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## Ideology and Intervention: The Case of Afghanistan's Opium Economy From the Cold War to the War on Terror

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# Gabriella Salemi

## Ideology and Intervention: The Case of Afghanistan's Opium Economy From the Cold War to the War on Terror

*Propaganda help must be combined with practical assistance. I suggest that you place Afghan markings on your tanks and aircraft, and no one will be any the wiser. Your troops could advance from the direction of Kushka and from the direction of Kabul. In our view, no one will be any the wiser. They think these are Government troops.<sup>1</sup>*

*-Afghan Prime Minister Taraki in 1979.*

*I do not want to disappoint you, but it will not be possible to conceal this. Two hours later the whole world will know about this. Everyone will begin to shout that the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan has begun.<sup>2</sup>*

*-Soviet Premier Kosygin.*

### Introduction

Like many global south countries during the Cold War, powerful political actors intervened in Afghanistan's affairs. Although the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (P.D.P.A.) welcomed the intervention of the Soviet Union in local politics, the mujahedeen rebel fighters retaliated against their occupation and P.D.P.A. rule. This political struggle drove Afghanistan to decades of civil war and the devastation of its infrastructure.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, to survive, the population of Afghanistan had to face the challenges of everyday life through any means possible.

Since the start of their civil war, Afghanistan created a thriving domestic and global economy with opium. In 2005, Afghanistan's opium amassed

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1 Alexei Kosygin & Nur Mohammad Taraki, "Telephone Transcript: Soviet Premier and Afghan Prime Minister, 1979," in *Worlds of History: A Comparative Reader*, vol. 2, 7th ed., ed. Kevin Reilly (Boston & New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2020), 929-931.

2 *Ibid.*, 929.

3 M. Nazif Shahrani, "Badakhshanis Since the Saur Revolution: Struggle, Triumph, Hope, and Uncertainty," in M. Nazif Shahrani, ed., *Modern Afghanistan: The Impact of 40 Years of War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 229-250.

52% of their G.D.P.<sup>4</sup> Even during the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan during the War on Terror and the Taliban ban on opium, opium was still a part of Afghan's daily lives.<sup>5</sup> During the Cold War and through the War on Terror, different global political actors have sought to change Afghanistan's political and ideological course. Afghanistan's opium economy serves as a testament that change is not possible; nothing changed during the U.S.S.R and or U.S. interventions. Afghanistan's social, political, and economic stagnation at the periphery of the conflict is partially due to national and international actors failing to consider Afghanistan's people. Although the people in Afghanistan lived through decades of political intervention, civil war, and terrorism, one aspect of life that remained stable was the cultivation and sale of opium. This study will address the confrontation of Cold War politics throughout the United States' War on Terror in Afghanistan using its globalized opium economy as a framework to analyze the changes and continuities of Afghan life over time. Over the years, scholars have looked at the Saur Revolution, the Cold War, the War on Terror, and the opium economy in Afghanistan through different methods. Scholars analyzed these historical variables using inquiry tools and concepts such as globalism, international relations, culture, sociology, and historiography. The main question these scholars seek to answer boils down to whether Afghanistan is a stable or unstable state.

### **The Saur Revolution and Dependency on Opium**

The Saur Revolution ignited in the city of Kabul as a result of the 1978 coup d'état against Mohammed Daoud Khan, the first president of Afghanistan. The revolution found support from the Soviet-backed People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (P.D.P.A.). The actions of the P.D.P.A. forced the Soviet Union to support the new regime, which allowed the presence of Soviet forces in Afghanistan from 1979 until 1989. Scholar Nazif Shahrani, in his work "Badakhshanis Since the Saur Revolution: Struggle, Triumph, Hope, and Uncertainty," viewed the Saur Revolution and Soviet Union occupation as the consequence of political instability which had left Afghanistan with decades of civil war, little infrastructure, and political isolation for its people.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout Afghanistan's decades of civil war, drastic changes have been rooted in the Saur Revolution era. By the beginning of the new century, the U.S. declared war on terrorism after the September 11, 2001 attack on U.S. soil, a war that once again centered on Afghanistan and its presumed

4 Philip Shishkin & David Crawford, "Heavy Traffic: In Afghanistan, Heroin Trade Soars Despite U.S. Aid; A Threat to Fragile Democracy, The Drug Spreads Death On its Route to Europe; Just Three Euros for a Shot," *Wall Street Journal, Eastern Edition* (January 8, 2006): 1-7.

5 *Ibid.*, 1.

6 Shahrani, "Badakhshanis Since the Saur Revolution", 229.

unstable political system. In his work "U.S. Middle East Policies and their Consequences," Khalid Rahman viewed the war on terrorism as a U.S. strategy to exert superiority over the geopolitical sphere that, consequently, harmed Afghanistan in the long term.<sup>7</sup> While Sharini understood the role of the Saur Revolution differently, Jonathan Goodhand, in "Bandits, Borderlands and Opium Wars: Afghan State-building Viewed from the Margins," argued that the revolution contributed to Afghanistan's reliance on the opium trade to alleviate the struggling economy domestically and globally.<sup>8</sup> By analyzing Afghanistan from the Cold War to the War on Terror, scholars have found that during the war on terrorism, the opium economy expanded exponentially.<sup>9</sup>

Over time, scholars continued to disagree whether the opium economy has caused instability or stability in Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup> Hermann Kreutzmann, in his work "Afghanistan and the Opium World Market: Poppy Production and Trade," and Astri Shurke, in her essay "Reconstruction as Modernisation: The 'Post-Conflict' Project in Afghanistan," analyzed Afghanistan's politics and modernization projects in 2007. Using United Nations Drug and Crime (U.N.O.D.C.) data, Kreutzmann argued that modernization projects funded by the opium economy had caused political conflicts between local, central, and insurgent rulers across Afghanistan.<sup>11</sup> Later, scholars turned to the global market to explain the stability of the state of Afghanistan.

Scholars in 2009 analyzed the opium economy as the primary role in the construction of Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, they argued that globalization furthered the government's reliance on the opium economy. However, these scholars differ in how they view the actors of the opium economy. Justin Mankin outlined the power structures that facilitate the globalization of opium in his article "Gaming the System: How Afghan Opium Underpins Local Power." His perspective illustrated how local power plays a role in the opium trade throughout Afghanistan and how regional powers' role

7 Khalid Rahman, "US Middle East Policies and their Consequences," *Policy Perspectives*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (January 2010): 33-60.

8 Jonathan Goodhand, "Bandits, Borderlands and Opium Wars: Afghan State-building Viewed from the Margins" (DIIS working paper 2009:26, Danish Institute for International Studies, Copenhagen, 2009), 6-27.

9 Ekaterina Stepanova, "Illicit Drugs and Insurgency in Afghanistan," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (May 2012): 4-18.

10 Hermann Kreutzmann, "Afghanistan and the Opium World Market: Poppy Production and Trade," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 5, (December 2007): 605-621; Astri Shurke, "Reconstruction as Modernisation: The 'Post-Conflict' Project in Afghanistan," Vol. 28, No. 7 (2007): 1291-1308.

11 *Ibid.*, 605.

12 Justin Mankin, "Gaming the System: How Afghan Opium Underpins Local Power," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 63, No. 1 (Fall/Winter 2009): 195-209; Goodhand, "Bandits, Borderlands and Opium Wars," 22.

has contributed to the stability of the state economically, socially, and politically.<sup>13</sup> However, Goodhand wrote that opium state-building from the centralized government utilized the periphery to grow and traffic opium in the global market.<sup>14</sup> Goodhand further noted that opium brought stability to Afghanistan by providing peace to Kabul, funding economic activities, and integrating the north and south into the Afghan economy.<sup>15</sup> These scholars used data from global markets and political events to assess the stability the opium economy brings to Afghanistan. However, not all scholars in 2009 used the same approach.

Health scholars A. Kamarulzaman and S.M. Saifuddeen argued in their essay “Islam and Harm Reduction” the necessity to use a cultural approach in understanding the opium economy throughout Afghanistan over time.<sup>16</sup> They posit that the opium economy made the Afghan people addicted to the drug and the economy addicted to its profits. Not only do they offer the perspective of substance abuse bringing violence among the people, but they demonstrate cultural instability since Islamic teaching prohibits the use of drugs. Opium, thus, presents a conundrum for Muslims who divide their opinion on whether to treat or punish the opium problem.<sup>17</sup> The authors conveyed the cultural perspective of the opium economy relying on health, drug, and crime data.

In 2010, Rahman shifted the discourse on Afghanistan politics to international relations.<sup>18</sup> He reasoned that the U.S. involvement in WWII and the rise of the Cold War set the United States as the most powerful country in the world. Because of the power status in the world theater, the U.S. could control the politics of the Middle East and its natural resources.<sup>19</sup> Naturally, the U.S. had a colonial-like control of smaller nations without needing to establish official settlements. Rahman used White House archives and primary sources from the Cold War and War on Terror to demonstrate the power the U.S. held globally; additionally, he noted that this power caused instability throughout Afghanistan.

M. Nazif Shahrani studied the region of Badakhshan during the Saur Revolution. He found that the opium economy, caused by the civil war, corrupted the Afghan central authority.<sup>20</sup> Although the opium economy funds Afghanistan, the state is unstable because of clashes between political actors

13 Ibid., 195.

14 Goodhand, “Bandits, Borderlands and Opium Wars”, 6.

15 Ibid., 22.

16 A. Kamarulzaman & S.M. Saifuddeen, “Islam and Harm Reduction,” in *International Journal of Drug Policy* Vol. 21, No. 2 (2010): 115-118.

17 Ibid., 115-118.

18 Rahman, “US Middle East Policies”, 33-60.

19 Ibid., 53.

20 Shahrani, “Badakhshanis Since the Saur Revolution”, 229-250.

such as the Soviets, the P.D.P.A., Burhanuddin Rabbani, and Hamid Karzai.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, the U.S. took Afghanistan's instability as an advantage to bolster their position in the Cold War and justify their occupation throughout the War on Terror. Although previous scholars have linked the Saur Revolution to the opium economy, Sharini's study differs considerably by reframing the events of the Saur Revolution from the advantage point of the Badakhshanis region.

### Background Information

Afghanistan aligned itself with the Soviet Union because of communist ties.<sup>22</sup> Afghanistan experienced a prosperous relationship with the Soviet Union under the Afghan monarchy. From 1955 to 1979, "the U.S.S.R. provided the Afghans with an estimated \$1.25 billion worth of military aid and \$1.265 billion in economic assistance."<sup>23</sup> Afghanistan and the Soviet Union had a close relationship. This relationship mutually benefited politically both the Kabul and Moscow governments. However, their relationship took a turn when political parties became radicalized in Afghanistan.

In 1965, Nur Muhammad Taraki, Babrak Karmal, and Mir-Akbar Khaybar established the P.D.P.A.<sup>24</sup> Influenced by the Soviet Union's Bolshevik Revolution, members of the P.D.P.A. wanted Afghanistan to become a communist country to end the monarchy under Mohammed Daoud Khan.<sup>25</sup> In the years before the formation of the P.D.P.A., the Soviet Union invested heavily in the Afghan military by providing the Afghan army with Soviet weapons and extensive military training.<sup>26</sup> Because Afghanistan had some of the largest military resources and the P.D.P.A. infiltrated the military, the P.D.P.A. successfully assassinated Khan and established the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (D.R.A.) on April 28, 1978.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the *coup d'état* became known as the Saur Revolution, and Taraki assumed power.

Although the Soviet Union and the P.D.P.A. were allies, the Soviet Union claimed no affiliation to the Saur Revolution.<sup>28</sup> The Soviet Union allied themselves with the P.D.P.A. cautiously because of the politics of the Cold War at a time where the U.S. and U.S.S.R. competed politically in the global south. The U.S. hoped for Afghan politics to unfold in their favor to reveal the

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21 Ibid., 233.

22 Hughes, "The Soviet-Afghan War", 328.

23 Ibid., 328.

24 A.Z. Hilali, "The Soviet Penetration Into Afghanistan and the Marxist Coup," *Journal of Slavic and Military Studies* Vol. 18, No. 4 (2005): 673-716.

25 Hughes, "The Soviet-Afghan War", 329.

26 Hilali, "The Soviet Penetration Into Afghanistan", 673-716.

27 Ibid., 696.

28 Hughes, "The Soviet-Afghan War", 328.

weakness of the Soviet Union.<sup>29</sup> The Saur Revolution and the P.D.P.A. regime left the Soviets on edge because of Cold War politics. As a result, the Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan in 1979 to protect its political interests.

Because of the Saur Revolution, Afghanistan developed its opium economy.<sup>30</sup> Fighting from the revolution forced farmers to grow a different crop than their usual cereals because it destroyed irrigation systems and pastures.<sup>31</sup> Farmers chose opium because it provided the highest profits. Unlike cereals, opium did not have a short half-life, and it could be produced year-round.<sup>32</sup> Lastly, opium created a stable form of credit, so farmers kept growing opium even during the Saur Revolution.<sup>33</sup> Overall, farming opium during wartime greatly benefitted the farmers financially. However, the war continued to persist in Afghanistan as the Saur Revolution turned into a civil war.

The P.D.P.A. was losing control in Afghanistan by 1979.<sup>34</sup> Uprisings and mutinies against the P.D.P.A. in Herat and Jalalabad by mujahidin rebel fighters resulted in thousands of deaths until the regime suppressed them.<sup>35</sup> Reluctantly, on December 24, 1979, 75,000 troops were sent to the D.R.A. from the U.S.S.R., and, two days later, the K.G.B. killed P.D.P.A. President Hafizullah Amin and replaced him with Karmal.<sup>36</sup>

The Soviet Union had assumed that their military intervention would not last long because of their backed leadership of Karmal.<sup>37</sup> However, the Soviet Union stayed in Afghanistan until 1989 to fight off the mujahidin fighters that continued to resist the rule of the P.D.P.A. The mujahidin had the power to keep fighting the P.D.P.A. and the Soviet Union because of their international funding, particularly from the U.S. In the 1980s, "the mujahidin were receiving weapons which were Western in origin, such as the American Stinger antiaircraft (A.A.) missile. The provision of Stinger occurred after a prolonged debate in Washington between officials who wanted to keep the mujahidin fighting and those—such as the C.I.A. director, William Casey—who wanted the defeat of the Russians by the Afghan resistance."<sup>38</sup> These strategies were a direct result of Cold War politics in which both the Soviet

29 Hilali, "The Soviet Penetration Into Afghanistan", 678.

30 Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "National Drug Control Strategy," *United Nations Security Council* (February 2006): 1-47.

31 Afghanistan, "National Drug Control Strategy", 32.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Hughes, "The Soviet-Afghan War", 330.

35 Ibid.

36 Azhar Javed Siddiqui & Khalid Manzoor Butt, "Afghanistan-Soviet Relations during the Cold War: A Threat for South Asian Peace," *A Research Journal of South Asian Studies* Vol. 29, No. 2 (December 2014): 617-631.

37 Hughes, "The Soviet-Afghan War", 333.

38 Ibid., 335.

Union and the U.S. utilized government agencies to fight to take power in the global south.

The Soviet Union could not continue the fight with the mujahidin forever. President Mikhail Gorbachev lost faith in the Afghan cause as the Soviet Union lost 60 billion roubles. The war stood in the way of Perestroika, the restructuring of the economy, as he attempted to improve relationships with the west.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, in 1988, the U.S., U.S.S.R., Pakistan, and Afghanistan signed the Geneva Accords, and in February 1989, Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan.<sup>40</sup>

Among the mujahidin that fought in the Soviet-Afghan war was Osama Bin Laden. Bin Laden was a wealthy Saudi Arabian man who fought against P.D.P.A. and Soviet rule in Afghanistan. Trained by the C.I.A., Bin Laden became a powerful force in the anti-Soviet jihad.<sup>41</sup> Utilizing his wealth and resources from the U.S., Bin Laden recruited 30,000 fighters and established relationships with radical Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar.<sup>42</sup> The relationship between Bin Laden and the U.S. soured when in the 1990s, the U.S., with the blessing of Saudi Arabia, sent soldiers to protect Saudi Arabia after liberating Kuwait from Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup> Bin Laden, angered that he could not be the one to defend Saudi Arabia, declared jihad against the U.S. and ordered Muslims and his Al-Qaeda organization to kill anyone from the U.S. in the name of God. As a result, attacks on U.S. soldiers persisted in Saudi Arabia. These attacks killed 19 and injured 400.<sup>44</sup> Then, in 1999 the U.S. demanded the Taliban hand over Bin Laden. However, the U.S. did not cooperate with the Taliban, so the Taliban declared Bin Laden not guilty of all crimes and set him free in Afghanistan.<sup>45</sup>

Under the Taliban, from 1992 to 1995, farmers continued to grow opium as they did during the Saur Revolution and Soviet occupation.<sup>46</sup> During Taliban rule, Afghan farmers grew around 2,400 tons of opium per year.<sup>47</sup> Farmers used the money to pay for their food and living expenses, while the Taliban used it to stock up on weapons and ammunition for soldiers.<sup>48</sup> In 2000-2001, the Taliban banned the cultivation of opium as a measure to

39 Ibid.

40 Hughes, "The Soviet-Afghan War", 344; Siddiqui & Butt, "Afghanistan-Soviet Relations during the Cold War," 627.

41 Dilip Hiro, "The Cost of an Afghan Victory," *The Nation* Vol. 268, No. 2 (February 1999): 17-20.

42 Ibid., 18.

43 Ibid., 17.

44 Ibid., 18.

45 Ibid., 20.

46 Afghanistan, "National Drug Control Strategy", 33.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.



increase its price in a highly flooded market.<sup>49</sup> As the news of a terrorist attack on U.S. soil circulated globally, the Taliban was forced to confront its relationship with Al-Qaeda and Bin Laden—the group responsible for the attack.

On September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked the U.S. Members of Al-Qaeda, took over airplanes, and flew them into the Twin Towers in New York, killing around 3,000 people.<sup>50</sup> The W. Bush administration acted quickly and responded by bombing Afghanistan where the Taliban was hiding Al-Qaeda command.<sup>51</sup> The U.S. removed the Taliban from power by December 2001.<sup>52</sup> As a result of their removal, there was no governing authority in Afghanistan until 2002.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, there were no regulations on opium cultivation. This vacuum led to the skyrocketing production of opium.<sup>54</sup> Besides the lack of regulation, there were many incentives for the production of opium. First, the ban on opium cultivation brought farmers into debt.<sup>55</sup> Farmers were able to repay their debt because the ban significantly increased the price of opium.<sup>56</sup> Also, farmers were able to make considerably more profits than before the Saur Revolution.<sup>57</sup>

The goal of military occupation was to remove the Taliban. Even after successfully doing so, the U.S. remained occupied in Afghanistan to prevent the Taliban from gaining power again.<sup>58</sup> Although U.S. Navy Seals killed Bin Laden in 2011, the War on Terror continued. To this day, U.S. troops have been pulled from Afghanistan, merely adding to the state's chaos. What started as Cold War politics turned into a humanitarian crisis in which Afghanistan continues to live today.

### P.D.P.A. and the U.S.S.R.

Political actors, local and global, have contributed to Afghanistan's instability and the lack of democracy. In a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Dr. Kurt Waldheim written on May 5, 1980, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, Shah Mohammed Dost, begged the secretary to mobilize the U.N. to remove the economic blockade against

49 Ibid., 32.

50 Tony Smith, "Afghanistan and the War on Terror," *Australian Institute of Policy and Science* Vol. 81, No. 3 (May-June 2009): 4-10.

51 Smith, "Afghanistan and the War on Terror", 4.

52 Afghanistan, "National Drug Control Strategy", 33.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Smith, "Afghanistan and the War on Terror", 4.

Afghanistan after the Saur Revolution. Dost wrote:

In recent months the UNDP headquarter have frozen or closed down dozens of projects and programmes. The World Food Programme has arbitrarily suspended the rendering of food assistance, provided for by the agreed programme, under the artificial pretext, that there is an abundance of food in the country. Recently, the World Bank Headquarters announced its refusal to finance the projects, which had been implemented with its assistance in Afghanistan.<sup>59</sup>

These organizations placed economic sanctions on Afghanistan because of their communist ideology and affiliation. Afghanistan adopted communism in the aftermath of the Saur Revolution and aligned itself with the U.S.S.R. In an attempt to revive democracy by condemning communism, the U.N. and Cold War politics halted Afghan civilians from experiencing modern infrastructure, access to more food, and an economic revival of the country. Although the U.N. could assist the P.D.P.A., Secretary-General Waldheim refused by stating that he could not because the executive heads had made the decision already.<sup>60</sup> Without economic assistance to Afghanistan, its economy was looking bleak until the opium trade kicked up. In 1980, Afghanistan produced less than 1,000 metric tons of opium.<sup>61</sup>

### **The Role of the U.S. in Afghanistan**

The U.S., through the C.I.A., funded the mujahideen during the civil war in the 1980s to save democracy in Afghanistan.<sup>62</sup> In a public message to Afghanistan on American's behalf, President Ronald Reagan issued a statement during the Islamic New Year's day in 1983. Reagan said that "Yet while we condemn what happened throughout Afghanistan, we are not without hope. To watch the courageous Afghan freedom fighters battle modern arsenals with simple hand-held weapons is an inspiration to those who love freedom. Their courage teaches us a great lesson—that there are things in this world worth defending."<sup>63</sup> President Reagan claimed that intervention instilled democracy

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59 Correspondence from Shah Mohammed Dost to Dr. Kurt Waldheim, 5 May 1980, S-0904, Box 77, Folder 17, UN Archives, New York, New York, United States. [hereafter: Correspondence. UNANY].

60 Shah Mohammed Dost to Dr. Kurt Waldheim, 5 May 1980, S-0904, Box 77, Folder 17. Correspondence. UNANY.

61 UNODC, "Global Illicit Trends 2001: Afghanistan," *UNODC Research* (2001): 30-43.

62 Hughes, "The Soviet-Afghan War", 335.

63 Ronald Reagan, "Message on the Observance of Afghanistan Day," Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, National Archives, Published March 3, 1983, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/message-observance-afghanistan-day>.

in Afghanistan, yet the U.S. did not intervene in their economic blockade.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, through the intervention of the U.S., the mujahedeen/ Reagan's freedom fighters supported by the U.S. led extremist groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban that wanted anything but freedom and democracy.<sup>65</sup> From this, it was clear that the U.S. was not helping the Afghan citizens gain freedoms, but the U.S. wanted the Soviet Union out of the world stage.

Although the U.S. sent military intervention in Afghanistan during the war on terror, they were not there to help Afghan civilians. In October 2001, a month after the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush wrote in his speech notecards, "In the face of today's new threat, the only way to pursue peace is to pursue those who threaten it. We did not ask for this mission, but we will always fulfill it—as Americans, we have always done our duty to God, history, and one another. The name of today's military operation is "Enduring Freedom." We defend our precious freedoms and the freedom of people everywhere to live and raise their children free from fear.<sup>66</sup> During the Cold War, the mujahedeen were the so-called providers of freedom to Afghanistan.<sup>67</sup> During the War on Terror, when the relationship between the U.S. and some mujahedeen groups fell apart, the U.S. had to operate in the country alone. W. Bush used ideological language such as freedom to live without fear in a democracy. Still, none of the U.S. actions fulfilled W. Bush's sentiment to create an Afghanistan where civilians could live without fear.<sup>68</sup>

### Opium and Ideology

While political actors like the U.S.S.R., the U.S., and the U.N. intervened in Afghanistan's political and economic affairs, Afghanistan cultivated a thriving opium economy. As soon as the U.S.S.R. left Afghanistan in 1989, Afghanistan had produced over 1,200 tons of opium, amassing 35% of the world's opium.<sup>69</sup> Over time, Afghanistan continued its narco-economy to keep its status on the global market. Furthermore, the opium economy served to keep local rulers in power.

In the opium-producing region of Badakhshan, educated youth favored local rule for political reform and the end of extensive regimes in Afghanistan.<sup>70</sup> Regional power maintained control throughout the 1990s

64 Shah Mohammed Dost to Dr. Kurt Waldheim, 5 May 1980, S-0904, Box 77, Folder 17. Correspondence. UNANY.

65 Shahrani, "Badakhshanis Since the Saur Revolution", 234.

66 George W. Bush, "Global War on Terror," George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, National Archives, Published October 2001, <https://www.georgewbushlibrary.smu.edu/en/Topics/GWOT>.

67 Reagan, "Message on the Observance of Afghanistan Day".

68 Bush, "Global War on Terror".

69 Kreuzmann, "Afghanistan and the Opium World Market", 612.

70 Shahrani, "Badakhshanis Since the Saur Revolution", 243.

because they controlled key resources such as ammunition and weapons, funded by opium, which gave local rule a standing over the centralized government.<sup>71</sup> Even when the Taliban had control throughout Afghanistan and opium production was down to a minimum of 1,000 hectares of poppy farms, local rule continued to operate regionally.<sup>72</sup>

At the local level, funding of opium drastically improved living conditions for Afghan civilians. This was because the drug trade globalized Afghanistan's markets, especially through border areas such as Tajikistan. Trade between Tajikistan and Afghanistan resulted in a boom in infrastructure. Therefore, the narco-economy allowed Afghanistan to create legitimate businesses and projects such as schools, restaurants, and cheaper imports for the people.<sup>73</sup> Not to mention, the farmers of Afghanistan were able to continue production of this export crop despite Afghanistan's droughts.<sup>74</sup> Afghan citizens could live a better life with a sustainable economy while supporting local political reformers to be elected to office.<sup>75</sup> From the opium economy, Afghanistan had what any country desired for its population: a better life, an increase in rural wages, greater class mobility, and a stable currency.<sup>76</sup>

Opium production in Afghanistan needed to be global to alleviate its population. This path was essential to Afghanistan because countries participating in international markets have a greater quality of life than those without this access. Although living conditions have gotten better, Afghanistan's people, as a whole, still are in crisis. A 2001 U.N. report concluded that the Afghan people experience decreased income and investments due to high food costs associated with yearly droughts.<sup>77</sup> Even if their wages had increased from the opium economy, the constant drought made it challenging to invest those funds into a greater quality of life.

Moreover, the U.N. reported that widespread famine and disease were linked to a lack of food resources.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, millions of Afghan people did not have access to safe drinking water before the 2001 report.<sup>79</sup> The Afghan people have suffered a poor quality of life since the Cold War through the War on Terror. Although the narco-economy has provided ample funds to the government

71 Kreutzmann, "Afghanistan and the Opium World Market", 612.

72 Justin Rowlett, "How the US Military's Opium War in Afghanistan was Lost," April 25, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-47861444>.

73 Mankin, "Gaming the System", 204.

74 Shishkin & Crawford, "Heavy Traffic", 3.

75 Shahrani, "Badakhshanis Since the Saur Revolution", 243.

76 Goodhand, "Bandits, Borderlands and Opium Wars", 22.

77 United Nations General Assembly, "Emergency International Assistance for Peace, Normalcy and Reconstruction of War-Stricken Afghanistan," *United Nations Archives* (New York), Dec. 7, 2001, 1-10.

78 United Nations, "Emergency", 1.

79 *Ibid.*, 5.

and its people, suffering continues to be a trend in Afghanistan. Opium has the potential for greatness in Afghanistan. In the hands of actors and citizens who want to provide food assistance and access to healthcare, opium can provide the funds for it. The issue is that the funds are still in the hands of warlords but should be distributed to the people through the local rulers they choose.<sup>80</sup>

There is no doubt that unregulated opium could cause a public health crisis. In fact, Tajikistan, Afghanistan's neighbor, has faced the brunt of opium-related health issues. Since 2006, the Tajiks faced an increase in opium addicts by ten times from 1999. Even more, many of the opium addicts are as young as 14 years old.<sup>81</sup> Opium contributes to even more health issues if unregulated. There is a positive relationship between opium addiction and HIV/AIDS.<sup>82</sup> In Afghanistan and Tajikistan, unsafe intravenous injection practices such as sharing hypodermic, often dirty, needles have caused the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Public health crises have contributed to the instability of Afghanistan. Opium had to be regulated and put into the market for medicinal and not recreational purposes. In 2005, Turkey generated a revenue of \$60 million in medicinal opium sales.<sup>83</sup> Like Afghanistan, Turkey started out producing opium for illicit sales.

The U.S. supported Turkey's "state-controlled license system" to create a legal opium economy in 1974.<sup>84</sup> Of course, Afghanistan and Turkey's governments differ immensely. Still, it does show that with negotiation, rather than war, the U.S. or any other mediator could negotiate a legally controlled medicinal opium economy with local rulers such as the Taliban today. With all that in mind, the opium economy can give Afghanistan a chance to heal from decades of violence and civil war. Vanda Felbab-Brown, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in Washington D.C. who studied Afghanistan, furthered the case of Afghan opium to an extent. In her testimony based on her field studies in Afghanistan, Felbab-Brown noted that "Although the illicit drug economy exacerbates insecurity, strengthens corruption, produces macroeconomic distortions, and contributes to substance abuse disorder, it also provides a vital lifeline for many Afghans and enhances their human security."<sup>85</sup>

The opium economy in Afghanistan is not perfect and has its problems. It does cause substance abuse and rapidly changes the course of the entire

80 Kreutzman, "Afghanistan and the Opium World Market", 612.

81 Shishkin & Crawford, "Heavy Traffic", 4.

82 Kamarulzaman & Saifuddeen, "Islam and Harm Reduction", 115-118.

83 "Opium Trade: Successfully Transitioning from Illicit Production to a Legally Regulated Market," Transform: Drug Policy Foundation (Bristol, United Kingdom), Nov. 22, 2018.

84 Ibid.

85 Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Drugs, Security, and Counternarcotics Policies in Afghanistan," *Brookings* (Washington D.C.), Oct. 29, 2020.

economy from its creation. However, corruption from the opium economy was limited. Corruption allowed local rule to assume power over the corrupt central government, which is what the people wanted.<sup>86</sup> However, Brown realized that the opium economy must remain intact. She said that “Eradication should remain suspended until peace has been achieved, the Afghan government has stable reach throughout the Afghan territory, and legal livelihoods are in place, not simply promised. Such conditions will not exist in Afghanistan for years to come.”<sup>87</sup> If the U.S. or any other political actor were to eradicate the opium economy, it would plunge Afghanistan into more profound insecurity than their civil wars. The destruction of the opium economy could destroy Afghan’s civilian human security and economic assets. Peace in Afghanistan has not been able to occur through foreign intervention shown from the intervention of the Soviet Union and the U.S. Even though all the fieldwork studies, the U.S. attempted to eradicate the opium economy.

The U.S. argued that the opium economy was harmful to democracy in Afghanistan. To combat the Taliban, the U.S. implemented Operation Iron Tempest in 2017 to target opium as the Taliban did use funds from it. Afghanistan produced 90% of the world’s opium at the time.<sup>88</sup> In a U.S. Department of Defense video, the military used a B-52 bomber, an F-22 Raptor fighter, and an M142 rocket launcher. The U.S. killed eight civilians in this bombing which was one of the many from Operation Iron Tempest.<sup>89</sup> Although the opium economy did provide some funds to the Taliban, the opium economy gave local rulers the power to negotiate with them, negotiations the U.S. could not establish.<sup>90</sup> For example, in 2006, the local rulers of the Musa Qala in the Helmand region negotiated a ceasefire with the Taliban so opium could grow safely. The settlement allowed for peace in the area and safety for the farmers and other locals.<sup>91</sup> Although the U.S. intervened in Afghanistan’s opium economy with the pretense to protect democracy from the Taliban, the U.S. ended up killing Afghan civilians while proving themselves unsuccessfully to rid the Taliban from the country.<sup>92</sup>

Operation Iron Tempest and other U.S. airstrike operations to target the opium economy violated the human rights of Afghan civilians.<sup>93</sup> Under Operation Iron Tempest, the number of civilians killed in airstrikes

86 Shahrani, “Badakhshanis Since the Saur Revolution”, 243.

87 Brown, “Drugs, Security, and Counternarcotics”.

88 UNODC, “Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017: Challenges to Sustainable Development, Peace and Security,” *UNODC Research* (2018): 1-79.

89 Rowlett, “How the US Military’s Opium War in Afghanistan was Lost”.

90 Hiro, “The Cost of an Afghan Victory”, 20.

91 Mankin, “Gaming the System”, 206.

92 Rowlett, “How the US Military’s Opium War in Afghanistan was Lost”.

93 “Troops in Contact,” *Human Rights Watch* (New York City), Sept. 8, 2008.

skyrocketed by 330%<sup>94</sup>; since 2005, 26,000 Afghan civilians have died from U.S. airstrikes.<sup>95</sup> A farmer in Afghanistan decried that “People hoped the U.S. would come and release them from the violence of the Taliban but all the U.S. does is attack us [...] The U.S. only blames the Taliban....”<sup>96</sup> The U.S. claimed to have intervened in Afghanistan to save the people from terror.<sup>97</sup> However, the military actions of the U.S. to rid drug operations have shown the opposite.

### Conclusion

The Cold War and the War on Terror were ideological wars that unintentionally put Afghanistan at the center of a decades-long conflict. Its people endured decades of violence and instability throughout this period from political interventions that both sides felt were right and just because it had supported their ideology. Foreign intervention in the country sought to destroy the one thing which uplifted the Afghan people: the opium economy. However, it did not matter the massive amounts of money spent, and the lives of soldiers and civilians lost in these wars. The only thing that mattered to these foreign political actors was their ideology triumph; they did not care if their ideology was comparable with the reality of Afghanistan. The people in Afghanistan continue to live in this conflict every day; they live in fear due to multiple foreign interventions and insurgency. The opium economy has had its drawbacks historically; it was and continues to be one of the few ways the Afghans can survive and make a living through war and peace. After all, the opium economy did not cause political and economic instability—foreign intervention did. Although the people of Afghanistan lived through decades of violence, the opium economy uplifted their human security from the Cold War, the War on Terror, and now.

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94 “Civilians Killed in Air Strikes in Afghanistan Soars by More than 300%,” *BBC News*, (London), Dec. 8, 2020.

95 *Ibid.*

96 “Troops in Contact”, *Human Rights Watch*.

97 Bush, “Global War on Terror”.