁰⁴ by 2011 it was been slashed to £16 million.⁹⁰⁵ As another British official noted: ‘there was some bewilderment over the budgetary stuff’, from the Americans that signalled ‘it was not going to be the partnership it had been a few years before when we were taking more of a lead role’.⁹⁰⁶ The UK would officially transition its role as ‘partner nation’ in 2011.

It was not only in counter narcotics that the UK government sought to reduce their commitment, a lack of adequate resources and manpower meant that the UK were also looking to pull back resources from northern Helmand to focus exclusively on central Helmand. The war weary British army was looking to transfer the northern district of Sangin to American authority. In a December 2009 meeting with Major General Nicholson and U.S. Marine political advisor Kael Weston the future British Prime Minister, David Cameron spoke of the lack of British manpower and that while the United Kingdom made up 30 per cent of the troop numbers they were responsible for 70 per cent of the population.⁹⁰⁷ The Marines were, according to the United Kingdom officials, deployed in too many unimportant locations. The following month in January 2010, Foreign Secretary David Miliband would also raise his concerns when meeting with Nicholson and Weston. It appeared to Weston that David Miliband was ‘discreetly’ petitioning for the Marines to bail the UK out of Sangin in northern Helmand, circumventing Miliband having to formally request help from the American government. Concerned by the turn of events, Weston drafted a cable for Ambassador Eikenberry titled ‘U.S.-U.K. at a Crossroads’. The cable detailed the need for the United States to help the British. Weston would subsequently argue that ‘Helmand...was important in terms of British self-respect and the U.S.-U.K. partnership. We had to help our best friends in the world out’.⁹⁰⁸ Before any decision was taken regarding the deployment of Marines to northern Helmand, the allies would launch the largest coalition offensive since the beginning of the war in central Helmand.

⁹⁰⁴ 9 November 2009 *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)* (House of Commons) col. 155W (available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm091109/text/91109w0034.htm>)

⁹⁰⁵ 1 February 2011 *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)* (House of Commons) col. 715 (available at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110201/debtext/110201-0001.htm>)

⁹⁰⁶ Author Interview with British Official (9), 11 August 2014.

⁹⁰⁷ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 213.

⁹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p. 214.

THE ‘SURGE’ and THE NEW COUNTER NARCOTICS STRATEGY (2010-2012): IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS

Marjah a Model for the Surge February 2010

The battle for the town of Marjah, in central Helmand, according to General McChrystal, would be the showpiece of the ‘surge’ and a model for future campaigns. This would be accompanied by a simultaneous British operation in Nad-e-Ali – also in central Helmand. Marjah, was considered of great strategic and symbolic value owing to the level of insurgent activity, minimal presence of the government and high levels of narcotics production and violence. U.S. Marines were deployed to Marjah in February 2010 to clear the town, as an insurgent stronghold. The operation was the first litmus test of the troop ‘surge’ to see whether or not it would be successful and McChrystal’s protect-the-people approach.⁹⁰⁹ It was designed to reclaim the town under government control. General McChrystal proclaimed: ‘We’ve got a government in a box, ready to roll in’⁹¹⁰ signalling once the Marine’s had cleared the area of insurgents, the Afghan government would be ready to step in and provide the area with public services. However, in a scene replicated throughout areas of Helmand the initial influx of American and Afghan troops led to deterioration in security. Insurgent activity remained or in some cases increased as the areas became ‘contested’.

Complicating matters further and another example of the conflict between counterinsurgency and counter narcotics; United States Marines initiated a plan to pay farmers to eradicate their poppy fields during harvest time in Marjah in the immediate aftermath of the offensive. The move - partly in response to media criticism of U.S. marines ‘turning a blind eye’⁹¹¹ to opium cultivation - was an independent decision, commissioned at the operational level and did not receive the backing of policy makers in the White House or United States drug agencies. Farmers were informed that opium cultivation would be permitted in 2010, but they would be paid if they

⁹⁰⁹ ‘US General: Marjah Just the Start’, *Aljazeera*, 22 February 2010.

⁹¹⁰ Andrew J. Bacevich, ‘Government in a box’ in Marja’, *The Los Angeles Times*, 17 February 2010.

⁹¹¹ For example: Rod Nordland, U.S. Turns a Blind Eye to Opium in Afghan Town, *The New York Times*, 20 March 2010.

chose not to.⁹¹² Displaying the hallmarks of the failed British compensated eradication scheme in 2002, Marines would offer farmers \$300 per hectare for the eradication operation and were provided with fertilizer and seeds for alternative crops.⁹¹³ Farmers were under no obligation to participate in the proposal and would not have their crops destroyed by United States marines if they chose not to volunteer. A member of General McChrystal's strategic Advisory Group, Commander Jeffery Eggers stated: 'We don't trample the livelihoods of those we're trying to win over'.⁹¹⁴ This move criticised by the Afghan government; Zulmai Afzali a spokesman for the Afghan Ministry of Counternarcotics stated: 'How can we allow the world to see lawful forces in charge of Marjah next to fields full of opium, which one way or another will be harvested and turned into a poison that kills people all over the world...The Taliban are the ones who profit from opium, so you are letting your enemy get financed by this so he can turn around and kill you back'.⁹¹⁵ The plan was short-lived and quickly abandoned after American, British and Afghan officials questioned its wisdom.⁹¹⁶

The attempts by coalition and Afghan forces to form a new civic administration faltered,⁹¹⁷ in part because of the government's unwillingness to contribute resources to the project.⁹¹⁸ The task was made more complicated due to local support for the Taliban and disdain for the Karzai administration.⁹¹⁹ Marjah did not prove to be the gold standard operation that General McChrystal predicted; at least in the short-term as violence increased and the 'government in a box' failed to initially improve governance. Whilst security was not necessarily improved, the physical presence of the state – checkpoints, roadblocks, military bases – following the military operations proved vital in reducing the levels of opium cultivation in Marjah and Nad-e-Ali in the 2010/11 planting season. Afghan expert, David Mansfield explains: 'the act of crop destruction itself is not a major determinant of

⁹¹² Mansfield, *Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risks*, p. 71.

⁹¹³ Mark Chisholm, 'Marines pay Afghan farmers to destroy opium', *Reuters*, 15 April 2010.

⁹¹⁴ A Report by the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, One Hundred Eleventh Congress, Second Session, *'U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy in Afghanistan'*, (July 2010) p. 38.

⁹¹⁵ Nordland, 'U.S. Turns a Blind Eye to Opium in Afghan Town'.

⁹¹⁶ Author Interviews with American Official (1), 10 June 2013; British Official (9), 11 August 2014 and British Official (10), 23 September 2014.

⁹¹⁷ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, 'Afghan official who will govern Marja pays first visit, makes plea to residents', *The Washington Post*, 23 February 2010.

⁹¹⁸ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, pp. 142-3.

⁹¹⁹ Chandrasekaran, 'Afghan official who will govern Marja pays first visit, makes plea to residents'.

opium poppy cultivation. Rather, it is the state's ability to establish its presence and outreach convincing the population that the authorities have the capacity to enforce a ban on opium production over a given geographic space'.⁹²⁰ Coupled to the deterrent effect, the area also received benefits from the availability of the FZP, which supplied 5,500 provincial farmers with fertilizer, wheat and vegetable plant seeds at a subsidized price. Over 90 per cent of farmers had taken advantage of this initiative.⁹²¹ Improved access to markets in conjunction with the FZP, and more importantly, the large presence of military forces produced a reduction in opium cultivation in the seasons after the operations. In 2010, 'opium poppy was almost 60 per cent and fell to less than 5 per cent the season after Operation Moshtarak [as] almost 15,000 ANSF and USMC had taken up post within the district'.⁹²²

Meanwhile, as the operations in central Helmand were underway, the British were still under-resourced and overstretched in the northern district of Sangin. Stationed in the district since 2006 – outlined in chapter 5 – British troops struggled to quell a resurgent Taliban and made overtures to the U.S. marines to ease them out of the district – to achieve what the British saw as an even distribution of resources. The Americans, already stationed in Marjah and planning a new mission in Nimruz and Barham Chah, did not want to send resources to Sangin and relieve their British allies. The U.S. Marines conceived their role in the province as pushing in areas where no coalition troops were stationed not 'rescus[ing] the country with the second largest military contingent in Afghanistan'.⁹²³ However, after U.S. forces moved into other northern districts in Helmand it made sense⁹²⁴ for them to transition into Sangin during the summer of 2010; this allowed the British military to place their troops under the command of the American Marines. As violence escalated in the district, American Marine Colonel Paul Kennedy rerouted a battalion destined to Nimruz to reinforce his mission in Sangin. After the additional troops arrived, British officials notified their American counterparts that it was relinquishing control of Sangin. The British Ministry of Defense stated:

⁹²⁰ Mansfield, Alcis, and OSD, 'Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risks', p. 72.

⁹²¹ Ibid.

⁹²² Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*. P. 283.

⁹²³ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 214.

⁹²⁴ Richard Dannatt, 'British Troops in Sangin, Heads not hearts must prevail in wartime', *The Telegraph*, 7 July 2010 and Claire Taylor, 'Afghanistan: Towards a Handover of Security Responsibility?' House of Commons International Affairs and Defence Section, 20 August 2010.

The handover of Sangin, which officially took place on 20 September 2010, is the last move in the current reconfiguration of ISAF forces in southern Afghanistan to ensure a coherent and equitable distribution of resources in the province...British forces have been in Sangin since 2006 but are now handing over command of the town to American forces in order to better align forces to populations and concentrate the British effort in central Helmand.⁹²⁵

In keeping with the general trajectory of the Anglo-American alliance during the Afghan Conflict, the friction experienced in Helmand province belied the greater cooperation and mutual respect between the two partners. 'According to the FCO, there are few areas of contemporary foreign policy in which the UK and US cooperate as closely as in Afghanistan...whether in diplomatic, military or development terms'. British and American military and civilian officials cooperated on a daily basis in the province working in conjunction with their Afghan counterparts. Military assistance increased in 2009 as both the United States and United Kingdom launched joint and simultaneous missions to improve security.⁹²⁶ This view was reinforced by a United States Marine political advisor 'for all the friction, however - who doesn't have disagreement during war - there was a lot more coordination and mutual respect. This has been lost in the books so far, even though opposing views were expressed'.⁹²⁷

The Arrival Of General Petraeus, Refocused Interdiction And Alternative Development

In June 2010, President Obama replaced General Stanley McChrystal as United States Afghan commander after the General had given an ill-thought out interview criticising the President's Afghanistan strategic review.⁹²⁸ He was replaced by General David Petraeus, the commander who had been credited with turning the Iraq war in America's favour and author of the new *Counterinsurgency Field Manual* a doctrine

⁹²⁵ 'US and Royal Marines strengthen ties during Sangin handover', *Ministry of Defence*, 22 September 2010.

⁹²⁶ House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *Global Security: UK-US Relations*, Sixth Report Session of 2009-10 (18 March 2010), p. 24.

⁹²⁷ Author Interview with United States Official (1), 10 June 2013.

⁹²⁸ Bob. Woodward, *Obama's Wars*, pp., 371-2.

he had implemented in Iraq. His appointment signalled a continuation of policy, as Petraeus would implement McChrystal's broader COIN strategy with some refinements. General Petraeus's grand vision for Afghanistan was the strategy he adopted in Iraq: the generic elements of which could be replicated against any insurgency. The 'Anaconda Strategy' was based around 'squeezing' the insurgents and the materials they needed to operate. As the General explained 'At the core there are the insurgents that have certain needs to sustain the insurgency (money, ammunition, explosives, leadership, communications, popular support, ideology, command and control, sanctuaries). To deal with that, you need a comprehensive civil-military effort that aims to squeeze the life out of the insurgency like an Anaconda snake'.⁹²⁹ The refinement of General McChrystal's strategy came as General Petraeus advocated more aggressive tactics against the insurgents, including intensified military efforts, rescinding the limit on air strikes and introducing more flexible rules of engagements.⁹³⁰ By the autumn of 2010, Marines in Kandahar and Helmand province realised in addition to practising COIN, they had to resort to conventional military tactics to flush out the insurgents. United States forces won significant battles and pushed back the Taliban by utilising brutal force. The Petraeus era also ushered in an increase in the use of night-time raids to capture (or kill) Taliban commanders, as more special forces became available after the drawdown in Iraq. Missions increased at such a rate in the remaining three months of 2010 that there were fifteen operations a night resulting in the deaths of a thousand insurgents.⁹³¹ As discussed below the significant uptick in these raids would hamper the effective implementation of the U.S.'s interdiction strategy. This proved to be the United States' most valuable tool in reducing the insurgents capability – from financing operations to coordinating attacks against American troops to attracting new volunteers. The overall strategy employed by General Petraeus was more aggressive and unreserved than the policy originally agreed upon by the President at the end of 2009. It appeared Petraeus ignored the President's 'narrow plan' by proposing to launch a wide-scale attack on insurgents in the east and aggressive campaigning in the south.⁹³²

⁹²⁹ Manea, Octavian, 'Reflections on the Counterinsurgency Decade: Small Wars Journal Interview with General David H. Petraeus', *Small Wars Journal*, 1 September 2013.

⁹³⁰ Cowper-Coles, *Cables From Kabul*, p. 287.

⁹³¹ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 277.

⁹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 279 and 322.

Forming a key component of his ‘Anaconda Strategy’, General Petraeus recognised the financial and material link between narco-traffickers and the insurgency. During a Senate Armed Services Committee, the General commented: ‘this drug money has been the “oxygen” in the air that allows these groups to operate. With the extension of authority granted to U.S. forces to conduct counter-narcotics operations,’ and to combat this they will interdict narco-dealers.⁹³³ His views meshed with the new counter narcotics strategy of going after Taliban linked traffickers with the aim of ‘reducing the flows of weapons, money, drugs, precursor agents and improvised explosive device (IED) components to the Taliban, with the goal of degrading the Taliban’s finances and physical resources and dismantling its logistical networks’.⁹³⁴

The DEA reported that most of the drug facilities they had destroyed since 2009 either had a direct or indirect connection to the Taliban. The DEA former chief of operations Michael Bruan testified before a congressional sub-committee that most of the high-level drug traffickers in Afghanistan are members of the Taliban or are associated with them.⁹³⁵ Operations against drug labs had not only discovered opium and heroin but weapons used by the insurgency – IEDs, bomb making materials and Taliban training manuals.⁹³⁶ However, Felbab-Brown observed that these raids only had local impact on reducing material support and ‘So far, the cumulative effects of the narcotics interdiction effort to suppress the financial flows do not appear to be affecting the Taliban at the strategic level’.⁹³⁷

Concentrated in southern Afghanistan, where the military surge was focused, interdiction efforts succeeded in disrupting the logistical supply chains as insurgents move both IED’s and narcotics simultaneously.⁹³⁸ The projected bias in targeting mid-level insurgents did not translate into implementation. The difficulty in

⁹³³ Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, ‘*U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy in Afghanistan*’, p. 24.

⁹³⁴ Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence*, p. 165.

⁹³⁵ Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, ‘*U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy in Afghanistan*’, pp. 24-25.

⁹³⁶ Statement of Co-Chairman Senator Dianne Feinstein, Before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, ‘*Counternarcotics Efforts in Afghanistan*’, (20 July 2011), p. 1.

⁹³⁷ Vanda Felbab-Brown, ‘War and Drugs in Afghanistan’, *World Politics Review*, 25 October 2011

⁹³⁸ Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence*, p. 29.

establishing who was a mid-level Taliban operative and who was not led to many low-level insurgents or farmers being apprehended during night raids. Any opium discovered on the raids was destroyed, ‘perhaps under the belief they are destroying Taliban stockpiles’.⁹³⁹ This proved counterproductive to ‘winning hearts and minds’ of the local population as in rural Afghanistan opium is a commodity used as savings, as Felbab-Brown states: ‘a blanket interdiction can completely wipe out the household savings and be in practice indistinguishable from eradication’.⁹⁴⁰

Another area where the implementation of this plan fell short was the difficulty of targeting drug traffickers with connections to the government. The failure of which had ramifications not only for combating the drugs trade but on good governance as well. David Mansfield warned that simply focusing on targeting traffickers with links to the insurgency would contribute very little to reducing opium output; instead this policy needed to work in conjunction with a serious effort to target corrupt Afghan officials. ‘Similarly exclusive targeting [of] those traffickers who are believed to have links to insurgents could serve to increase the market position of corrupt government officials involved in the trade, achieving little in terms of reducing the flow of narcotics out of Afghanistan and possibly further damaging the legitimacy of the GoIRA with the population’.⁹⁴¹

Implementation and design difficulties also beset U.S. efforts to substantially increase alternative development to Afghan farmers. One of the most fundamental differences with the Bush and Obama administration’s approach to Afghanistan, in general, was the sharp increase of resources under the latter. As such the Obama administration’s commitment to agricultural programmes rose sharply to a quarter of a billion dollars annually.⁹⁴² Unfortunately, there was still a lack of strategic clarity regarding the rationale behind agricultural development; as two conflicting philosophies collided: on the one hand short-term initiatives to ‘buy’ the population’s allegiance from the insurgency and on the other long-term projects designed to produce sustainable developments. The majority of programmes implemented were

⁹³⁹ Felbab-Brown, *Afghanistan Trip Report VI*, p. 4.

⁹⁴⁰ Khan, ‘Opium Brides’.

⁹⁴¹ Testimony of David Mansfield, ‘*Challenging the Rhetoric: Supporting an Evidence Based Counter Narcotics Policy in Afghanistan*’, p. 10.

⁹⁴² Felbab-Brown, *Afghanistan Trip Report VI*, p. 5.

short-term fixes, which lasted between several weeks to several months. The rationale behind this form of development was to provide employment to Afghan males preventing them being forced into the ranks of the insurgency by financial motives. The aim was to strengthen ties between the government and population whilst severing the link between the population and Taliban.⁹⁴³

A central pillar of Richard Holbrooke's plan to transform the U.S. Agricultural and Counter narcotics policy to transition farmers away from poppy growing was to give them alternative food sources to grow. Holbrooke's overarching approach would try to cover all bases, 'credit and training for farmers, new roads so they could get their goods to market, cold storage facilities so produce wouldn't spoil, and processing factories to dry grapes in[to] raisins and crush pomegranates in[to] juice'.⁹⁴⁴ However, the problem with this solution was it would take years to produce results. In order to fill the void Holbrooke decided to provide cash hand-outs and short term employment to Afghan farmers to prevent them slipping back into poppy farming.⁹⁴⁵ The Special Representative assumed command of agricultural policy from USAID and sought to reorganise the reconstruction landscape by implementing several new initiatives. He directed USAID to become more Afghan-centric by utilising Afghan development organisations as opposed to the hitherto American run programmes.

In order to achieve his goals, Holbrooke promoted the injection of vast amounts of funds into the reconstruction effort, which he assumed was the most effective way to kick-start reconstruction.⁹⁴⁶ The two main programmes designed to accomplish U.S. goals were the Incentives Driving Economic Alternative for the North, East and West with a \$150 million budget.⁹⁴⁷ In the South the AVIPA-Plus project, mentioned above, was launched in Helmand and Kandahar and piloted Holbrooke and USAID's new approach to stabilise the provinces. It offered farmers subsidised crop seeds and fertiliser – at a fraction of the retail price - as a substitute for poppy, whilst providing them with the necessary equipment and the construction

⁹⁴³ Felbab-Brown, 'War and Drugs in Afghanistan'.

⁹⁴⁴ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 107.

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 108.

⁹⁴⁷ Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence*, p. 173.

of new roads to undertake the venture.⁹⁴⁸ At Holbrooke's request, the AVIPA programme received between \$300 million and \$360 million in funds.⁹⁴⁹ The majority of this money (\$250 million) was spent on stabilization initiatives, such as cash-for-work projects and small grants.⁹⁵⁰ The project largely focused on Helmand and Kandahar but was later expanded into 32 provinces and was responsible and the expenditure increased to \$450 million. According to data provided by International Relief & Development, the programme was credited with creating employment for 103,000⁹⁵¹ labourers and boosting the economy by nearly \$27 million in wages - - the validity of these claims have been questioned,⁹⁵² and certainly the initiatives fell short of achieving all the goals set out.⁹⁵³

In the same way the United States sent the bulk of their forces to Helmand at the neglect of the rest of Afghanistan: Helmand (and Kandahar) were the recipients of the majority of United States aid. So much so that 'USAID allocated \$250 million for the two provinces in 2010. And in Helmand's Nawa district, USAID spent upward of \$30 million within nine months, in what some described [the] carpet bombing of Nawa with cash'.⁹⁵⁴ Nawa was flooded with employment – typically irrigation canal cleaning or road construction - and moneymaking opportunities to such an extent, employment in day labour projects became as profitable as working for the Taliban. The initiatives not only reinvigorated the entire economy but also reduced violence dramatically.⁹⁵⁵

Whilst providing an instant boost the projects had negative consequences; designed as short-term employment opportunities the programmes they did not provide a sustainable solution to unemployment in south of the country. Additionally,

⁹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 109.

⁹⁴⁹ U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of Inspector General, Audit of USAID/ Afghanistan's 'Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Productive Agriculture (AVIPA)' Program Audit Report no. 5-306-10-008-p (April 20, 2010), p. 3.

⁹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

⁹⁵¹ NGO's argue "such statistics conflate day labourers with full-time employment and distort labour markets" A Majority Staff Report Prepared for the Use of the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate One Hundred Twelfth Congress, First Session, 'Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan', (8 June 2011), p. 11.

⁹⁵² Ibid., p. 12.

⁹⁵³ U.S. Agency for International Development, 'Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Productive Agriculture (AVIPA)', p. 9.

⁹⁵⁴ Felbab-Brown, *Afghanistan Trip Report VI*, pp. 5-6.

⁹⁵⁵ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p.191.

Rajiv Chandrasekaran argues that alternative livelihoods initiatives, which donate large sums of money, created negative consequences in provinces by creating artificial economic conditions: which resulted in tension and rivalries between communities over resources and also led to a surplus of crops.⁹⁵⁶ The main objective of the development programmes quickly became to spend as much money as possible in the provinces. After early scepticism, Holbrooke's plan for increasing AVIPA-Plus funding soon won supporters in USAID, as the department quickly realised the injection of large amount of cash into the provinces would be regarded as progress by Congress. More importantly, if USAID did not spend its entire budget, it would not receive the same level of financial contribution the following year. The contractor employed by USAID, International Relief & Development, was under strict instruction that the full \$300 million had to be spent within the one-year contract.⁹⁵⁷ However, it soon became apparent, that Holbrooke's plan for transitioning farmers away from opium cultivation by giving them alternative food sources to grow and making markets more accessible could only be completed in a limited number of districts. With the contract stating the full amount had to be spent in a year, USAID dictated International Relief & Development to spend more money in the few districts it could.⁹⁵⁸ As a consequence, the projects created distortions in the local economy that could not be maintained. For instance, the pay from the projects was so profitable - \$5-\$6 a day – schools closed because the teachers could earn higher wages performing manual labour. A further consequence of the insistence to spend the full quota of development aid generated waste. Farmers received up-to six rations of seed and fertilisers instead of the allocated one. This led to surplus stock, which in turn lead to prices falling. Some farmers actually sold surplus seeds and tractors in Pakistan or simply discarded them.⁹⁵⁹ There were many more instances of goods bought that were unsuitable or went to waste as a result of the 'spend as much as you can' attitude employed by USAID and International Relief & Development.

The day-labour projects, it was argued, also lead to the collapse of the social structure of rural communities in Helmand and Kandahar. The majority of the projects were designed around clearing irrigation canals and ditches. Citizens, to benefit the

⁹⁵⁶ Committee on Foreign Relations, *Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan*, pp. 11-12.

⁹⁵⁷ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p.194.

⁹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.195.

community had done this work previously for free; however, with projects paying citizens to complete the work, it could possibly lead to the disintegration of the ‘social fabric’ of the community.⁹⁶⁰ Moreover, a Senate Committee on Foreign Relations contended: ‘Too much aid can have a destabilizing effect on local communities that are unable to absorb the cash surge’.⁹⁶¹ The influx of large volumes of aid into insecure areas can have two opposite consequences: firstly it can have the ‘substitution effect’, which transfers the loyalty of the population from the insurgents to the authorities. Alternately, it can have the opposite ‘income effect’, ‘whereby development programmes increase the resources available to villagers and lead them to believe that they can improve their prospects of survival by entering negotiations with the insurgents’.⁹⁶² Studies indicate the delivery of aid projects does not necessarily garner support for the deliverers or for the government.⁹⁶³ There is the danger that once coalition troops withdraw the artificial conditions created over the past few years will collapse resulting in unrest amongst segments of the population. A more prudent policy would have been to inject the same amount of money over a longer period of time, creating sustainable projects which could redevelop agricultural communities and reduce dependency on opium for good.

USAID initiated numerous other projects as large as AVIPA to help spend the enormous budget from Congress. The most important gauge of success was the amount of money spent, which totalled \$340 million per month in 2010.⁹⁶⁴ In an attempt to sustain financially massive projects, USAID employed U.S. contractors, which defied Richard Holbrooke’s directive to utilise the Afghan government and development agencies to deliver aid. By using American contractors, the amount of money delivered to Afghans was vastly reduced – as over 70 per cent of the money was used to pay foreign staff, pay thousands of private security guards, pay subcontractors and insurgents for allowing the work to go ahead. The large sums of money also went to local warlords to provide services who had connections to the

⁹⁶⁰ Ibid., p.196.

⁹⁶¹ Committee on Foreign Relations, ‘*Evaluating U.S. Foreign Assistance to Afghanistan*’, p.13.

⁹⁶² Ibid., p.12.

⁹⁶³ Ibid., p.3.

⁹⁶⁴ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p.198.

Karzai government.⁹⁶⁵ All of which meant the actual money being delivered to the Afghans in aid was 30 per cent of the total money promised.

In an attempt to correct the shortcomings of the AVIPA programme, USAID sought to launch a new \$350 million programme in its place during 2010 in Kandahar. Concerned by the way AVIPA spent money, USAID wanted to reduce the amount of handouts in their new initiative. However, when International Relief & Development won the contract to deliver the new programme, USAID abandoned the initiative. Attempts to initiate a new programme resulted in more problems.⁹⁶⁶ Personnel at the aid agency struggled with the direction; should the programme offer short-term initiatives that would provide instant success or provide longer-term initiatives that would offer sustainability. They opted to extend AVIPA cash-for-work programmes – to entice males away from ranks of the Taliban and provided the military with day-labour projects. It also gave International Relief & Development a further \$65 million year contract to be delivered in Helmand and Kandahar.⁹⁶⁷

All this is a rather sad story of a western government throwing large amounts of money at what was essentially a development problem. All was well intentioned, but the dramatic insertion of resources simply created major economic dysfunctions at the same time that it provided short-term financial benefits to individuals. Those dysfunctions mitigated against the possibilities of long-term improved and sustainable agricultural economics. Once again problems that the U.S. and the UK confronted were more intractable than policy-makers realised.

Governor Mangal's Food Zone Programme And the Opium Ban in Nangarhar Collapses (2010-2011)

Governor Mangal's FZP, continued to receive international plaudits for its success in reducing opium cultivation. As previously noted above, the fall in cultivation the previous year was principally made possible for two reasons: an increase in the price of wheat and the massive influx of Afghan and international troops to central

⁹⁶⁵ Ibid., 198-9.

⁹⁶⁶ Ibid., 309.

⁹⁶⁷ Ibid., 310.

Helmand – as opposed to a direct consequence of the FZP. During 2010, opium cultivation continued to decrease in the province, albeit by a modest 7 per cent.⁹⁶⁸ With the amount of land cultivated across Afghanistan remaining unchanged from the previous year at 123,000 hectares – this reduction was a positive development. However, during 2010 and 2011 results were not uniform across the province; urban centres close to the provincial capital Lashkar Gah and central canal command area experienced reductions in opium cultivation – for slightly varying reasons; whereas north of the Boghra Canal experienced an increase in opium cultivation.⁹⁶⁹

Opium cultivation decreased significantly in areas surrounding the urban centres of Lashkar Gah and Gereshk. The international forces presence had a constructive impact on the area, income remained constant, the Taliban were displaced and security was improved. Levels of violence decreased significantly around Lashkar Gah, Nawa, and Garmser⁹⁷⁰ as the Taliban's hold over the areas was diluted. The success in Garmser was due to the United States marines adopting a multi-pronged approach of conventional COIN coupled with an aggressive attitude towards the insurgents. The marines expanded the area under control by using lethal force to take it from the Taliban, until a large number of insurgents left the region. The stable safety environment improved living conditions in the area and allowed a number of positive developments to occur. The close proximity to a provincial centre increased employment opportunities and the ability to grow and sell a wide range of vegetables and other produce at the local market.⁹⁷¹ Travel was greatly increased as the threat of violence from state and anti-state actors decreased allowing more access to markets and trading opportunities with other districts. There was also an influx of development aid, which reached more people than it did in rural areas because of the better security.⁹⁷² The population in this region were also recipients of public services such as education, healthcare and agricultural support causing greater ties and support for the government.

⁹⁶⁸ UNODC and Government of Afghanistan Ministry of Counternarcotics. 'Afghanistan Opium Survey: Summary Findings', (Vienna and Kabul, September 2010), p. 25.

⁹⁶⁹ Mansfield, Alcis, and OSD, '*Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risks*', p.10.

⁹⁷⁰ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 246.

⁹⁷¹ Mansfield, Alcis, and OSD, '*Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risks*', p.53.

⁹⁷² Mansfield, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, p. 35.

The canal command area in central Helmand also experienced a noteworthy decrease in the levels of opium cultivation; however, conditions were less favourable than in Lashkar Gah and Gereshk as violence remained high. Notwithstanding, due to the high levels of coalition forces the Afghan government were able to execute a more robust counter narcotics campaign including eradication and the imprisonment of offenders. The increase in checkpoints, which were abundant across the canal command area and military bases were seen as vital in the population's perceptions of the government's ability to enforce a ban⁹⁷³ – although they did not necessarily improved security. There was a direct correlation between the extension of the government's authority and the arrival of military troops. Where the government had minimal presence (north of the Boghra Canal) its authority was lessened dramatically, along with its ability to enforce a poppy ban or eradication. Where the writ of the government was not extended, eradication was seen as a 'random act that can be managed through patronage and corruption, a perception that has led to increasing resentment'.⁹⁷⁴ The military operations were accompanied by searches of compounds – primarily for security and counterinsurgency objectives – which resulted in a greater danger of keeping opium as a source of cash.⁹⁷⁵

Eradication was seen as a credible threat in the canal command area of central Helmand. This was highlighted by research that reported farmers in the canal command area did not fear the government's threat to eradicate poppy the previous year because it was seen as too weak to enforce their edicts. However, by 2010 following the military operations of 2009 and 2010 the provincial authorities had executed a robust counter narcotics campaign including eradication and the imprisonment of offenders. Offenders were imprisoned at the price of \$12 a night until the crop was destroyed then fined a further \$230-350 in addition.⁹⁷⁶ Ironically, and despite the Obama administration's defunding of eradication, the 2010 eradication campaign conducted by the Afghan government was the most aggressive and non-partisan campaign to date with corruption largely absent. Imprisonment not only brought a financial burden but detention left female and children unprotected for

⁹⁷³ Ibid., p.30.

⁹⁷⁴ Mansfield, Alcis, and OSDR, *Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risks*, p. 3.

⁹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 71.

⁹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 39.

several days in a precarious security environment. The increase in military personnel sharpened the reality of imprisonment for opium cultivation.

Several problems confronted the FZP during 2010 and 2011. As farmers transitioned from opium to other crops in the canal command area of central Helmand,⁹⁷⁷ household income fell. Consequently, segments of the population were driven into debt, forced to sell assets, and experienced a shortage of food and healthcare.⁹⁷⁸ Moreover, ‘less than a quarter of respondents from this zone had a household member with a salary or earning a daily wage’.⁹⁷⁹ The increased insecurity prevented family members travelling to other districts to find work because this would leave other ‘family members exposed to the threat of violence’. This led to a rise in anti-government sentiment and the erosion of the state support in the canal area. The Taliban were able to tap into this sentiment by offering protection to the farmers ‘the government is just trying to destroy the crop, threaten the people and destroy your economy. We [the Taliban] want to support the economy of the people and keep your crop safe’.⁹⁸⁰ That being said, the Taliban intimidated locals from cooperating with the government – which resulted in some farmers refusing development aid or employment via cash-for-work programmes. For example, those who accepted aid were open to intimidation from the Taliban, as a British Army Officer noted: ‘for most farmers the cost of accepting the wheat seed is set too high by the threat of insurgent retribution, and hence is not a sensible economic choice for most communities in the district’.⁹⁸¹ A ban by the Taliban led to farmers being fined, beaten or the aid destroyed. Common practice among farmers was to sell the seed directly after receiving it. ‘Almost a quarter of those in the intermediate Zone that had received agricultural inputs in the autumn of 2010 reported selling their wheat seed and fertiliser, receiving around \$120 for a “package” of agricultural inputs that has cost them only \$40’.⁹⁸² In the areas, where violence was at its worst, the distribution of wheat seed was considered of little value with development and security considered more urgent requirements.⁹⁸³ However, neither the

⁹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

⁹⁷⁸ Mansfield, *‘Between a Rock and a Hard Place’*, p. 33.

⁹⁷⁹ Mansfield, Alcis, and OSDR, *‘Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risks’*, p. 62.

⁹⁸⁰ Mansfield, *‘Between a Rock and a Hard Place’*, p. 34.

⁹⁸¹ Author interview with British Military Officer (1), 20 February 2013.

⁹⁸² Mansfield, *‘Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risks’*, p. 67.

⁹⁸³ Ibid.

implementation of the FZP nor the presence of the Afghan and international troops was uniform across all of Helmand resulting in differing outcomes.

The troop surge was designed to clear the Taliban from its strongholds and protect the population. However, research highlighted that this had failed as violence was exacerbated in central Helmand in late 2010. ISAF records of violent incidents corroborated this finding.⁹⁸⁴ The increase in violence limited the option of crops available to farmers as travelling or spending too much time in the field was considered extremely dangerous.⁹⁸⁵ Locals also reported acts of violence by the Afghan police, who intimidated and stole from villagers, ‘The seizure of opium by the authorities was often seen as “theft” rather than law enforcement due to the lack of trust in the security forces in the area’.⁹⁸⁶ Intimidation and the threat of violence from state and anti-state actors resulted in the rural population being attacked by both sides. As a consequence of the behaviour of the local authorities, citizens were forced to seek protection from the Taliban, ‘There is government during the day and at night there is the Taliban’.⁹⁸⁷ A British Army officer supported this view ‘Until GIROA...can present a credible, economically viable security solution... [Tribal elders] will continue to tolerate insurgent presence in his village’.⁹⁸⁸

As opium cultivation decreased in the canal command area of central Helmand because of an increase in the physical presence of the state – despite levels of violence increasing, paradoxically, North of the Boghra Canal experienced an increase in the level of opium cultivation. Unlike, the canal area the government’s presence was minimal and the level of violence low. The population of the area had exploded over the previous decade,⁹⁸⁹ as the area offered many benefits districts closer to the provincial centres could not. Firstly, it allowed many landless Afghans to become landowners. Secondly, the area offered Afghans relative peace as the area was not ‘contested’ between the authorities and insurgents and offered an escape from the predatory behaviour of provincial and government officials. As economic opportunities were restricted in the area, the opium industry economically

⁹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

⁹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

⁹⁸⁶ Ibid., p.32.

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁸ Author interview with British Military Officer (1), 20 February 2013.

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

underpinned the community and without it, the community would not have survived. The Taliban maintained a strong presence in the region and support for them was ‘unequivocal’, as they offered defence from the government’s counter narcotics campaign.⁹⁹⁰ The Taliban were *de facto* authorities in the region, offering services and arbitrating disputes. This was evident from a farmer’s comment: ‘we are happy with the Taliban; as long as the Taliban are here we will continue to grow poppy. There is no eradication in the area. The Taliban will not allow this; they will fight [the government]’.⁹⁹¹ The presence and support for the insurgency was high as they offered a range of services the government was unable to, mainly opium protection. The government’s strong position on eradication allowed the Taliban to cultivate sentiment among the rural population and win ‘hearts and minds’.⁹⁹² Compared to central Helmand income levels rose along with the standard of living. Farmers in the region did not fear the government’s opium ban for two reasons, firstly, the government and international forces were minimal, therefore, their ability to enforce the ban was limited. Secondly, the pre-eminence of the Taliban in the area guaranteed crops survived. As a British Army officer concluded: ‘the economic balance remains in favour of poppy cultivation...farmers have made independent, pragmatic decisions to sow poppy...farming communities remain disenfranchised from GIRoA...The insurgency must not be allowed to retain its status as a sound economic choice’.⁹⁹³

As opium cultivation fell overall in Helmand, the situation in Nangarhar province – which was touted as a model for counter narcotics efforts⁹⁹⁴ - deteriorated. As previously noted, the province experienced a decline in opium cultivation, which lasted for three years⁹⁹⁵ driving the amount of land dedicated to poppy down considerably.⁹⁹⁶ The reduction had largely being attributed to the coercive power of the authorities with the governor creating a credible threat to cultivation. However, by the 2010-2011 planting season opium cultivation rebounded, as cultivation rose by 276 per cent⁹⁹⁷ - mainly in the southern districts of Nangarhar.

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 27

⁹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 28.

⁹⁹² Ibid., p. 2.

⁹⁹³ Author interview with British Military Officer (1), 20 February 2013.

⁹⁹⁴ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 143.

⁹⁹⁵ In 2009 and 2010, opium cultivation increased and reached 108 ha and 131 ha respectively, which is a negligible amount. Mansfield, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, p. 11.

⁹⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 1.

⁹⁹⁷ Mansfield, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* p. 3.

The success of the counter narcotics campaign relied on the ability of the authorities to continue coercion, broker deals with tribal elites and access alternatives to opium. In the districts that had access to alternative forms of income via agriculture and non-agriculture avenues support for poppy cultivation and opposition to the government was negligible. Whereas, in the districts that experienced a reduction in economic wellbeing the government's writ was limited and support for the insurgency was strong.⁹⁹⁸ By the 2010-2011 season the governor of Nangarhar was unable to fulfil the delivery of alternative livelihoods to a large section of the province.

As a result of the lack of access to alternative forms of income via agriculture and non-agriculture avenues, the ban drove large sections of the population in the southern districts of Nangarhar into economic adversity. The basic needs of the population were not met; to survive financially many were forced to send their relatives to seek employment with the ANSF. As David Mansfield stated: 'enlisting family members in the ANA has been a pragmatic response to the ban on opium production – an economic necessity – and should not be seen as an indicator of political support for the ANSF or backing for the government and its laws'.⁹⁹⁹ As a result of the economic situation, cultivation returned along with anti-government sentiment. The 2010 eradication drive against the districts in southern Nangarhar proved destabilising for relations between the authorities and farmers, and led to several violent confrontations. The local population invited insurgents to protect their fields, which resulted in the deaths of ANP's officers.¹⁰⁰⁰ Resistance was so strong only 16 hectares and 61 hectares of opium poppy cultivation were eradicated in Nangarhar province respectively in 2010 and 2011.¹⁰⁰¹

Evidence suggests when bans on opium cultivation occurred out-with the specific requirements necessary to make it successful, locals turn to the insurgency for support.¹⁰⁰² The local insurgency harnessed growing bitterness towards the

⁹⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid., p.10.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁰⁰¹ UNODC and Government of Afghanistan Ministry of Counternarcotics. 'Afghanistan Opium Survey: Summary Findings', (Vienna and Kabul, October 2011), p. 9.

¹⁰⁰² David Mansfield and Adam Pain, '*Counter-Narcotics in Afghanistan: The Failure of Success?*' Afghanistan Research and Evaluation unit, Briefing Paper Series, (December 2008), p.12.

government by responding to the local populations needs. For example, the insurgency prevented eradication and promised to keep a low profile during the harvesting season to avoid inviting conflict with the local authorities.¹⁰⁰³ The insurgency also abandoned their policy of intimidating locals whose family were serving in the ANSF.¹⁰⁰⁴

Like Helmand, opium cultivation did not increase throughout all of Nangarhar's provinces; in fact the lower districts of the Kabul River Basin maintained low level of opium cultivation. This was due to the crop diversification and non-farm employment prospects located in the area. The development of the bazaar at Markoh increased the opportunity for farmers to sell a wide variety of vegetables¹⁰⁰⁵ and other products. Employment prospects improved in the urban centre of Jalalabad with wage rates increasing from 300-350 Pakistani Rupees (PR) per day in April 2009 to 400-450 PR in April 2011.¹⁰⁰⁶ The situation in the lower districts of the Kabul River Basin demonstrates that a ban on opium cultivation can be successful and sustainable if there are alternative livelihoods and increased security. However, the situation in the Southern districts served to demonstrate that a ban on opium cultivation without viable alternatives forced the population into economic distress which in turn eroded support for the government and increased support for the insurgency and increased the likelihood of a re-emergence of opium cultivation. This created insecurity as the population sought help from insurgents - insurgents in turn court the support of the population – to protect their opium cultivation.

CONCLUSION

With violence increasing and governance decreasing the United States Afghan conflict was in a perilous state. President Obama refocused the United States attention on Afghanistan but several problems confronted him about resources and strategy. The review commissioned by President Obama in March 2009 concluded that the United States needed to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The review, some argued, did not produce a conclusive assessment of what

¹⁰⁰³Mansfield, *'Between a Rock and a Hard Place'*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibid., 18.

the new strategy should be. The second review - which largely came to fruition through happenstance – concluded that if the coalition did not reverse the Taliban’s momentum within 12 months then victory might no longer be achievable. One of the key differences of the war under the Obama and Bush administrations was the level of attention, manpower and financial resources dedicated to the conflict. By increasing the number of troops and resources to the war effort, the United States was able to focus on implementing COIN. However, by authorising a middle ground of COIN and counterterrorism President Obama committed insufficient resources to properly resource a COIN mission though success was achieved in several areas. Security and governance were improved in the medium term in several provinces. Progress was made in the south where the bulk of extra troops were stationed but this was countered by insurgent gains in northern and eastern Afghanistan. Kandahar and (especially) Helmand proved success stories for the ‘surge’. Levels of violence were decreased in several key provincial and rural districts as the Taliban’s hold over the areas was lessened. Economic development initiatives transformed districts such as Nawa and contributed to the increasing stability of the area. A critical failure of the Obama administration military and financial ‘surge’ was its reliance on a short-term game. Constrained by domestic pressures, a rising financial bill for involvement and a heavy toll in lives and wounded soldiers President Obama’s set timeframe was optimistically short. But Afghanistan’s problems could not be fixed in two or three short years. Significant progress would take decades and by beginning the withdrawal of the surge troops in 2011 meant the any success the Obama administration achieved was transitory.

The period also ushered in a new period of Anglo-American relations during the Afghan conflict. The United Kingdom would not - as it had done during the Blair tenure - follow the Americans’ lead unreservedly and increase its commitment to Afghanistan. The relations also had more broadly altered. The UK was unable to exert the same degree of influence at the strategic level, as had been the case during the Bush-Blair era. President Obama and indeed Gordon Brown were far less personally invested in the Afghan campaign than their predecessors were. This was coupled to the somewhat strained relations between Gordon Brown and Barack Obama. Also, much of the strategic decisions were now handled by the SPRAPS; Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles tried but ultimately failed to swing his opposite number behind the

British approach. Holbrooke on the other hand was successful in implementing his ideas as the U.S substantially increased its agricultural assistance. There were also differences of approach at the operational level as UK troops and U.S. Marines clashed in Helmand over their respective visions for the province. Critical of - what the Americans saw as -appeasement the United States would make more progress fighting the insurgency than the British. The reason for their success and the United Kingdom's lack of sustainable progress was the United States vast resources and manpower. Under manned, under-resourced and suffering heavy casualties, the UK military was spread too thinly across the province and wanted to consolidate its forces in central Helmand. There was no doubt that the British had fought hard, however, a decidedly war weary UK looked to its closest ally to bail it out of several districts in Helmand province. By 2010, U.S marines stationed in the province, outnumbered numbered their British counterparts with UK forces only accounting for 30 per cent of the fighting force but were responsible for 70 per cent of the population. The UK government pushed for an even redistribution of resources, complaining that U.S. marines were stationed in too many unimportant areas.¹⁰⁰⁷ The Marines, however, conceived their role in Helmand as pushing into areas where there was no government presence not bailing out their closest ally. After they moved into northern Helmand the Marines acceded to the British demands.

There was, however, greater harmonisation of counter narcotics policies between allies, as the United States de-emphasised counter narcotics removing the key point of friction, which was responsible for numerous diplomatic battles over the previous years. The United Kingdom, also re-evaluated their counter narcotics strategy as fighting narcotics slowly decreased as a strategic priority. By 2009, the British were subsumed by an insurrection in Helmand and struggled to dedicate the same level of resources to their twin mission of stabilising Helmand and 'partner nation' on counter narcotics. The policy making process to transition their role as 'partner nation' was complex with a variety of actors championing various perspectives. The prevailing sense was one of realism, it was recognised a successful counter narcotics mission would take a generation to succeed and was dependent upon a range of measures being adopted. Given the finite resources available and the

¹⁰⁰⁷ Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 213.

stabilisation situation in Helmand the UK could not effectively maintain the same level of commitment to both missions. There were those, however, that considered counter narcotics a bad news story and the UK had failed miserably to control opium cultivation since 2002. Therefore, it was within the UK's interest to transition the 'poisoned chalice' of counter narcotics before any more reputational damage was done. Lastly, there were those who argued the UK had a responsibility not to abandon their commitments to counter narcotics before placing them on a sustainable footing. Despite, several arguments entering into the policy debate, all factions agreed that the UK could not and should not continue in its current role as G8 'partner nation' on counter narcotics.

Although, there was a marked improvement in the development and design of the U.S. administration's new policy towards the Afghan drugs industry, results have differed across location and socio-economic group and ultimately have not lead to a significant decrease in the land dedicated to opium cultivation. Opium cultivation rose to record levels in 2013 and 2014 and the prospect of impending uncertainty will maintain these levels. There was a clear correlation between the reduction in opium cultivation and the international security forces presence in central Helmand. Therefore, the U.S. administration was successful in stopping cultivation in the central belt by forcing it into the more remote desert regions of the Helmand. However, a key aspect of maintaining low levels of cultivation was the ability to maintain a physical presence in the region, something the U.S. was unable to ensure throughout all of Helmand. Furthermore, 'there was a strong, statistically significant association between lack of agricultural assistance and poppy cultivation.'¹⁰⁰⁸ 'Among the surveyed villages, only 30 per cent received agricultural assistance in the preceding year in the form of seed, fertilisers and irrigation facilities, 70 per cent reported not to have received any such assistance'.¹⁰⁰⁹ Whilst agricultural assistance has been a major component of the U.S.'s policy agricultural development has still failed to provide long-term sustainable alternatives to opium cultivation. In addition, a ban which fails to provide alternative livelihoods, political stability and economic development will lead to an inflammation of violence countering any

¹⁰⁰⁸ UNODC and Government of Afghanistan Ministry of Counternarcotics. 'Afghanistan Opium Survey: Opium Risk Assessment for all Regions (Phase 1&2), (Vienna and Kabul, April 2012), p. 10.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ibid.

counterinsurgency gains. As discussed below, evidence of the failure of the strategy - both under Obama and Bush - has been the continued record levels of opium cultivation in Afghanistan.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this work is to provide the first comprehensive coverage of Anglo-American counter narcotics strategies in Afghanistan over the ten-year period (2001-2011). It analyses the decisions that have underpinned policy formulation and implementation process. In doing so, this research provides unique insight not only into counter narcotics policies in Afghanistan but the impact these policies have had on the 'special relationship'. The Anglo-American relationship in Afghanistan was, in its broadest sense, complex and fraught but nevertheless benefitted from cooperation and coordination.

Constrained by an ideological opposition to state building and a focus on expanding their mission to Iraq, the Bush administration considered Afghanistan as the first step in their global 'war on terror'. Determined not to be bogged down in Afghanistan, the United States used Afghanistan's recent history and their conflict with the Soviet Union to justify operating a light-footprint approach. The quick military victory against the Taliban signaled to the U.S. that they were justified in operating this way. But significantly, the United States did not ask: what comes next after military intervention? That was a particularly pertinent question given the continued presence of a weak Afghan central state, a society and economy devastated by decades of war and an entrenched opium industry. The United States, however, refused to address the opium problem – viewing the issue as not *their* problem. This coupled to their marriage of convenience with warlords involved in the drug industry hindered the implementation of effective counter narcotics strategies and signaled that involvement in the opium industry would be tolerated.

The UK, however, guided by the British Prime Minister's, notions of international community and moral intervention, used Afghanistan as a testing ground for ethical foreign policies. More specifically by tackling the drug trade afforded the PM, what he saw, as the perfect opportunity to score a success both at home and abroad. Just as the Americans had failed to fully appreciate the significance of Afghanistan political history, the UK failed to appreciate the scale of the problem posed by the entrenchment and extent of the drug industry. Compounding matters was the UK's misunderstanding of the Taliban's opium prohibition in 2000. The

effectiveness of the ban convinced some within the British government (and international community) that the drug industry could be halted. All of these factors would hinder the effective implementation of successful counter narcotics policies in the post-Taliban era. It was in this environment that the UK fashioned the first counter narcotics strategy.

The counter narcotics policy-making process in the wider-Anglo-American alliance was highly competitive and led to a bureaucratic battleground of fluctuating alliances and conflicting priorities. Moreover, the various actors within the Anglo-American alliance also faced resistance from members of their own governments as well as in the wider alliance. It was in this policy-making atmosphere that Tony Blair authorised MI6 to compensate poppy farmers for the opium planted in 2001. Tony Blair proved influential in quashing domestic opposition and promoting counter narcotics as an essential aspect of the UK's mission in Afghanistan. Furthermore, Blair's enthusiasm for tackling the drug industry resulted in the UK volunteering for G8 'lead nation' on counter narcotics; both this position and the policy of compensated eradication were conditioned by a false and overly optimistic reading of the Afghan drug industry. Partly as a result of this optimism and largely to do with political spin, the British government asserted it would completely eliminate the opium industry by 2013. By doing this, the PM and his advisors again overrode the objections of Whitehall and committed themselves in a very public way to the defeat of the Afghan opium trade. Not only did this show political naivety but also it demonstrated a lack of understanding of the nature of the Afghan drug industry. Notwithstanding the disastrous compensated eradication policy and the reputational damage to the UK, there was more freedom to operate in the 2002-2003 period when counter narcotics was treated in isolation as a separate strand of policy and importantly, and when the metrics associated with opium cultivation were not at record highs. However, as this study shows it is accurate to conclude that the UK never fully got to grips with the task of G8 'lead nation'. Furthermore, counter narcotics activities were constrained by the divergent views in the Anglo-American alliance and the tension present within the Bush administration, particularly from the Pentagon, over involvement in counter narcotics. The Pentagon was adamant about not becoming involved in anything resembling state building or use scarce resources

fighting the drug industry. This hampered the formulation of a U.S. counter narcotics strategy.

The policy landscape altered dramatically in 2004, when record levels of opium cultivation pushed counter narcotics to the forefront of the policy agenda and forced the United States into acting. The formulation of a U.S. counter narcotics strategy was far from a smooth process as the Bush administration was divided along departmental lines. At this point the State Department and individual actors championed the introduction of an aggressive policy of aerial eradication of poppy crops. Conditioned by their experience in Colombia the State Department argued that the wholesale aerial eradication was the panacea to the Afghan opium industry and deemed that poppy farmers were primarily rational economic actors who chose to engage in criminality and should be treated as such. The policy process was fraught with difficulty for the State Department as it struggled to win the debate against the dominant Pentagon. After the State Department convinced the President of the merits of their proposal things looked hopeful, but Rumsfeld and the Pentagon engaged in serial political skullduggery to circumvent the introduction of aerial eradication. The policy was eventually defeated, as Ambassador Khalilzad, a “Rumsfeld Lieutenant” convinced the President he needed full flexibility to deal with the issue. With too many opponents in positions of power and Rumsfeld’s political manoeuvring, aerial eradication was effectively dead in the water (for the time being) and a diluted policy was adopted instead. The new policy placed manual eradication at its core and this would form the backbone of the U.S.’s counter narcotics strategy for the succeeding years.

This period also marked a seminal juncture in the Anglo-American counter narcotics relationship as the UK came under intense criticism from the State Department for failing to reduce opium cultivation. A key issue arose between the allies: the means and methods of eradication; the battle over this issue characterised the Anglo-American relationship over the next four years. This first manifested itself in open diplomatic warfare when Robert B. Charles testified before a congressional committee that the British attempts at counter narcotics to date were weak and ineffectual. Charles predicted that by publicly criticising the British they would be forced to accede to his demands, whilst the move did prompt the UK to redouble its

counter narcotics efforts, the UK remained resolute against the introduction of aerial eradication. Furthermore, in doing so, Charles opened a significant diplomatic rift between the allies that would take some time to heal. Ironically, Tony Blair was an advocate of aerial eradication and UK officials were constantly fearful that the PM - under pressure from George W. Bush - would adopt aerial eradication as official UK policy. However, whilst the President was a supporter of aerial eradication he was unable to push through the policy because of the Pentagon's dominance.

With the state building project being questioned and the Americans forced to react, counter narcotics was pushed up the policy agenda. Not for the last time counter narcotics was pushed up the agenda in the wake of record levels of opium cultivation and questions raised about the state building project.¹⁰¹⁰ The renewed vigour resulted in the first reduction in opium cultivation since 2001. The UK's mission in Afghanistan became more complex and delicate as they deployed to Helmand as part of NATO's expansion into southern Afghanistan. The UK's mission was flawed conceptually and much like their foray into counter narcotics built on inadequate intelligence. This failure in intelligence left the UK unprepared to deal with the insurgency and prevented them from executing their original plan of reconstruction and stabilisation. Consequently, undermanned and under-resourced they were embattled against a resurgent Taliban and suffered heavy casualties. A subsidiary factor touted by the government for deployment to the opium capital was the UK's role as G8 'lead nation', however, this move opened up new disagreement internally between ADIDU and the military over the UK's role in counter narcotics. It also frayed already tense relations with the State Department and White House over where and when to conduct eradication. A complex picture emerged as the U.S. ambassador in Kabul, Ronald Neumann, was under considerable pressure from the White House and State Department to produce a sufficient amount of eradication. However, just as individual actors attempted to influence the process at the strategic level, Neumann influenced the process at the operational level by attempting to satisfy Washington's demands but balanced by an appreciation of the political sensitivities of this issue and a decision not to push the British or Afghans too far. The record opium crop in 2006 strengthened the arguments of those calling for stronger action in the fight against

¹⁰¹⁰ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*.

opium cultivation and it became increasingly difficult for ADIDU to prevent the introduction of aerial spraying. In an effort to reach a compromise and prevent the introduction of aerial eradication, the UK agreed to an experimental GBS programme. The policy, however, was never adopted as Afghan concerns over the safety of the programme prevented its implementation. Not for the last time, the Afghans stalled the State Departments plans for increased eradication.

The Anglo-American counter narcotics relationship was strained to its limit, when in 2007 another record opium crop pushed aerial eradication back onto the agenda. Two vocal proponents of aerial eradication, Tom Schweich and William Wood (among others) placed UK officials under peak pressure to accede to aerial eradication. British and Afghan officials defended an embattled position against the State Department and White House onslaught. Concurrently, the policy gravitated up the agenda and gained sufficient support across the Bush administration that the Bush NSC approved the policy. Then in a remarkable move, the Pentagon enlisted the help of the British to derail the plan. The British, who had opposed the policy from the start, contacted President Karzai to pledge their support and prevent its introduction. The plan worked. By the time William Wood and Condoleezza Rice pressured Karzai to agree to the plan he pointed to the disunity in the alliance as a reason not to support it. The issue was eventually dropped when Bush realised he could not coerce the Afghan president into accepting the proposal. Aerial eradication was eventually overcome by a number of factors. The Pentagon, which was constantly opposed to the policy engaged in political manoeuvring and used the disunity within the administration to defeat the State Department's plan. This disunity allowed Karzai the perfect excuse not to adopt the policy. The policy was also widely opposed in the larger NATO alliance and after the Colombian government rejected aerial eradication in 2007 the State Department could not claim the policy was successful – as it had done previously. As the issue of aerial eradication faded from the policy agenda the British government re-evaluated their goals and priorities in Afghanistan. With the security situation deteriorating UK forces lacked the resources to focus on their twin mission of stabilisation and counter narcotics. A realisation within the UK government emerged at that juncture that for counter narcotic to be successful it would require gains in a number of areas (detailed below) and that the UK did not have the resources or time to fully achieve them.

As the Obama administration came into office, the situation in Afghanistan continued to deteriorate and remained unresolved. The Bush administration had dedicated the bulk of its resources and focus to the Iraq conflict to the detriment of Afghanistan. The new President commissioned a review of the war to justify an increase in resources and to formulate a new strategy. The first review whilst advocating the need to focus on al-Qaeda remained inconclusive over the broader strategy in Afghanistan. General McChrystal's second review of policy gave more focus to the American approach and ultimately led to the implementation of the 'surge'. The most fundamental difference of approach between Obama and his predecessor was the former's increase of focus, manpower and financial resources dedicated to Afghanistan. Notwithstanding, President Obama occupied a middle ground between authorising adequate resources to truly implement COIN and a less resource heavy counterterrorism approach. The 'surge' was successful in places, security and governance improved in areas close to the provincial centres in Helmand and Kandahar and the Taliban's hold was weakened. However, progress was not uniform, in other districts violence increased as areas became contested and economic gains did not materialise. Importantly, the 'surge' was based on a short-term game; this meant any gains achieved were transitory as American troops withdrew in 2011.

Under the Obama administration the 'special relationship' entered a new phase. Relations at the strategic level modified as the relationship of President Obama and Prime Minister Brown remained decidedly cool and decisions were conducted through both countries SPRAPs. The UK also commanded less influence in the decision-making process than it had under the Bush administration with Cowper-Coles complaining that he was unable to swing his opposite number behind the British approach. As American troops flooded into Helmand, the Anglo-American military relationship was strained. UK forces and Marines did not agree on the broader reconstruction agenda or where and when to deploy resources and manpower. Furthermore, an under-resourced and war-weary UK government looked to its American partners to bail them out of the most troublesome districts of northern Helmand. The Marines, however, did not consider it their role to bail out the second largest allied military power in Afghanistan. The Marines eventually replaced the

British in Sangin, which allowed the British to consolidate their forces in central Helmand.

Just as relations at the strategic levels modified, the counter narcotics relationship between the partners altered. The U.S.'s new counter narcotics policy had shifted – ironically – full circle as they de-funded centrally led eradication. Eradication had, for four years, provided the backbone of the U.S.'s counter narcotics strategy and opened a point of bitter contention between the allies. With the removal of this key friction the relationship between the partners aligned and there was greater harmonisation over counter narcotics policy formulation and implementation. The UK, however, struggled to maintain their twin mission of stabilisation and counter narcotics and transitioned their role as G8 'partner nation' to the UNODC. The move, whilst universally accepted within the British government was a result of a broader policy debate. The main factor shaping the policy discussion was the need to dedicate scarce resources to saving British lives in Helmand. Linked to this was the realisation that counter narcotics policies would take a generation to succeed and the British government did not have the resources or time to achieve this. There were others, however, who argued counter narcotics was a poisoned chalice and it was a 'bad news story', therefore, the British should distanced themselves from counter narcotics. Finally, there were those that argued it was the UK's responsibility not to desert counter narcotics before placing it on a sustainable footing.

Recognising the Bush counter narcotics strategy had failed, the Obama administration redesigned several aspects of the policy, whilst at the same time aiming to be more effective in the implementation of its new strategy. A massive increase in agricultural assistance formed the core of the strategy; however, the results varied across location. Whilst job opportunities were created the policy proved largely ineffective at providing sustainable economic opportunities and development aid across Afghanistan. The link between the drug industry and insurgency was elevated in significance under the Obama administration with the interdiction of Taliban linked traffickers an important aspect of the new policy. However, the policy fell short in the implementation phase, as the discriminatory practice of interdicting opium stashes during night-time raids devastated many rural Afghans' savings. Also, it failed to address government linked drug traffickers. With the massive influx of

resources to Helmand, the Obama administration was successful in reducing opium cultivation in the central regions but cultivation was merely pushed to the regions out-with government control. In the same way the surge was successful in producing gains, the gains achieved in counter narcotics activities under the Obama administration were transitory and vanished when the 'surge' troops began to withdraw.

One of the problems of assessing success and failure is the criteria to be applied. There are always subjectivities involved and conflicting priorities. Nevertheless, some general observations may be hazarded about how successful or otherwise Anglo-American counter narcotics strategies have been. Firstly, the metrics associated with opium cultivation paint an extremely bleak picture. Opium cultivation totalled 82,000 hectares in 2000 (one year before the Taliban's opium prohibition) yet in 2014 after 13 years of international intervention opium cultivation was 224,000 hectares. Based upon these figures it would be difficult to argue that counter narcotics strategies have been successful; however, viewing counter narcotics policies as isolated policies divorced from the broader picture of political stability, economic consolidation and development and security environment whilst measuring success based on annual opium outputs will provide little indication of why the level of output is such and the best way of tackling opium cultivation. Counter narcotics are one aspect of a broader symptom of problems, thus in order for counter narcotic strategies to be successful there needs to be improvements in security and governance and economic development over a course of several years.

Other observations can be made about counter narcotics policies in Afghanistan. Successful counter narcotics policies were constrained by a number of factors; firstly, they were naturally, subservient to the overarching war policies. This impacted on resources and strategy decisions. Secondly, the division in the Anglo-American alliance over policies – whether over the means and methods of eradication or a disagreement over the pre-eminence of development or law enforcement - hampered their effective implementation. More broadly, there was a lack of appreciation of the complexity of the issue and the problems posed by the drug trade by the Anglo-American alliance. The UK's and U.S.'s knowledge of the drug industry progressed as the conflict progressed but finding effective solutions was nevertheless

hindered by political realities throughout the course of the conflict. Due to domestic political concerns and the anxieties over what opium cultivation meant for the state building project there was pressure on the existent counter narcotics policies to succeed in a short-time frame. The recognition that a successful counter narcotics policy would take a generation to come to fruition was not politically expedient. Furthermore, polices were constrained by annual opium output and as opium cultivation increased more extreme measures were called for.

An examination of Anglo-American counter narcotics policies has revealed an inextricable connection between the counter narcotics agenda and wider reconstruction and military agendas in Afghanistan. Conversely, counter narcotics policies were at times, subordinate to the state building agenda but at other times were used to ratchet support for the wider state building agenda.¹⁰¹¹ This inconsistency in policy position was more reflective of the United States relationship with the counter narcotics agenda than that of the United Kingdom. It emerged that both nations from the outset of the intervention conceived their roles in Afghanistan in a diverse manner; this impacted upon the way in which both nations viewed the conflict and more specifically the way in which they viewed the problems posed by the drug industry. The United States, for the first three years of the intervention subordinated counter narcotics as a strategic objective for fear it would compromise their main priority of fighting the Taliban and al-Qaeda. This altered in 2004 when record levels of opium cultivation highlighted the importance of the state building agenda. The counter narcotics agenda now became coopted by the broader state building agenda as the U.S. demanded demonstrable progress against opium cultivation to prevent state failure. A similar political imperative reappeared in 2007 as another record opium crop materialized and success with the counter narcotics agenda was once again, inseparably linked to the state building agenda.¹⁰¹²

As appointed 'lead nation', counter narcotics was the UK's second most important priority (behind defeating terrorism) in Afghanistan. Consequently, the UK's counter narcotics agenda was directly tied to its wider objectives in Afghanistan. And as such, any failure on counter narcotics was considered to

¹⁰¹¹ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*.

¹⁰¹² Ibid.

represent a failure in the broadest sense. This was evident in 2004 when opium cultivation reached record levels and the UK came under criticism from the United States for a weak performance in Afghanistan. Both missions, however, until 2006 did not come direct conflict as the UK only maintained a small military presence in the north of the country. This altered dramatically after the UK military deployed in Helmand province when the lack of resources, manpower and complications with their original reconstruction plan brought the two missions into direct conflict. The UK then subordinated their counter narcotics agenda to focus their limited resources on their reconstruction agenda eventually transitioning G8 ‘partner nation’ role in 2011.

The Anglo-American relationship in Afghanistan was complex and fraught but marked with a great degree of cooperation. The ‘special relationship’ was reinvigorated under Tony Blair and George Bush as both leaders forged a close personal relationship and Blair stood shoulder to shoulder with the Americans in two wars. Britain was the United States closest partner in Afghanistan providing the second largest troop commitment to the conflict. The areas of cooperation were vast at all stages of the strategic and operational levels. At the strategic level the partnership, whilst genuine, was not equal as the United States was the lead decision maker in the conflict with the UK only exerting influence on the margins of policy decisions. Steve Marsh goes further: ‘Blair’s military commitment to...Afghanistan was useful. However, it was operationally negligible for the Bush administration next to its symbolic value as it sought to maintain public support and counter soft balancing tactics by other states within and beyond the transatlantic alliance.’¹⁰¹³ In saying that, an examination of the Anglo-American counter narcotics relationship is useful and is representative of the UK’s broader role in the alliance. The Anglo-American partnership was at the centre of counter-narcotics policy formulation, funding and implementation in Afghanistan. At the same time, their relationship degenerated at times into open diplomatic warfare over how best to counter the drugs industry with both - for the majority of the Bush administration - occupying opposite policy positions. The policy debate regarding the introduction of aerial eradication

¹⁰¹³ Alan, P. Dobson, and Steve, Marsh, (eds) *Anglo-American relations: Contemporary Perspectives* (Oxon, 2013), p. 271.

provides evidence that the UK fulfilled an active role within the alliance. Despite heavy pressure from the State Department and White House at no point did the UK agree to aerial eradication – whilst constantly fighting an embattled position. If the U.S dominated the policy landscape it would have been able to push through the introduction of aerial eradication (at least with the UK not the Afghan government) by 2007. Again at the strategic level, the ‘special relationship’ altered when the Obama administration came to office for several reasons. Firstly, the close personal connection of the Bush and Blair disappeared and also the SRAP dealt with much of the strategic decisions. At the operational level relations between the UK and U.S. officials were extremely close and were characterised by cooperation and frequent contact - a view confirmed by Charge d’ Affaires Richard Norland of the American embassy Kabul.¹⁰¹⁴

As developed throughout this study, the counter narcotics agenda in Afghanistan was inextricably linked to the wider military and reconstruction agendas. Moreover, success or failure with the counter narcotics agenda was often used as measure or indicator of success with broader objectives. David Mansfield explains, how counter narcotics was utilized to ratchet support for wider foreign policy concerns:

Theatre of drugs policy' and how, at times, different institutions and actors subsume the counter narcotics agenda to pursue their own quite sometimes competing goals, and how counter narcotics organisations do the same, coopting the narrative and agendas of counterinsurgency, state building, development and other issues to help them justify their own policies and programmes.¹⁰¹⁵

The initial years of intervention (2001-03) provide one of starkest examples of the way in which the counter narcotics agenda was subordinated by ‘higher priorities’. The United States government, particularly the Pentagon and White House neglected tackling the opium industry to focus on hunting al-Qaeda and Taliban operatives. This policy standpoint was conditioned by several factors, American reliance on warlords

¹⁰¹⁴ Norland, ‘Trip Report PDAS Schweich to Afghanistan’.

¹⁰¹⁵ Mansfield, *Building a State on a Foundation of Sand*, p. 26.

with links to the opium industry, a lack of resources and a belief that this was a law-enforcement issue not a military issue. Consequently, for the first three years of the intervention counter narcotics were severely under-resourced and considered a low priority.

Conversely, there were occasions when the counter narcotics agenda was used as a measure of state failure. An example of this cooption of the counter narcotics agenda occurred in 2004 and 2007, when many within the American government and broader international community highlighted record levels of opium cultivation as an indication that the wider Afghan policy was failing. Specifically, they underlined a ‘loss of control’ by the state and international community as Afghanistan descended into a ‘narco-state’.¹⁰¹⁶ The following year, demonstrable success with counter narcotics became a political imperative for both the Afghan government and international community if the perceived failure in the state building project was to be reversed.

The chief method utilised by the international community to identify whether a counter narcotics policy is working (or not) is to measure the annual nationwide statistics for poppy cultivation. It is against these findings that subsequent policies are maintained, adapted or abandoned. However, using this simplistic approach leads to superficial assessments on how successful or unsuccessful counter narcotics policies have been. If cultivation is reduced from the previous year observers generally conclude that the existing counter narcotics policies have been successful and an increase in cultivation leads to the view that counter narcotics policies have been unsuccessful. These measures fail to address external factors, which contribute to reasons for cultivating opium, such as food insecurity, high wheat prices, levels of insecurity, levels of agricultural development and access to markets. For example, a food price increase accompanied by an opium price decrease and the relative unavailability of wheat caused a significant decrease in cultivation in 2008 as opposed to a ‘successful’ counter narcotics campaign.¹⁰¹⁷

¹⁰¹⁶ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up*, p. 141.

¹⁰¹⁷ Mansfield and Pain, *Counter-Narcotics in Afghanistan*, p. 2.

There have been several opium prohibitions throughout the country that have dramatically reduced cultivation; however, poppy cultivation in all cases has re-emerged at a later date. Typically, most bans have resulted in large segments of the rural population experiencing a decline in income, higher unemployment, economic distress, food shortages and lowering of living standard.¹⁰¹⁸ Yet, despite these adverse effects on the population the bans are considered successful, which leads to calls for similar bans to be replicated in other parts of Afghanistan. Measuring the land dedicated to opium cultivation for one year does not provide adequate information to determine why there has been an increase / decrease in cultivation.¹⁰¹⁹ It has failed to recognise the distinct difference spread ‘across location and socio-economic group’.¹⁰²⁰ Thus, ‘dramatic reductions in cultivation imposed across a wide geographic in a single season cannot automatically be labeled successful; rather, they can often prove counterproductive to establishing the necessary security, economic and political conditions required to address the underlying cause of cultivation’.¹⁰²¹ Mansfield further states: ‘using the amount of land grown with opium poppy as the key indicator by which to judge counter narcotics efforts highlights a confusion not only regarding what success might look like but what is actually required to achieve it’.¹⁰²²

Several conditions have to be met to enable farmers to transition to licit crops. Evidence has demonstrated that in areas with a stable security environment, the rule of law and access to markets poppy reductions can be achieved. In most cases, these reductions have come in areas that are in close proximity to provincial capitals, which facilitates better access to markets or where employment prospects are greater.¹⁰²³ It is also argued that close proximity to the provincial capitals will increase security and

¹⁰¹⁸ That is not to say, all communities experience these conditions. Where access to alternative livelihoods, access to markets, improved governance and security - typically located near urban centres – communities have transitioned from opium cultivation and remained economically secure.

¹⁰¹⁹ Mansfield and Pain, *Counter-Narcotics in Afghanistan*, p.2.

¹⁰²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁰²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰²² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁰²³ Testimony of David Mansfield, Independent Consultant and Fellow on the Afghanistan/Pakistan State Building and Human Rights Programme, Carr Centre, Kennedy School, Harvard University, Before the Sub Committee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, ‘*Challenging the Rhetoric: Supporting an Evidence Based Counter Narcotics Policy in Afghanistan*’, (1 October 2009) p. 3.

the opportunity of locals connecting with the state thus strengthening ties between the populace and government. Therefore, where there are economic opportunities and a stable security and political environment, the likelihood of farmers returning to opium cultivation is considerably less. Consequently, where these conditions are not met in the more remote regions of Afghanistan the transition from opium to licit crops is far lengthier.¹⁰²⁴ As there are various factors, which determine why a farmer plants poppy other than straightforward profit margins and different political and economic conditions throughout Afghanistan, counter narcotics approaches have to be tailored to suit specific needs. These factors were not appreciated fully by the international community and subsequently were not reflected in their counter narcotics strategies.

The ‘opium problem’ cannot be solved in the short to medium term. Decreases in opium cultivation are realistic and sustainable if certain criteria are met. Politically, there needs to be trust in the state, low levels of corruption and the availability of public services. Economically, there needs to be alternatives to the opium trade, availability to markets and employment opportunities. There also needs to be a stable security environment where the levels of violence are low from state, anti-state and non-state actors. There needs to be a multi-faceted approach, which incorporates political, economic, and security provisions. What will not work are singular approaches; for example, eradication and forced bans cannot be sustained unless there is agricultural alternatives to poppies and access to markets.¹⁰²⁵ Constrained by domestic and international recognition that success in counter narcotics would require a complex and long-term strategy, the British government transitioned their role as G8 ‘partner nation’ to the UNODC in 2011. With the success or failure of counter narcotics strategies being measured directly against levels of opium cultivation the political will of western nations to engaged with the topic is limited. Domestic political pressure to rising levels of cultivation prevents the implementation of long-term strategies, where things might ‘get worse before they get better’ and in this case the British did not have the resources, capacity or will to continue in counter narcotics.

¹⁰²⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁰²⁵ Byrd, William, and Mansfield, David. *‘Drugs in Afghanistan-A Forgotten Issue? Implications and Risks for Transition’*, United States Institute of Peace, Peace Brief 126, (18 May 2012).

The formulation of Anglo-American counter narcotics policies in Afghanistan serves as a vivid example of a highly fractured and competitive policymaking process. Cohesion at every stage of the conflict was elusive with both governments divided along departmental lines and individual agency prevalent. This is demonstrated by the variety of actors within each government advocating and pursuing different policies, for example, in the United States, the State Department, Pentagon, White House, Military and U.S. Embassy in Kabul were pursuing different and often competing strategies. This work has made a significant contribution to the counter narcotics policymaking literature, and broadly, Anglo-American relations literature by highlighting internal debates present within British government over counter narcotics policy. Notwithstanding, a divide between the government and military over counter narcotics policy, few sources provide any detailed accounts of the divided nature of the British government over the policy. From 2001, many officials within the British government warned against involvement in fighting the Afghan opium trade. This opposition was maintained throughout the course of the intervention but was largely silenced because of the personal investment of Tony Blair in counter narcotics. Division was more pronounced in the American system as the Pentagon remained in control of the policy-process and shut down any attempts by the State Department to launch a Colombian style eradication programme. This division was replicated in the wider Anglo-American alliance as the British government – with the exception of Tony Blair - consistently argued against the introduction of aerial eradication. These examples demonstrated the negative impact that divisive policy positions had on the implementation of effective counter narcotics policies.

A key thread of analysis has been developed throughout the study and provides an important example of individual agency in shaping the policymaking process in both counter narcotics and the wider military and reconstruction agendas. On both sides of the Atlantic, individual actors were able to influence the policymaking process to suit their own agenda despite the absence of governmental consensus. Tony Blair was one of earliest examples of the individual agency within the decision-making process. Prime Minister Blair abandoned the traditional foreign policy machinery and conducted informal policy sessions with his closest advisors and committed the UK to support wholeheartedly the Americans in their foreign

policy adventures in Afghanistan (and Iraq). On the other side of the Atlantic, Donald Rumsfeld skillfully shaped the reconstruction agenda of Afghanistan to suit the Pentagon's objectives. Moreover, both actors played dominant roles in shaping the early Anglo-American counter narcotics policies. One of the most illustrative examples of individual agency was the cabal of right-wing State Department officials attempted to shape the direction of U.S. counter narcotics strategy to suit their own ideological beliefs. Robert B. Charles, Tom Schweich and William Wood had advocated Colombian style eradication as the solution to countering the Afghan opium industry and if it were not for the intervention of the British, Pentagon and Afghan government they would have succeeded.

Counter narcotics and counter insurgency are not by their very nature incompatible practices. However, ill-conceived and ill-implemented counter narcotics policies can be disastrous for the effective implementation of counterinsurgency. The most widely used and pertinent example of this difficulty is mismanaged eradication efforts. When eradication efforts are not targeted properly and are directed against poor farmers with no alternative livelihood streams they can have disastrous consequences. Furthermore, if wealthy farmers evade eradication because of political connections or corruption this can sever the link between state and population. The insurgency have skillfully tapped into this discontent and offered to protect opium fields from eradication teams. Therefore, not only are state-societal relations weakened insurgency-societal relations are strengthened.

As explained elsewhere, this thesis is not primarily an exercise in assessing the success or failure of strategies in any general way. That is not the main expertise deployed here. What this study has done is to present in a more complete and compelling way than ever before how and why counter narcotics policies were developed and executed in Afghanistan. In other words, the thesis provides the detailed empirical evidence for those specialized in policy evaluation to do their work. Having said that, the present author tentatively suggests some of the lessons that can be learnt from this work.

The case study of Anglo-American counter narcotics policies in Afghanistan may have several 'generalisable' lessons that can be applied to broader policy areas.

Part of the problem with the reconstruction of Afghanistan has been it has suffered from a lack of strategic clarity on the part of the international community. Before intervention, the international community was guilty of not thinking about what came after regime change. Regime change was in itself the goal; the American government did not consider in any great detail what Afghanistan would or should look like after the Taliban was toppled. Whilst the UK pledged not to abandon Afghanistan, there was a dearth of strategic vision of how to transition Afghanistan into a democracy or indeed a more suitable government than the Taliban. Perhaps the main lesson here is that due accord needs to be given to the question: What comes next? Exit strategies are important, but only if what is left behind is better than the state of affairs that justified the intervention in the first place.

The information on Afghanistan and its people was woefully inadequate at every junctures of the conflict. Even as UK soldiers deployed to Helmand – four and a half years after intervention – the British, to their peril, had little knowledge of the structure of rural society, tribal politics or the insurgency. Similarly insufficient thought was given to the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The allies failed to appreciate the complexities or indeed even the fundamentals of Afghan society.

Of course it is impossible to accurately predict the duration of a conflict but military planning cycles operated on an insufficient 12-month schedule. The war – as most wars are – was constrained by domestic political imperatives, that is to say, that the long-term strategies, which can transition post-conflict societies in a sustainable manner, are considered too time-consuming or politically expensive. As such intelligent attempts to reconstruct the parts of Afghan society that required attention failed. For example, rising levels of opium cultivation resulted in many commentators condemning the existing counter narcotics strategy as a failure and triggered calls from the State Department and members of the White House for the launch of an oppressive aerial eradication campaign. When in fact there should have been an acceptance that success with counter narcotics could take up to a generation to come to fruition.

A further point might be that given the difficulties that arose between the United States and Britain, even though they had a special relationship, highlights the

difficulties of allied operations in difficult circumstances and clearly requires very careful coordination and supervision.

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