

May 2022

Evaluating Afghanistan's Past, Present and Future Engagement with Multilateral Drug Control

John Collins¹ and Ian Tennant²

1. **John Collins** is Director of Academic Engagement at the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) in Vienna. All correspondence to: john.collins@globalinitiative.net
2. **Ian Tennant** is Head of Multilateral Representation at the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime in Vienna.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to our research support, Nicole Kalczynski. Thanks also to our interviewees for this paper and our broader research on this subject.

Suggested citation

Collins, J. and Tennant, I. (2022). *Evaluating Afghanistan's past, present and future engagement with multilateral drug control*. SOC ACE Research Paper No. 6. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham.

About the author

John Collins is Director of Academic Engagement at the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) in Vienna. He is also a Fellow at the Centre for Criminology, University of Hong Kong, and Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Illicit Economies and Development*, LSE Press. John's contemporary policy interests focus on the political economy of international drug control and the evolving dynamics of national and international policy reforms.

Ian Tennant is Head of Multilateral Representation at the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime in Vienna. He also manages the GI-TOC Resilience Fund, a multi-donor initiative which supports civil society individuals and organisations working to counter the damaging effects of organised crime around the world, and leads the GI-TOC engagement with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the wider diplomatic and civil society community. Ian is currently the Vice Chair of the Alliance on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, an umbrella grouping of non-government organisations (NGO).

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Acronyms and abbreviations

| | |
|---------------|---|
| AD | Alternative Development |
| CND | Commission on Narcotic Drugs, UN (1946–present) |
| DND | Division on Narcotic Drugs, UN (1946–present) |
| DSB | Drug Supervisory Body (1933–1967) |
| ECOSOC | United Nations Economic and Social Council (1946–present) |
| EIC | British East India Trading Company |
| FARC | Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia |
| FBN | US Federal Bureau of Narcotics (1930–1968) |
| INCB | International Narcotics Control Board |
| OSS | US Office of Strategic Services |
| PPI | Paris Pact Initiative |
| PCOB | Permanent Central Opium Board |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNGASS | United Nations General Assembly Special Session |
| UNO | United Nations Organization |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |
| US | United States |
| \$ | US dollars |

Summary

This paper charts the history of Afghanistan's interaction with the international drug control system and the complex relationship between national–international policy formation. It tells the story of Afghanistan's relationship with and impact on evolving global drug regulations from the birth of the League of Nations drug control system through the 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs and up to the present day. It draws on primary documentation from US and British archives and an extensive review of secondary literature, as well as a series of interviews conducted for the purposes of this paper. It argues for a more nuanced historical awareness of Afghanistan's role within multilateral drug control as a way to understand its roles in the creation of the modern licit drug economy and its continued role in the modern illicit drug economy. Further, it argues that there is a need to engage broader society in discussions, to ensure more continuity is built into the system—as relationships built with the old regime in Afghanistan have collapsed. It calls for re-centring international capacity-building efforts on community-centred approaches, not simply law enforcement and traditional alternative development (AD) programmes. Moving away from the former enforcement-focused activities also reduces the risks of human rights violations.

1. Introduction

Contemporary policy analyses and literature reviews continue to portray Afghanistan as a passive client state, oscillating between different regulatory approaches depending on international sticks and carrots. The question of Afghanistan's role within the international drug control system is widely ignored in the existing literature and policy analyses. This paper charts the history of Afghanistan's interaction with the international drug control system and the complex relationship between national–international policy formation. It tells the story of Afghanistan's relationship with and impact on evolving global drug regulations from the birth of the League of Nations drug control system through the 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs and up to the present day. It draws on a blend of primary source documentation from US and British archives, an extensive review of secondary literature, and a series of interviews conducted for the purposes of this paper. It argues for a more nuanced historical awareness of Afghanistan's role within multilateral drug control as a way to understand its roles in the creation of the modern licit drug economy and its continued role in the modern illicit drug economy. Further, it argues that there is a need to engage broader society voices in discussions, to ensure more continuity is built into the system—as relationships built with the former regime have collapsed. It calls for a re-centring international capacity-building efforts on community-centred approaches, not just law enforcement and traditional AD programmes. Moving away from the former enforcement-focused activities also reduces the risks of human rights violations.

Historically, Afghanistan's drug policies have received significant attention since the 1979 Soviet invasion, but the pre-1979 history has been neglected almost entirely (Bradford, 2019, p. 3). James Bradford's impressive historical work serves as an important corrective to this, but remains a first step—focusing on the institutional and diplomatic relations with the global drug control regime and the US in particular. There has, as yet, with the partial exception of some broad institutional histories of the League of Nations (Taylor, 1969), and United Nations drug control (Collins, 2021; McAllister, 2000), been no systematic analysis of Afghanistan's complex relationship with evolving global drug regulations from the League of Nations to the present era. Although Afghanistan is often discussed as a policy-taker in this regard, its exact role within and impact on these regulatory systems and the key international protagonists, particularly the US, the UK and Iran, have yet to be taken fully into account. This paper attempts to fill this void and to bring these historical analyses to bear on contemporary policy discussions about Afghanistan's role within international drug control, particularly under the new Taliban regime, in order to better understand and develop policy responses to likely policy outcomes in the coming years.

2. The International Drug Control System

While the concept of international drug control is centuries old, the modern drug trade emerged as a product of globalisation and technological development. Increased ship tonnage and reduced transport costs enabled mass production and transit of psychoactive compounds (Courtwright, 2012). The Sino-Indian opium trade of the nineteenth century, which had solidified under Portuguese, British and Dutch traders, culminated with the monopoly of the British East India Trading Company (EIC). The lucrative trade soon ran headlong into Qing China's crumbling imperial state as it sought to redefine its relationship with opium, exemplified by the prohibitions of 1729 (Bello, 2003). The result was a series of conflicts between Britain and China known as the Opium Wars.

China's defeat and the enforced legalisation of opium under the 1860 Convention of Peking marked a high point in the legalised trade as opium consumption followed free wage labour across Asia (Trocki, 2005). European colonisers looked to regulate, manage and where possible fiscally benefit from their local opium trades (Trocki, 2005). As the opium trade expanded and adapted, however, there were transnational calls for regulation and prohibition (Collins, 2020; Richards, 2002a). Britain ended its opium trade with China via the Anglo-Chinese Opium Agreements of 1907–1914, while the US prohibited opium in the Philippines and viewed this as the model to be replicated by the European colonial powers (Collins, 2021).

The Shanghai Opium Commission in 1909 represented the first formal multilateral gathering. Delegates quickly divided into two camps. The US and China advocated a strong prohibitionist agenda, while the European colonial powers sought accommodationist policies, including 'quasi-medical' opium eating and smoking in their colonies. The Commission was followed by the Hague Convention of 1912, which committed states parties to the gradual 'suppression of the manufacture, the internal traffic in and the use of prepared opium' (*The Hague International Opium Convention, 1912*). A compromise document, with broad aspirations and no implementation mechanisms, it became the normative foundation for the multilateral control system.

The 1925 Geneva Opium Conventions produced a bureaucratic framework for international regulations. This included the creation of the Permanent Central Opium Board (PCOB) to monitor imports and exports globally. The 1931 Convention established a separate body, the Drug Supervisory Body (DSB), to oversee the 'system of estimates' whereby member states could predict and report on their drug requirements and thus enable comparison with actual imports and exports. The creation of this closed system thereby enabled the formal international distinction between licit and illicit drug trades. Furthermore, it created the international system of 'scheduling' to distinguish between controlled or 'listed' drugs based, in theory, on their relative harm to medical utility (Collins, 2017a; McAllister, 2000).

World War II reshaped the international drug control system. The PCOB, DSB and part of the League drug secretariat moved to Washington DC. Throughout the war, countries vied for access to US markets and US goodwill, with Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey and others promising major changes in domestic opium cultivation (Collins, 2021). Moreover, in 1943, in response to US pressure, Britain, the Netherlands and eventually France, committed, with significant small print, to ending their opium monopoly systems in Asia upon repossession of their colonies (Collins, 2017b). These broad shifts helped set the policy terrain for a reinvigorated drug control order under the new United Nations Organization (UNO).

By World War II the international system regulated manufacture and distribution but had not yet coalesced around controlling raw materials (Renborg, 1964). By the 1950s, attention had focused on production control and the specific goal of dividing up the global licit market. States competed for market share and global regulations that would play to their individual strengths. After tumultuous negotiations, the US and France pushed through the 1953 Opium Protocol despite wide opposition. It imposed strict production controls, including a permanently closed list of seven countries legally entitled to produce opium for the global market (Collins, 2021).

Moderate states sought to bury the Opium Protocol through the superseding 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. A consensus treaty, it established a limited measure of production control and expanded the control regime in a number of key areas. States soon focused their attention on barbiturates, tranquilisers and amphetamines, agreeing the 1971 *Convention on Psychotropic Substances* (the Vienna Convention) to cover these drugs (Collins, 2021). With a broad regulatory framework in place, attention turned to enforcing the system. Latin American governments pushed for an aggressive international response to the growing problem of illicit markets, crime and instability in their region (United Nations, 1998). The 1988 *Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances* enshrined two key innovations. First, it created mechanisms to monitor and control 'precursors, chemicals and solvents, which are used in the manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances' (Preamble, United Nations, 1988). Second, as UNODC writes,

... it was designed to hit drug traffickers where it hurts them most: by depriving them of financial gains and freedom of movement, extending the scope of control to measures to prevent money laundering and facilitate the tracing, freezing and confiscation of proceeds from drug trafficking. (UNODC, 2008, p. 8)

3. Afghanistan and Opium before World War II

The role of territories that constitute modern-day Afghanistan as a crossroads of opium and empire has a long and varied history, which would inevitably come into contact with multilateral control efforts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For example, in 1840, when evaluating the implementation of their New Regulations on opium 'in the Cities of the Southern March', one Qing Chinese official wrote that 'Kashmir and Badakshan are the worst' cross-border smugglers of opium (quoted in Bello, 2000, p. 138). As the historian David Bello writes, the Chinese officials had '*touched upon a profound spatial truth*' in their assessments, namely that although no British had reached Xinjiang, therefore '*[t]echnically there was no overland connection between Britain and Xinjiang*' but, '*Kashmiris, Badakshanis, assorted Mongols, and "Indians"*' used '*precisely such routes to bring opium to Xinjiang from the British colony of India*' (Bello, 2000, p. 143). Geographically, parts of modern-day Afghanistan became transit points, playing a triangular geopolitical and economic role between Chinese and British Indian opium markets.

When Afghanistan first attempted entry into the global drug market in the twentieth century it was largely driven, or drawn, by external forces. James Bradford convincingly frames this in terms of Britain's restrictions on the Sino-Indian opium trade creating demand for Afghan opium in India and China. This coincided with independence from Britain in the 1919 Treaty of Rawalpindi and a Friendship Treaty with Bolshevik Russia in 1919. Both appeared to open the way to a strategy of state modernisation under Amanullah Khan, which, in part, looked to opium as a means to boost revenues and economic development (Bradford, 2019).

The Penal Code of 1924–1925 brought drug and alcohol use more firmly under government regulation, with nominally strict penalties for consumption. By the 1920s international estimates placed Afghan opium production at 25,900 lbs (approximately 11,750 kg), with production centred in the northern part of the country, particularly Herat and Badakhshan (Bradford, 2019, p. 34). Amanullah, in line with his general trade policy, sought to formalise the customs system surrounding it and to encourage exports, including by exempting production for export from the Penal Code provisions. He introduced a 10% ad valorem tax for traders, leading some scholars to conclude that the regime was increasingly convinced of the lucrative potential of the opium export market (Bradford, 2019).

The global market was indeed changing, with the European colonial trade dying off. In reality, Indian opium had already been largely supplanted by domestic Chinese opium by 1900. It remained a significant source of revenue for British India, but one with which reformers in London and ultimately government officials in India were willing to dispense (Newman, 1989). Further, the economic fundamentals of the trade in India had changed, driving farmers away from the crop en masse (Newman, 1989; Richards, 2002b). Britain did have concerns about incipient competition in the South Asia and East Asia regions around this time, but it came largely from Persian and Turkish opium

(Newman, 1989). There is little indication that Afghan opium registered as more than a local enforcement issue in the face a gargantuan global market. Multilateral emphasis focused overwhelmingly on Iran, Turkey, Yugoslavia and Southeast Asia. Within this context Afghanistan was viewed as a potential spoiler for Iran and the global licit market more broadly (Collins, 2021).

3.1. The Iran Connection

Opium played a fundamental role in Iran's economy. By 1917 it was the country's second most valuable export, in addition to a substantial domestic consumption market. Consequently, like Afghanistan, Iran's government sought to probe the value of an uncertain opium market and assess its potential taxable role in state building and modernisation (Hansen, 2001, p. 96). Moreover, like Afghanistan, Iran faced a global regulatory conundrum. The lucrative Southeast Asian and Chinese markets were in decline as governments sought to restrict consumption. India's collapsing exports offered only limited market possibilities, as League of Nations regulations reduced the 'licit' global trade. Iran faced a choice: either to try to work within the emerging global regulatory system or continue to operate on the fringes with all the associated diplomatic and reputation implications (Collins, 2021).

The regime of Reza Shah, running from 1921 to 1941, pursued a course of modernisation and westernisation that required new sources of government revenue. Opium again seemed an obvious source and one actually encouraged by US economic advisers (Hansen, 2001). As tentative regulations grew, a sudden rise in smuggling pushed the government to establish a monopoly and harsher penalties. Even so, the government struggled to rein in the illicit market or provide a stable and predictable licit outlet or gain control of the export market. Even success brought problems as stocks began to pile up, a situation only worsened by the Great Depression. Soon Iran was bargaining with Britain, France, Japan, Siam and other powers, promising to ratify and forcefully implement the 1912 Hague Opium Convention and join the multilateral licit framework, in exchange for commitments to buy up excess stocks (Hansen, 2001). The ability to implement the requisite regulations within Iran would, however, rest on their ability to prevent a shift of the illicit trade into Afghanistan.

The 1931 Convention had already made it difficult for states, such as Iran, to straddle the licit-illicit divide. Adherence required ever-increasing commitments to tackle illicit supplies and attempt to limit output to licit market demands (Taylor, 1969). During the economic crises of the 1930s the Iranian government had been actively seeking to replace opium crops with food and cash crops with limited success. Without alternatives, Iran sought new, increasingly unpalatable, outlets for its opium, for example supplying Japanese forces for resale in occupied China (Hansen, 2001). Iran's role in supplying the Japanese state, widely believed to be undertaking a policy of 'narcotisation' against the Chinese people, placed it in an unwelcome position in relation to the League drug control system and US federal drug agencies in particular (Collins, 2021). It was a position from which Iran would spend the wartime years and post-World War II era seeking to retreat. As it did so and tried to enact far-reaching reforms of its domestic opium markets, Afghanistan emerged as the key potential spoiler (Collins, 2015).

3.2. Enter Afghanistan

In 1934 Afghanistan joined the League of Nations and was then included in the 1937 Saadabad Pact, thereby formalising relations with the Soviet Union (Bradford, 2019). Imports and exports rose with its formal absorption into the international trading system. As foreign trade increased, so too did the state's reliance on trade to fund modernisation. The US was slow to establish relations with the burgeoning state, watching as Germany became the primary donor in the 1930s. Alongside this, Prime Minister Mushammad Hashim Khan sought to join the global regulatory system on drugs, in order to obtain much-needed essential medicines. As Bradford highlights, this came at a cost of disrupting traditional systems of political, regulatory and social control, and thereby committing to install modern systems of centralised state monitoring and distribution, as mandated by the international drug conventions (Bradford, 2019).

Afghanistan hesitated about ratifying the 1912 Hague Opium Convention but did ratify the 1931 Geneva Convention for limiting the Manufacture and regulating the Distribution of Narcotic Drugs (Taylor, 1969). Although Afghanistan struggled to implement key reporting provisions, it did establish a government opium monopoly, the Shirkat-i-Taryak or Afghan Opium Company, which began exporting to pharmaceutical companies in Germany, the UK, Japan and Russia (Bradford, 2019). The provision of opium to Japan also served to inflame anti-Afghan opinion within the US Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN). Japan, according to FBN Chief Harry Anslinger, was leading a global conspiracy to flood the world with opium. By extension, any state providing opium to Japan to facilitate its efforts became part of the global list of control recalcitrants and renegades (Collins, 2021). Consequently, Afghan opium was unwelcome in the US by World War II (Bradford, 2019).

By acceding to the system, Afghanistan assumed significant regulatory burdens which in turn required state capacity to implement (McAllister, 2004). Aside from the basic bureaucratic underpinnings of a system of estimates and reporting, it also conferred the obligations to suppress illicit cultivation, manufacture and consumption. If Afghanistan would struggle with the former, it was hard to see how it could hope to enforce the latter, even under conditions of relatively constrained geographic production. By World War II Afghanistan remained a non-party to the 1912 Convention and effectively non-compliant with the 1931 Convention. Nevertheless, its accession to the League of Nations system locked it into a global commodity control arrangement whereby decisions made in other countries, namely Iran, Turkey, China the US, UK and many others, would have spill-over implications for Afghanistan, and vice versa (Collins, 2021).

3.3. World War II

World War II fundamentally reshaped international drug control and Afghanistan's relationship to it on several fronts. During the 1930s the US amassed a four-year strategic stockpile of over 600,000 lbs (around 272, 155 kg) of opium (McAllister, 2000). The US was thus in a position to pursue and enforce its vision on drug policy as it had no risk of shortages. Anslinger had become the 'de facto global drug czar' during the war and Britain remained the only country capable of challenging this drug hegemony (McAllister, 2000, p. 132).

At the outbreak of war Britain had no stockpile, making it vulnerable to supply disruptions and price gouging (Collins, 2021). Iran provoked a supply crisis in 1939–40 by renegeing on an agreement to supply 1,000 chests of opium to London, pushing instead for higher prices and payment in US dollars.¹ Desperate, the Colonial Office sought supplies from Afghanistan and Turkey.² The Foreign Office encouraged both, noting that Afghanistan seemed eager to sell to generate government revenue, and indeed India was keen for Afghanistan to sell to London.³ By the close of 1940, Afghanistan and Turkey had emerged as favourable suppliers and, equally importantly, willing to accept payments in pounds sterling.⁴ The crisis deflated, but left an indelible imprint on British regulatory policy. Never again would the government allow itself to be held to ransom by a shortage of suppliers (Collins, 2021).

By the outbreak of war Iran was also viewed as the main source of global illicit supply, particularly for Japanese forces in China (Friman, 1996; McCoy, 2003). The 1941 invasion of Iran by Britain and Russia effectively cut the country off from its Far Eastern market as British forces instituted contraband controls and stopped issuing navicerts for neutral ships to pass through the wartime blockades. Meanwhile, Iran, under the new regime of Mohamed Reza Pahlavi, began to countenance greater restrictions on the domestic trade and consumption practices. Anslinger, having heard such proclamations before, remained sceptical (Collins, 2015; Hansen, 2001).

Anslinger was soon forced by the State Department to temporarily lift the Iranian opium import ban in 1942, as part of a broader US–Iranian trade rapprochement (McAllister, 2000). US–Iranian free trade negotiations kicked off in 1942 and opium, again despite the objection of drug control officials, was one of the commodities under discussion.⁵ Concessions on opium from Afghanistan and other suppliers whose opium had relatively high levels of morphine content were highly prized. The price for preferential treatment would be strict adherence to the existing international drug conventions. Iran and the US concluded their Free Trade deal in 1943. Although Iran received a tariff concession on opium, it remained under strict FBN control, meaning a rapid increase in demand from the US was unlikely as progress on domestic controls appeared remote. Anslinger, having won a major concession on British and Dutch opium monopoly policies in the Far East during 1943, determined to use 1944 to take on Iranian drug policy. He was to be greatly assisted by Afghanistan (Collins, 2021).

Following the well-received overtures to Britain in 1940, Afghanistan sought to break open the US market to its opium in 1941. Initially the State Department refused, citing well-worn arguments about existing US legislation and Afghanistan's lack of adherence to the 1912 Convention. Following pleas from Kabul and a promise to take 'any steps' needed 'to comply with American laws', the US Federal government acquiesced. Seeing an opportunity for closer bilateral relations with Kabul and a chance to lure Afghanistan into international regulatory adherence, the US bent its own rules and granted access.⁶ Afghanistan announced in 1943 that it had ratified the 1912 Convention. Although another major victory for Anslinger in his wartime drug diplomacy and something he would use as leverage against Iran, the US push to strengthen Afghan drug control was just beginning. As with Iran, from 1944 Anslinger was determined to push for greater controls on Afghanistan and to threaten its market access to the US after the war if his demands were not met (Collins, 2021).

In 1944 the US Ambassador began, 'in a friendly spirit', to warn the Afghan Foreign Minister that access to the US market would naturally cease after the war unless it could fully adhere to the drug conventions. Further, given the British and Dutch announcements, and the expectation that licit opium-smoking markets would all but collapse in the aftermath of hostilities, there would be no potential outlet apart from the licit manufacturing market. He then went further, offering a segment of the lucrative US market to Afghan opium (Collins, 2021). Afghanistan also relied on US pharmaceuticals and could not risk being cut off from these, although it still lacked the capacity to implement the conventions. Mitigating this, and following the loss of its German donor, Afghanistan began to see prohibition on production as a potential entry point to US financial aid (Bradford, 2019).

In November 1944 the Afghan government made an announcement which shocked observers, proclaiming that from March 1945 *all* opium cultivation would be prohibited in the country. The State Department openly praised the decision as driven by 'humanitarian sentiments' in the face of 'financial sacrifices' and hoped that other producers would follow suit. The reasons for the far-reaching decision were not clear at the time, with the Council of Ministers claiming that despite its profitability they lacked the necessary controlling organisations to regulate the trade. The social costs (moral and material), they claimed, simply outweighed the benefits.⁷ How the Afghan government expected to implement complete prohibition in such conditions raises obvious questions about the sincerity of their effort or the rationale underpinning it. James Bradford, for example, argues that 'at best the 1945 prohibition can be seen as an attempt to start restricting opium, and at worst, as a masquerade to get American money' (Bradford, 2019, p. 83). Whether cynical or naïve it would soon become clear that the Afghan state was quite incapable of restricting illicit cultivation even as it ostensibly wound down the vestiges of its formal market.

While Anslinger and his allies tried to use the Afghanistan change to pressure Iran, ultimately time was running out. By 1944 he received reports from the US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) that Iranian government stores were ignoring regulations and indiscriminately re-selling opium to US merchant mariners and Indian troops.⁸ With his focus drawn to new strategic battles over the creation of the United Nations Organization, Anslinger appeared to relinquish the Iranian front to pro-forma State Department efforts (Collins, 2021). Still, domestic rumblings emerged within Iran. In June 1944 the Anti-Opium and Alcohol Society became a vocal advocate for expanding domestic prohibitions, even openly refuting official narratives and statistics. Soon, the Iranian Foreign Minister began to sound out the possibilities of crop-substitution assistance from the US.⁹ The State Department responded encouragingly, offering a full economic package, including a dedicated share of 125 tons of the post-war licit market (roughly 30% of the estimated quantity). To assist in bringing production down from the estimated 750 tons annually, the US also offered large-scale technical assistance and to continue buying Iranian opium in the interim.¹⁰

The seriousness of the US response demonstrated the emerging US post-war drug strategy. Alongside reconstructing the multilateral apparatus, the US wanted simultaneously to push through a global production limitation agreement that would achieve its long-sought goal of reducing global production to purely medical and scientific needs of 400 tons per year. Meanwhile, the more the US was able to pick off

smaller-scale producers like Afghanistan, the more it could consolidate global production among a small core of large producer states. Afghan prohibition was a diplomatic coup in many ways, but Iranian control was key. For now, however, the Iranian-US overtures came to nothing (Collins, 2021).

4. The Problem of the Post-war Global Market

The US FBN ambition for a radically reformed global drug control system, moulded more as a global court and enforcement body, never materialised. The political consensus style of the League of Nations, supplemented by the quasi-judicial treaty bodies, was transferred intact to the UN apparatus. Further, US efforts to accelerate the limitation of global production also ultimately failed. Former League drug official Bertil Renborg wrote that the 1931 Convention had created,

... a planned economy on a world-wide scale. It regulates a whole industry throughout the world, from the point at which the raw materials enter the factory to the point at which they finally reach the legitimate consumer. The only missing link was at the time the limitation of the production of the raw materials. (Renborg, 1964)

Prior to 1939, a total of 12 countries produced raw opium. Of these, Iran, India, Turkey, Yugoslavia, the USSR, Korea, Afghanistan and Bulgaria produced raw opium for export, while China and Indo-China produced for domestic consumption alone. PCOB estimates suggested that between 1934 and 1937 a world total of 18,504 tons of raw opium had been produced, of which 65% was produced in China, 17% in Iran, 6% in Turkey, 2% in the USSR, 1.5% in Yugoslavia and roughly 1.5% in Afghanistan, Korea, Japan, Indo-China and Bulgaria combined. Chile accounted for an insignificant 45 kg over the four years.¹¹

By 1945, the key states fell broadly into four groups: hardliner supply controllers (dominated by the US), activist producers, sceptics, and moderates. Turkey typified the activist producer group and indeed led the producer bloc for the coming decades. Driving a race to the top in the 1930s in terms of cultivating an image of being a global 'good citizen' producer, it increasingly came to favour a level playing field as a way to solidify its efforts and lock out competition. Yugoslavia represented the moderate elements of the producer bloc, supportive of regulatory standardisation but accommodating key producer concerns (Collins, 2021).

Sceptics, such as Canada and Britain, were not opposed to production controls in principle, but feared they would be unworkable and costly in practice (Collins, 2021). Both countries kept a footing in the moderate group, which before the war had consisted of Belgium, France, Poland and Switzerland. The moderate group believed the obstacles were surmountable through sustained diplomatic efforts, while Britain and Canada saw no loss in allowing limitations on production to sink under their own internal contradictions (Collins, 2021).

The US, although sceptical about Afghanistan's 1944 prohibition, was unprepared for a claim by the Afghan Foreign Office in 1947 that their government had never actually promised to limit production fully but only to restrict it to medical and scientific purposes.¹² Despite initial bluster Anslinger was powerless as the US strategy of picking

off small-scale suppliers and consolidating the global market under several large producers was unravelling. Afghanistan had, via Britain, put the other powers on notice that it intended to be considered for a share of the global licit market, potentially torpedoing the already unlikely prospect of agreement on production control.

4.1. The Road to the 1953 Opium Protocol

In 1949 the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) formed an ad hoc committee to examine the possibility of an interim production control agreement. It was composed of representatives of leading producers, namely India, Iran, Turkey, the USSR and Yugoslavia. The USSR ultimately refused to take part on procedural grounds.¹³ Producer countries which did participate played along but focused on protecting their market share. Facing seemingly insurmountable odds, they reached a compromise agreement to establish an international buying and selling agency and carve up the global market into delineated shares.¹⁴ However, worsening market conditions,¹⁵ and a lack of support from the Soviet Union, left it dead on arrival.¹⁶

The issue returned to CND unresolved and consumer states, particularly Canada, supported free-trade positions. Their concerns were only worsened by market volatility. In 1952 Britain believed Iran was price-gouging on opium shortages (Collins, 2021). Moreover, Iran began to renege on opium agreements with British firms in order to sell opium to the US, which was in the process of stockpiling.¹⁷ Then it began to renege on these contracts with US suppliers.¹⁸

Part of the numerous concerns of Canada and the UK stemmed from the suggestion that opium be limited to a 'closed list' of producers, thereby once again risking a 'trade monopoly' that could hold both manufacturing and consumer countries to ransom. The US continued to push for a closed list of four global producers. Finding no hope of constructive support from the UK, Canada or others, the US turned to France and pushed through an agreement, including a closed list, at the 1953 Opium Protocol Conference in New York. They did expand the closed list of producers to seven—Bulgaria, Greece, India, Iran, the Soviet Union, Turkey and Yugoslavia. However, many viewed the Protocol as an affront to national sovereignty and refused to sign, while the Soviet Union boycotted the whole process. The UK looked to the conclusion of the Single Convention as a means to kill the Protocol. The US tried to encourage producer states to sign and reach a quorum of ratifications. It was precisely at this period of discord that Afghanistan sought to re-enter consideration for the global licit market (Collins, 2021).

4.2. Iranian Prohibition and the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961

In 1955 the Iranian parliament instituted a complete ban on opium cultivation. Member states were justifiably sceptical, but the US immediately offered vocal support.¹⁹ While the US had nominally argued against paying countries to follow international drug obligations, it was willing to dangle the carrot of technical assistance.²⁰ So far so good on Iranian prohibition. However, by 1954, Afghanistan was already shifting its policy, actively looking towards an expanded role in the global licit market. The US Embassy in

Kabul had noted that the government was actively encouraging cultivation and had already successfully marketed crops to Germany and Italy and 'reports of substantial shipments to Russia'.²¹ Then in 1955, while tensions were still raw over the 1953 Protocol meeting, Afghanistan formally requested to join the Protocol's closed list of producers. This was despite Afghanistan having remained outside producer state negotiations and still not having ratified key treaties, such as the 1925 Convention. Anslinger initially tried to gently dissuade Kabul, offering technical assistance instead.²²

The UK and US delegations had sought a compromise at the 1956 CND, passing a resolution recognising the justice of Afghanistan's claim, but ultimately looking towards its inclusion in the list of producers under the Single Convention. Iran was furious, viewing them as voting in favour of Afghanistan 'and her friends...the Soviet Union'.²³ Anslinger was privately implacably opposed. The State Department initially sought a middle ground and offered five reasons for the US hedge: a desire to avoid the perverse effects prohibition would have on the Afghan economy; the relatively small quantity and high quality of Afghan opium; the absence of evidence on leakage into the illicit market; Afghanistan's right to equal treatment; the lack of 'immediately practicable' crop-substitution options.²⁴ However, the UK Foreign Office sought to ensure a common front that 'in no circumstances' would the US vote against Iran.²⁵ Iranian anger had undoubtedly softened up the State Department which agreed to follow the UK's lead in postponing the issue until the 1958 session.²⁶ Ultimately a ham-fisted and counterproductive Afghan effort simply served to strengthen the resolve of member states against its request.²⁷ The issue was postponed to the 1958 Session and the US and UN drug secretariat, the Division on Narcotic Drugs (DND), set about burying the issue. The head of DND, Gilbert Yates, visited Afghanistan prior to the 1958 session and recommended technical assistance, which the US would enthusiastically support at the 1958 session if Afghanistan withdrew its request.²⁸ Further, if the 1953 Protocol went into effect, the US promised to give Afghanistan's request every consideration, an almost certainly empty gesture given that other producers would be sure to veto new additions. Thus, Afghanistan's ambitions for a share of the global licit market quietly ended.

Focus now turned to an increasingly overt fight between the UK and US over the Single Convention. Approaching the 1961 plenipotentiary conference the UK had amassed a broad coalition of states and now focused on making 'every effort to secure a treaty that the great majority of countries' would accept.²⁹ Inflexible and unplugged, the US failed on most fronts to either sustain or gain ground, while the UK systematically ensured 'the more controversial elements [were] watered into a generally acceptable form', including removing the maligned closed list of producers.³⁰

Under the Single Convention the PCOB and DSB were fused into a new International Narcotics Control Board (INCB). The provisions regarding estimates and statistics were virtually identical to the existing treaties; while the scheduling system, initially running to two schedules under the 1931 Convention, was expanded to four.³¹ Parties were to establish national agencies to collect the opium crop, and cultivation would be restricted to those licensed by the agency. All countries which produced opium for 10 years prior to January 1961 could continue to produce it; and any country could produce and export up to five tons annually simply by notifying the Board. A country wishing to export more than five tons had to notify ECOSOC, which could either approve or recommend against it.

Anslinger, despite a relatively sanguine State Department, sought to torpedo the Single Convention. Ultimately, these efforts only served to further alienate moderate states and ended in failure as the Single Convention came into force in 1964. Four decades into the system, despite efforts to rein in production via a strict international framework, producers such as Afghanistan remained limited only by their ability to compete in the global licit opium market, while adhering to the regulatory provisions underpinning it.

4.3. From the 1961 Single Convention to 1990

Iran's prohibition in the mid-1950s arguably started the long-feared regional shift of opium cultivation into Afghanistan. While states were slowly gearing up to implement the 1961 Single Convention, a rapid expansion in consumer markets saw a boom in demand for heroin and other drugs (McAllister, 2000). Countries like the UK, which had previously dismissed the issue as a US consumer problem, witnessed expanded domestic use. Simultaneously, Asian drug markets had been disrupted by a successful suppression campaign within the People's Republic of China and the emergence of Burma and the broader 'Golden Triangle' (the bordering areas of Laos, Myanmar and Thailand) as a key axis in the world heroin trade, particularly as nationalist Chinese paramilitary groups flocked to the ungoverned regions to wage a guerrilla war against the Chinese communist government (Collins, 2020). The dismantling of the French Connection heroin trafficking ring, centred on Marseilles and drawing on excess production of Turkish opium (which underwent mass eradication in the 1970s), only solidified the dislocations in global markets. The end of the Turkish–French–US trade route resulted in a drought in US heroin markets from around 1973 (Agar & Reisinger, 2002).

Meanwhile, as opium supplies slowly depleted in Iran, they were replaced by traffickers and cultivators in Afghanistan. By 1969, the Iranian government altered the ban to enable minimal amounts of state-regulated opium cultivation to provide a form of maintenance to registered consumers (Haq, 1996). By that time, however, opium production in Afghanistan had already taken root and Iran was its key market. The trade had proven to be lucrative and to some degree straightforward—despite the looming threat of the death penalty if caught—as traffickers deployed existing smuggling routes to transport products into Iran (Haq, 1996). Iranian markets remained the focal point for Afghanistan's opium while Afghanistan became a brief tourism destination for US and European counterculture tourists who came to smoke cannabis and take advantage of a lax government attitude to their activities. Their early smuggling of hashish to Europe began the supply routes that would eventually be used for heroin smuggling (Haq, 1996). By 1972 the INCB wrote,

Two areas which present the strongest immediate challenge are: South Central Asia, embracing Afghanistan and Pakistan, both of which share frontiers with Iran; and South East Asia, particularly the limitrophe regions of Burma, Laos and Thailand. Both areas have long been enmeshed in the international illicit traffic; and in both areas the traffic is likely to expand further unless vigorous remedial measures are applied. (UNODC, 1973)

Afghanistan still paid relatively little attention to western heroin markets. The collapse of the French Connection, coupled with disruption in the Golden Triangle from drought and the fall of the governments in Vietnam and Laos in the mid-1970s (Haq, 1996). Demand for opium produced in the Golden Crescent (comprising Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan) suddenly spiked in the west, coinciding with the brief collapse of the Iranian opium market following the fall of the Shah in 1979 (Haq, 1996). Alongside this, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 led to immense destruction of Afghanistan's agricultural capacity, pushing many farmers towards opium as a cash crop for subsistence, but also as a means to finance their guerrilla activities (Farrell & Thorne, 2005). The Mujahadeen had largely become financially self-sufficient by 1984, as the lucrative nature of opium cultivation and production dwarfed foreign aid. By 1988, an estimated of anywhere between 100–200 heroin refineries were said to exist within the Khyber District. Opium production increased over the 1980s at an average of 15% a year, a process that strengthened with the Soviet withdrawal coupled with the absence of a functioning government and the descent into civil war. By 1989 Afghanistan and Pakistan were seen as global hubs of heroin manufacture (Haq, 1996).

5. Afghanistan and International Drug Policy 1990–2021

As one commentator has argued,

During the decade of Cold War confrontations with the Soviet Union ... CIA intervention provided the political protection and logistics linkage that joined Afghanistan's poppy fields, through Pakistan's land mass, to heroin markets in Europe and America. Now although Soviet forces are gone and CIA aid has slackened, there is every indication that the Pak-Afghan heroin trade, like Burma's before it, will remain a source of supply for world markets notwithstanding the fact that covert operations are over. (Haq, 1996, p. 946)

Following the Soviet withdrawal, western aid dried up and the subsequent civil war among the Mujahideen in the early 1990s led to a new political economy whereby the opium economy replaced western aid as a source of paramilitary financing. Moreover, expanding drug smuggling moved neatly on to existing arms and other commodity smuggling routes (Haq, 1996). In 1994 the US cut off all aid, on the grounds that,

No indication that the regime in Kabul has taken any action to suppress opium cultivation and heroin refining. ... We are concerned about opium poppy cultivation in areas controlled by Mujahadeen commanders. We fear ... that once hostilities end, refugees will turn to poppy cultivation during the period of economic disruption as they seek to rebuild a livelihood interrupted by 10 years of war. (US Department of State, 1994)

Emerging as the strongest faction from the Afghan Civil War, the Taliban gained control of roughly 75% of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. Known for its extreme implementation of sharia law, their rise represented a shift in power away from the Mujahideen warlords that had emerged during the Soviet–Afghan War and ultimate split, leading to the 1992–1996 civil war. The rise of the Taliban was met with some policy ambivalence in the west, with many hoping it would eradicate domestic opium production, with indications that the Taliban took a hardline approach to drug use and imposed prohibitions in territories it controlled in 1994 and 1995. Fearing Taliban reprisals farmers temporarily reduced their crops in these areas (Felbab-Brown, 2021).

By 1996, however, the Taliban's prohibitionist orientation had evolved into an acceptance of cultivation and trafficking and a desire to tax it. Drugs use, heroin manufacture and cannabis production were all banned (in reality heroin labs were eventually also taxed by 1999), while production and trading in opium were not. The Taliban ultimately has a long and well documented engagement with illicit markets as a means to fund its activities and buy off opponents, with some describing their 'bribe approach' as a 'key feature of the Taliban's military tactics' (Felbab-Brown, 2021). Initially they levied a 10% tax (*zakat*), rising eventually to 20%, which was paid directly to the Taliban's treasury (Felbab-Brown, 2021). For example, in 1997 the Taliban was

estimated to receive \$75 million from smuggling licit goods into Pakistan (Balfour, 2001). By 1999 UN estimates placed the value of the Afghan opium crop at \$265 million, with an estimated \$40 million in tax revenue for the Taliban (Back, 2001). The Taliban eventually sought to expand cultivation by handing out licenses and distributing fertilisers (Felbab-Brown, 2021). Between 1980 and 1999, opium production rose from 200 to 4,600 tonnes a year against a backdrop of total economic collapse (Felbab-Brown, 2021).

By the 1990s Afghanistan had become the predominant source of global illicit heroin supplies, providing roughly 70% by 2000 (UNODC, 2003). For various reasons, including international pressure, the Taliban embarked on a ban on opium production from July 2000 onwards, particularly in 2001. It was enforced by repression and close monitoring of crops with local accountability for outcomes. The ban proved effective in the immediate term with a 99% reduction in cultivation and a net 65% decline in the potential global production of opium and heroin in the 2001 harvest, although academic studies on the topic suggest strong and credible repression was the likely explanation (Farrell & Thorne, 2005, p. 82). However, the ban also pushed large swathes of the population into economic ruin, particularly in rural areas where people relied on opium cultivation as their sole means of income (Crossette, 2001). Some sources also argue that the purpose of the Taliban's ban on opium cultivation served to consolidate control over the heroin trade and drive up prices of opium—of which the Taliban had 3,000 tonnes stockpiled (Felbab-Brown, 2021).

Initial hopes for a thaw in Afghan relations with the west proved short lived. Despite the ban, the US ordered the closure of the Taliban's informal 'embassy to the UN' in New York, in response to which the Taliban closed down the UN political office in Kabul ('Afghanistan's opium fiends', 2001). Nevertheless, by 2001 roughly 95% of Afghanistan was under the control of the Taliban, while the murder of Northern Alliance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud by al-Qaeda assassins on 9 September 2001, solidified the Taliban's position as well as that of al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden's attack on the US on 11 September, with the certainty of protection by his host government (Bergen, 2006). It also ultimately led to the Taliban being deposed and the creation of a western-friendly regime under Hamid Karzai.

5.1. 2001–2021

Soon after the fall of the Taliban, with no effective enforcement of prohibitions in place and no clear substitute crop for farmers, poppy cultivation resumed and returned to its mid-1990s levels ('The poppies bloom again', 2002). Subsequent efforts to replace poppy crops with wheat were unsuccessful, as the crop required more water to grow and was less financially sustainable.

Western governments' financial contributions to counter narcotics programmes in the country were relatively (compared to other countries) huge in this period. Although many interventions took place outside UNODC through other partners or through bilateral programmes, looking at UNODC programme budgets in Afghanistan during this period demonstrates the commitment of a range of donors to tackle the drug situation through programmes mandated by CND decisions. During this period, western

governments pledged millions of dollars to UNODC's range of programmes in Afghanistan to address drug cultivation and trafficking.³²

Alternative Development (AD) is an approach to drug control based on the premise of providing economic alternatives to communities living in drug-crop-affected regions. There are many different national approaches, with programmes often depending on donor preferences. For example, some donors impose conditionality, meaning that funding is dependent on farming communities committing to end opium production. Other donors focus on the creation of economic opportunities as a means to draw communities away from a reliance on illicit economies without resorting to conditionality. Until 2019 UNODC had implemented AD programmes in Afghanistan costing almost \$25 million, of which the US provided the \$20 million, Japan \$3 million, and the Russian Federation \$1million. In financial terms, this is the fourth largest UNODC country programme on record, and its largest in the West and Central Asian region, where it has implemented a total of \$90 million in programmes. In addition, between 2016 and 2019, the US and Japan each pledged almost \$9 million to the \$18 million UNODC law-enforcement capacity-building efforts in Afghanistan (the second largest programme in the region's history), and in the same period Japan pledged \$2.5 million to support UNODC's efforts to support criminal justice capacity in the country.

Finland and others have made huge contributions to UNODC programmes focused on international cooperation capacity building. Its \$8 million 2011–2019 programme to support regional international cooperation was supported by \$3 million from Finland, and just under \$3 million from Japan. Between 2011 and 2019, UNODC also implemented another \$5.5 million programme on improving international cooperation on criminal matters, to which Finland contributed \$3.3 million, and the European Union (EU) almost \$900,000. Finland was also a major contributor to UNODC research on trends and impacts in the country, giving another \$1.7 million to UNODC's \$3.3 million programme, also funded by the EU (\$888,000), the UK (\$289,000) and Sweden (\$244,000). The UNODC's Afghan Opiate Trade Project is funded solely by the US, which pledged a total of \$5.1 million between 2013 and 2021.

Despite the temporary success of the Taliban's opium ban in the early 2000s, none of the counternarcotics strategies, including the vast AD and capacity-building programmes implemented by UNODC through its CND mandates and aimed at the illicit drug market, has ultimately been effective in reducing poppy cultivation. Existing conditions—particularly in terms of widespread poverty, limited economic opportunity and decades of conflict prior to the Taliban's rule—remain the structural causes of the illicit drug economy.

5.2. Engagement with the UN Drug Control System

During this period, Afghanistan's engagement at the CND has been shaped by the capacity-building programmes and related research and analysis work, clearly focused on opiate trafficking and cultivation—in particular through the Paris Pact Initiative, Afghan Opium Survey, and the Afghan Opiate Trade Project, as well as AD programmes, law enforcement and criminal justice capacity building, as well as some health and prevention activities. At the political level, Afghanistan became active in its participation

at the CND only in 2012, becoming a Commission member from 2012 to 2015, and again between 2018 and 2021 (UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs, n.d.). It was therefore increasing its participation in the UN bodies making policy on drugs and expending political capital in getting itself elected in its regional group (the Asia Pacific Group) in New York, since the CND is a subsidiary body of ECOSOC, with lobbying activities in Vienna and other capital cities to support the election.

However, Afghanistan has primarily acted at the CND as a recipient country, with its positions based on calling for more international cooperation and capacity building, given its dependence on the west through UNODC for support in this area. It has never taken on a similar role to other major producer states such as Colombia and Mexico, which have shaped evolving drug policy at the CND—notably through the UN General Assembly Special Session on the World Drug Problem (UNGASS 2016)—and become unapologetic about the role of their country in the global drug trade and started asking for different approaches in the mid-2010s. For Colombia this was linked to the peace deal with the FARC and massive UN funding that came with it, which resulted in Colombia becoming UNODC's largest field operation. This has since changed with a policy reversal following the national elections, but Mexico has pushed this further with an expanding decriminalisation agenda. Both countries receive significant capacity-building funding, but also have shaped the international agenda to fit their domestic priorities. Before the new Taliban period, Afghanistan had never been vocal in this way in the CND or related forums. In addition, its engagement was generally focused on opiates (to which donor funding is attracted)—but looking at research, monitoring, prevention and alternative development.

Afghanistan consistently used its platform during its period at the CND to accuse the Taliban of involvement in illicit narcotics. For example its official statement at the CND in 2017 highlighted one of its main challenges as being: *'Direct links between Taliban and drug traffickers, and Taliban's own involvement in drug trafficking'* ('Statement by H.E. Baz Mohammad Ahmadi', 2017). In practice, however, the statements made during this era focused primarily on the need for capacity building. The same statement concluded with the following suggestions:

- 1 Give priority to the fight against illicit drugs on the regional and international levels, and strongly support all countries where the level of drug cultivation and drug production remains high, but also to those countries that find themselves on the main routes of illicit drug trafficking.
- 2 Empower law enforcement departments to effectively counter narcotics on different levels and to match the actual threats.
- 3 Establish a fundamental agricultural infrastructure to decrease poverty and to provide alternative and sustainable livelihoods to the farmers of Afghanistan.
- 4 Strengthen regional cooperation and establish a mechanism to implement regional agreements.

- 5 Strengthen border control management and custom ports management of Afghanistan in order to prevent drug trafficking as well as to prevent precursors exported into Afghanistan.
- 6 Provide state-of-the-art equipment and machinery for Afghanistan in order to decrease opium cultivation and enabling destruction of heroin production facilities.

At the end, I would like to thank UNODC and the supporting countries, especially the United States of America, the United Kingdom, the European Union and Japan for providing capacity building for the law enforcement institutions in Afghanistan and in particular for the National Special Police Forces of Anti-Narcotics and the National Police of Afghanistan.”
 (‘Statement by H.E. Baz Mohammad Ahmadi’, 2017)

For donors and other regional powers, engagement with Afghanistan at the CND can be characterised as a vehicle for their engagement with the Afghan authorities—with projects such as the Opium Survey having a steering group consisting of the main donors, Afghanistan and UNODC country and global staff. In addition, other forums such as CARICC and the CND regional Subcommission on drug trafficking in the region, provide other opportunities for engagement with law enforcement.

BOX 1: The Paris Pact Initiative

The Paris Pact Initiative (PPI) was launched in 2003 and comprises 58 partner countries and 23 organisations, which included UNODC (*Paris Statement*, n.d.). It quickly became a key multilateral framework for addressing opium traffic, including cultivation and production, originating in Afghanistan, linking multilateral resolutions and local technical assistance (*Paris Pact Initiative*, n.d.). The 2003 Paris Declaration was augmented by a 2006 Moscow Declaration, which suggested additional measures to counter the traffic from Afghanistan (*Moscow Declaration*, n.d.). A Third Ministerial Conference of the Paris Pact Partners on Combatting Illicit Traffic in Opiates Originating in Afghanistan met in Vienna in 2012. The resulting *Vienna Declaration* (2012) became the roadmap for PPI activities and focused on four main ‘pillars’:

- 1 Regional initiatives
- 2 Financial flows
- 3 Diversion of precursor chemicals
- 4 ‘*Drug abuse and dependence*’.

Since 2013 the Initiative has received pledges totalling \$7.4 million, mostly from the US (\$5.6 million), and Russia (\$1.5 million) (UNODC, n.d.). However, in more recent years the Initiative has lost political and financial momentum in as donors, such as the UK, reduced their investment in counter narcotics work in Afghanistan in general, and in UNODC-run programmes in particular. Since the Taliban regained power, there have been attempts to revive the PPI, which have now stalled due to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine as western governments seek to avoid all areas of cooperation with Russia at the UN.

Despite the amounts of money spent on programmes that were ultimately unable to control poppy cultivation and trafficking, these programmes remained central to the engagement between Afghanistan and other countries throughout this period. One of the lasting benefits of that engagement was the relationships built up between figures in the government, or connected to it, and western donor governments and UN agencies. By the end of this period, however, these relationships were also of little value as the new regime took over.

5.2.1. *Multilateral engagement and UNODC capacity building*

UNODC field operations were already largely confined to Kabul before the 2021 Taliban takeover, since when activities were organised and funding renegotiated from a regional office. In the immediate term, the terms of engagement are quite rigid and will take time to change. UNODC has to comply with the UN's Transnational Engagement Framework and rely on its other offices in the region. UNODC will have to focus on non-local/regional interventions but based on the same models—operational engagement with law enforcement, monitoring drug production, and so on. The US and Germany in particular have been interested in restarting PPI, which might have been a good vehicle for this kind of re-engagement between the west and the new regime in Afghanistan, but Russia's invasion of Ukraine has thrown this into doubt given its importance in this process.

Despite the potential interest from both sides to resume engagement along similar lines as before, Afghanistan is still represented (at the time of writing) in other diplomatic forums by representatives of the former regime—who, for example, represented the country at the regular CND session in March 2022. For now, they focus on issues such as human rights and girls' education, but time must be running out for their ability to represent the country. While they are publicly supported by western diplomats for the issues on which they campaign, their inability to gain insights and influence the new regime will become more important for donors as time wears on.

As discussions begin on trying to revive some of the old processes such as Paris Pact, or regional UNODC work or monitoring mechanisms involving law enforcement, under the current UN terms of engagement in Afghanistan, they take place without a real voice for the recipient government, or indeed local people. Even when direct capacity building and technical assistance can start, UNODC must consider human rights issues in relation to training the Taliban networks on drugs enforcement, helping them monitor farms, or securing funding for technology to aid enforcement. The UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) is showing a general interest in increasing its engagement and monitoring of UNODC capacity-building work, and if new programmes in Afghanistan do start OHCHR and human rights NGOs will be keenly interested in how safeguards are put in place.

At present, it is impossible to be certain about the new regime's real priorities in narcotics. The relationships built up over many years with the previous government are now worthless for the future, and Taliban perspectives on international assistance and the multilateral order do not lend themselves to reviving old approaches. The west cannot expect the Taliban to engage with the earlier programmes as the previous regime did, bearing in mind the effectiveness of some of these programmes as this paper has

demonstrated. They cannot be engaged in the same way as Mexico or Colombia as prominent producer countries with clear political aims on drug policy.

There is, however, an opportunity for a change in approach based on being realistic about what can be achieved through traditional methods of engagement at the CND and UNODC programmes, and about the limits of what can be accomplished through regional cooperation in relation to law enforcement. One key missing element of earlier engagement has been civil society participation and consultation, as most efforts have focused on enforcement and other state-led approaches to address drug trafficking, including through top-down AD programmes. While it may be difficult under the new regime, there is the potential to include more community-led elements in engagement with drug policy both on the ground, and through multilateral engagements.

6. Conclusion

Contemporary drug policy narratives rightly focus on Afghanistan as the centre of the global illicit trade (Paoli et al., 2009). Roughly 90% of the global illicit market in heroin production is centred around Afghanistan, so it clearly assumes a focal point in global policy discussions and diplomacy related to drug control. As this paper has shown, this was not always the case. Indeed, Afghanistan was long viewed as a secondary actor through much of the twentieth century, with diplomats seeing it more as a reflection of circumstances in Iran, itself the key protagonist in major drug policy debates. This began to shift in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s as Iran sought to implement far-reaching policy changes and Afghanistan sought to mirror Iranian and other national approaches, oscillating between efforts to gain more access to the global opium market and those to potentially leverage illicit opium production to secure entry points to US economic aid.

This paper therefore seeks to expand our understanding of Afghanistan's functional role in international drug diplomacy, which was not just a dialectic between national and international levels, but also a triangulating force, a by-product of strategic posturing among other states and at times an active spoiler in that posturing. Such narratives disrupt the linear tale of cause and effect of US drug diplomacy, splicing in other states and powers, for example Iran, Turkey the UK and others into a more complex diplomatic picture. Thus, just as it is impossible to understand the imposition of opium prohibitions in Afghanistan without also considering the role of international drug diplomacy, nor can one fully understand the development of global licit/illicit market delineations without understanding Afghanistan's role in global negotiations. In this understanding, Afghanistan can be seen not just a protagonist and state-building progeny of international drug control, but a protagonist in a complicated international political economy of market regulation.

A number of lessons may be derived from this analysis:

- 1 Contrary to orthodox interpretations of the genesis of the drug control system, producer states were far from passive actors. They were intrinsic to the regulatory genesis and shaped the system in many ways that continue to exert an impact on global policies. Afghanistan was a clear example of this dynamic, if only secondary at times.
- 2 Many states retreated from the global market, including at times Afghanistan and Iran included, not solely in deference to US designs. They were in many ways rising with the tide of global regulations and the shrinking of the regulatory scope to engage with grey or illicit markets, but they often, at least in part, chose to leave the licit market because of fears about their own regulatory (in)capacity to compete or engage with it. Then as now, Afghanistan recognised that this issue was not access to the licit market, but whether the state could sufficiently project power into areas to ensure that the regulatory distinction had any objective reality within the state. Often, the answer was that it did not.

- 3 Contemporary discussions on opening new licit routes to Afghan opium, as many scholars have highlighted, miss the fundamental point. Access to the regulated market is predicated on regulatory capacity. Moreover, there is no basic lack of sources of licit supplies, although there are major issues with their global distribution.

There is a need to engage broader society voices in discussions, to ensure more continuity is built into the system—as relationships established with the pre-Taliban regime have collapsed. This means re-centring international capacity-building efforts on community-centred approaches, not simply law enforcement and traditional alternative development (AD) programmes. Moving away from the former enforcement-focused activities also reduces the risks of human rights violations.

There is great uncertainty over the future directions of drug control in Afghanistan and of potential scenarios. This paper has argued for the importance of linking history with contemporary analyses in order to better understand Afghanistan's relationship with multilateral drug control. Further, it has offered an evaluation of contemporary policy platforms and trends and what these presage for future UN engagement on Afghan drug control.

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Endnotes

¹ Blaxter to Thornton, 27 April 1940; Letter to Thornton, 15 May 1940, BNA-FO371/24748.

² Ronson to Henniker, 23 September 1940, BNA-FO371/24748.

³ Talbot's Minute, 9 October 1940; Minutes, 14 October 1940, File: Purchase of Opium from Iran, BNA-FO371/24748.

⁴ Singapore to Loyd, 10 August 1940; CO to Straits Settlements, 23 November 1940, BNA-FO371/24749.

⁵ Memorandum: Trade Agreement with Iran, by George Morlock, 1 April 1942, FBNA/ACC170-74-12/Box142/File0480-172, Opium Reserves, Iranian Opium (1941-45).

⁶ Paraphrase of telegram from US Legation, Tehran, 14 October 1941; State Department to FBN, 20 October 1941; Engert to Secretary of State, 19 December 1942; State to Legation Kabul, 21 January 1943; Note of telephone call, 12 October 1943; State to American Minister Kabul, 22 January 1944, FBNA/ACC170-74-12/Box151/File0660, Afghanistan (1929-1968). James Bradford suggests a more limited interpretation, which is that the US desire for 'high-quality' Afghan opium drove its decision and represented Harry Anslinger's hypocritical and inconsistent application of rules. Ultimately the narrative here suggests the approach was perfectly consistent with that chosen for Iran (a comparatively morphine-poor opium producer) and consistent with the respective policies of Anslinger and the State Department. Furthermore, given its opium stockpiles, the US had no need for Afghan opium at the time, regardless of pharmaceutical interest—or lack thereof, as Bradford well highlights. Our analyses coalesce around the view that the US government saw 'an opportunity to generate Allied support in Central Asia'. (Bradford, 2019, p. 64).

⁷ Rep. Judd Remarks, House of Representatives, 5 December 1944; Department of State press Release, 20 November 1944; Afghan MFA to US Minister Kabul, 11 November 1944, FBNA/ACC170-74-12/Box151/File0660, Afghanistan (1929-1968).

⁸ Opium Prices in Iran—Quarter Ended March 31, 1944; White to Anslinger, 29 June 1944, FBNA/ACC170-71-A-3554/Box18/File0660, Iran (1941-45).

⁹ Opium Prices in Iran—Quarter Ended June 30, 1944, FBNA/ACC170-71-A-3554/Box18/File0660, Iran (1941-45).

¹⁰ Memorandum to Government of Iran, September 1944, BNA-FO371/40503; State Department to Morris, 23 October 1944, FBNA/ACC170-71-A-3554/Box18/File0660, Iran (1941-45).

¹¹ PCOB Report, 'Pre-War Production and Distribution of Narcotic Drugs and Their Raw Materials,' *Opium and Other Dangerous Drugs*, XI.1 ([LON], 1944), 7, FBNA/ACC170-74-5/Box120/File1230-1, UN 1st Session (Jan 1946 - Dec 1946).

¹² Coles to Anslinger, 27 October 1947; Anslinger to Coles, 17 November 1947, FBNA/ACC170-74-5/Box121/File1230-1, UN 3rd Session #1 (1947-8).

¹³ US Delegation Position Paper, CND 4th Session, 9 May 1949, FBNA/ACC170-74-5/Box121/File1230-1, UN 4th Session #4 (1949-50).

¹⁴ Merrill to Secretary of State, 8 December 1949, FBNA/ACC170-74-5/Box121/File1230-1, UN 4th Session #4 (1949-50).

¹⁵ In just one example, successive bad harvests in Turkey and Yugoslavia left global shortages and Yugoslavia 'trying to buy opium (!)'. Merrill to Anslinger, 9 December 1949, FBNA/ACC170-74-5/Box121/File1230-1, UN 4th Session #4 (1949-50).

¹⁶ Merrill to Anslinger, 9 December 1949, FBNA/ACC170-74-5/Box121/File1230-1, UN 4th Session #4 (1949-50).

¹⁷ British Embassy Tehran to Foreign Office, 14 March 1952, BNA-FO371/98721; Logan to Pilgrim, 2 April 1952, BNA-FO371/98721.

¹⁸ Walker to Logan, 20 May 1952, BNA-FO371/98721.

¹⁹ Confidential Report of the Acting US Rep, 11th Session CND, 5 July 1956, FBNA/ACC170-74-5/Box122/File1230-1, UN 11th Session (1955-6).

²⁰ US Del Position Paper, 11th Session CND, 13 April 1956; US Del Report, 11th Session CND, 5 July 1956, FBNA/ACC170-74-5/Box122/File1230-1, UN 11th Session (1955-6).

²¹ Memo: 'Increase in Opium Production', 21 August 1954, FBNA/ACC170-74-5/Box122/File1230-1, UN 10th Session #1 (1955).

²² Tabibi Statement, 10th Session CND, undated; Anslinger to Morlock, 28 April 1955, FBNA/ACC170-74-5/Box122/File1230-1, UN 10th Session #2 (1955).

²³ Draft Letter to Parliamentary Under Secretary, 23 April 1957, UNS1815/23, BNA-FO371/129981.

²⁴ US Del Position Paper, 11th Session CND, 13 April 1956, FBNA/ACC170-74-5/Box122/File1230-1, UN 11th Session (1955-6).

²⁵ Gauntlett to Sam Hoare, 6 May 1957, UNS1815/17, BNA-FO371/129981.

²⁶ Draft letter to PUS, April 23 1957, UNS1815/23, BNA-FO371/129981.

²⁷ IOC (57)55, 21 June, BNA-CAB134/2063; Draft US Del Position Paper, 12th General Assembly, August 1956, FBNA/ACC170-74-5/Box123/File1230-1, UN 12th Session (1957).

²⁸ US Del Position Paper, 28 April 1958; Memorandum for Commissioner, 1 May 1958, FBNA/ACC170-74-5/Box123/File1230-1, UN 13th Session #1 (1958).

²⁹ IOC (61)3, 11 Jan, BNA-CAB134/2082.

³⁰ IOC (61)61, 9 May, BNA-CAB134/2084.

³¹ Report of US Delegation to the UN Conference for the Adoption of a Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 19 April 1961, FBNA/ACC170-74-12/Box170/File1230, Single Convention #4 (1961).

³² The data from this section is taken from the UNODC's online grants database, (UNODC, n.d.).