



Center for Strategic & Regional Studies

Kabul

Weekly Analysis-Issue Number 225 (October 7-14, 2017)

Weekly Analysis is one of CSRS' publications, which significantly analyses weekly economic and political events in Afghanistan and the region. The prime motive behind this is to provide strategic insights and policy solutions to decision-making institutions and individuals in order to help them to design best policies. Weekly Analysis is published in local languages (Pashto and Dari) and international languages (English and Arabic).

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Preface

After a long time delay, the stalled quadrilateral talks are to resume. Last year, the quadrilateral talks failed, and relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan became tenuous. When the disappointments about the peace process were increasing, the Pakistani Military Chief traveled to Kabul, and later reports were released about holding the sixth quadrilateral talks in Muscat, Oman.

It seems that after the announcement of the new US policy towards Afghanistan and South Asia, Pakistan is under pressure more than ever and that is why it has, once again, undertaken efforts about the Afghan peace process. The effectiveness of the peace talks in Oman and the probable outcomes of these talks are analyzed in the first part of the Weekly Analysis of the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (CSRS).

In the second part of the Weekly Analysis, we have analyzed narcotics and the fight against it in Afghanistan. Kabul hosted a regional event in relation to this phenomenon last week, which means the Afghan government is trying to pave the way for the cooperation between its neighboring countries and the countries in the region regarding the fight against drugs.

The Afghan government had also spoken about such an initiative about three years ago. At that time, the Afghan government had said that they had prepared a regional strategy to fight against narcotics, in which they had demanded cooperation in areas of exchanging information, arresting the smugglers, and preventing the imports of chemical substances that are needed to process heroin in Afghanistan. However, in this regard, no developments were seen then. The question is what will be the impacts of the recent initiative, and why the counter-narcotics struggle is a failure in Afghanistan?

The upcoming meeting of QCG in Oman



The media outlets quoted the Afghan and Pakistani authorities last week that the next meeting of Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) was to be held on 16 October 2017 in Muscat, Oman. The Afghan National Security Council (NSC) has acknowledged that Afghanistan has accepted Pakistan's proposal about the resumption of the Quadrilateral Talks. The representatives of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China and the US will take part in this meeting. Although the Pakistan Foreign Minister Khwaja Asif has announced that the representatives of the Taliban will also attend the meeting, quoting some senior Taliban members, some media outlets have reported that the Taliban's representatives will not participate in this meeting.

The two countries (Afghanistan and Pakistan) have agreed about holding the next meeting of QCG while before this a high-ranking Pakistani delegation had visited Kabul and had met the Afghan President and other Afghan senior officials.

How did the QCG form? What were the reasons behind the failure of the quadrilateral talks? And what are the probable messages and outcomes of the upcoming Oman meeting? These and other similar questions are analyzed here.

The Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG)

When Ashraf Ghani came to power in Afghanistan, the Afghan government approached to Pakistan for its peace process which led to the Murree talks. However, the disclosure of the death of Mullah Omar sabotaged this process.

Within six months, with the efforts of some countries in the region and the world, the Afghan peace process was resumed under the Quadrilateral Talks. The difference between the Murree and Quadrilateral Talks was that in the later, the two powers of the world China and the US had also participated to guarantee the commitments of both sides. Nevertheless, one and a half year after the beginning of the QCG meetings, the two powers failed to ensure the promises, and they played only the role of a facilitator when tensions rose between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The first meeting of Quadrilateral Talks was held in December 2015 which formed the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), which in turn held its first meeting in Islamabad on 11 January. The QCG held its second meeting in Kabul on 18 January, the Third in Islamabad on 6 February, the fourth in Kabul on 23 February, and the Fifth also in Kabul on 16 May 2016. In the statements of both the third and fourth meetings, the group had spoken about the beginning of the direct talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government, but the representatives of the Taliban denied to participate in these meetings to the end nor did the face-to-face negotiations started out of the framework of the Quadrilateral Talks.

The reasons behind the failure of QCG

The QCG have to this point failed to facilitate direct talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. The following are the most important factors behind this failure:

First, the mechanism of the quadrilateral talks. The Afghan Taliban were not trusted from the beginning, and in the statements of the first, second, and third meetings it had been said that practical action would be taken against those Taliban members that do not take part in these talks. It means that even from the

start, the policy of bringing the Taliban to the negotiation table through intimidation was undertaken while if one assesses the political-psychological condition of the Taliban, one will find out that the Taliban do not easily surrender to such pressures. This policy has still prevailed its impacts on the Taliban, and the group is yet to show a willingness to participate in these talks.

Second, most of the promised that were made about the Afghan peace process in the QCG meetings were not fulfilled. For instance, Pakistan had pledged to take action against the Taliban if the group did not participate the peace process, a promise yet to be fulfilled.

What is the objective of Oman meeting?

The sixth QCG meeting in Oman will be held at least after a little more than one year with the participation of Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and the US. The followings are the most important goals of this meeting.

First, this meeting must be seen as a way of improving the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan rather than facilitating direct talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government.

Second, since the past one week, Pakistan has undertaken efforts to ease tensions in its relations with the US and notably Mr. Trump. That is why it released the American-Canadian family from the captivity of the Haqqani Network after five years. The surprise was that the US President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of State praised this step by Pakistan. According to Trump, it was a positive step towards improving the relations between the US and Pakistan.

Third, Pakistan wants to get out of the isolation after it was criticized in BRICS declaration. Being part of the BRICS, China and Russia had also supported and advocated the BRICS declaration.

The Conclusion

Overall, every effort toward peace is promising, but it seems that the upcoming meeting will rather be focused on easing the tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan than providing the way to direct talks with the Taliban.

The Afghan Taliban believe the US to be the primary party of the current war in the country and they have declared that they will continue this battle until the complete withdrawal of the US soldiers from Afghanistan. Therefore, the limited role of the US in the peace process and the Afghan government's peace efforts through its foreign policy and mainly through Pakistan have led the peace process towards failure, and it may not reach any tangible outcomes anytime soon.

Moreover, instead of finding new ways to conduct peace talks, the Afghan government has undertaken the policy of fighting and suppressing the Taliban. The new US strategy towards Afghanistan also focuses on such a policy.

After the death of Mullah Akhtar Mansour, the Afghan Taliban do not have a specific policy regarding the peace process either, and their frozen stance regarding the peace talks with the Afghan government has challenged this process while unless the Afghan government and the Taliban set around a table, it is most unlikely for the peace talks to produce any desirable outcomes.

Drugs: the biggest challenge of Afghanistan and the countries in the region



The summit of the senior experts of counter-narcotics efforts of the countries in the region was held in Kabul on 9-10 October 2017. The representatives of 12 countries in the region and the neighboring countries of Afghanistan including Russia, China, India, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan had participated in this meeting.

This two-day conference aimed to discuss how to deal with the cultivation and production of narcotics in Afghanistan and to make efforts to draft a single joint strategy among these countries to fight against drugs. The Afghan Minister of Counter Narcotics said in this meeting, “Struggle against narcotics is not the problem of one single country but it is rather a regional and international challenge; therefore, fighting this phenomenon will not be possible unless all the states join hands together.”

Afghanistan is a country that produces a lot of the world's narcotics and has not reached anywhere fighting this phenomenon in the past more than one and a half decade.

The status of the cultivation and production of poppy in Afghanistan, the reasons behind the failure of the fight against it and the impacts of preparing a joint regional counter-narcotics strategy are issues that are analyzed here.

Narcotics in Afghanistan

The cultivation of narcotics in Afghanistan has a long history. People in this country cultivated poppy both before and during the Cold War; however, the exact statistics of the drug productions at that time is not in hand. Nevertheless, in the post-cold war era, Afghanistan was one of the countries in the world that produced the most amount of drugs. In 1997, Afghanistan produced 2804 tons of poppy while in 1999 this amount increased to 4565 tons. Nonetheless, in 2001, after the Taliban Leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar banned the cultivation of narcotics issuing a decree, the poppy production of the country reduced from 3276 tons to 185 tons only.

Based on the statistics of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC), in 2001, the last year of the Taliban's reign in Afghanistan, 8000 hectares of land was under poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. However, after the collapse of the Taliban regime, the graph of the poppy cultivation and production in Afghanistan has been ascending.

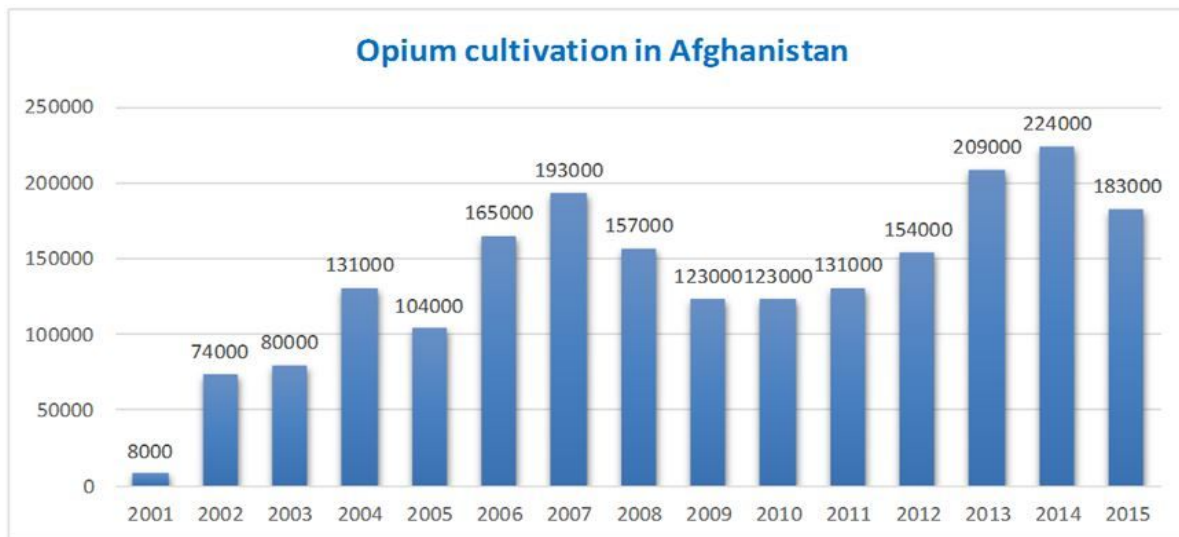
In 2007, 193000 hectares of land was under poppy cultivation which produced 8200 tons of yields. However, in 2008 and 2010, the cultivation of poppy decreased. In 2012, the poppy productions decreased to 3700 tons, but in 2013 and 2014, the production of poppy rose to 5500 tons and 6400 tons. In 2014, 224000 hectares of land was under poppy in Afghanistan.

In 2016, 201000 hectares of land was under poppy cultivation in the country which marked an increase compared to 2015. The production of poppy in 2016 was 4800 tons. It should also be noted that the 19% decrease in poppy production in 2015 was due to the unsuitable condition of weather and plant pests. In 2015,

183000 hectares of land was under poppy cultivation which produced 3300 tons of poppy.

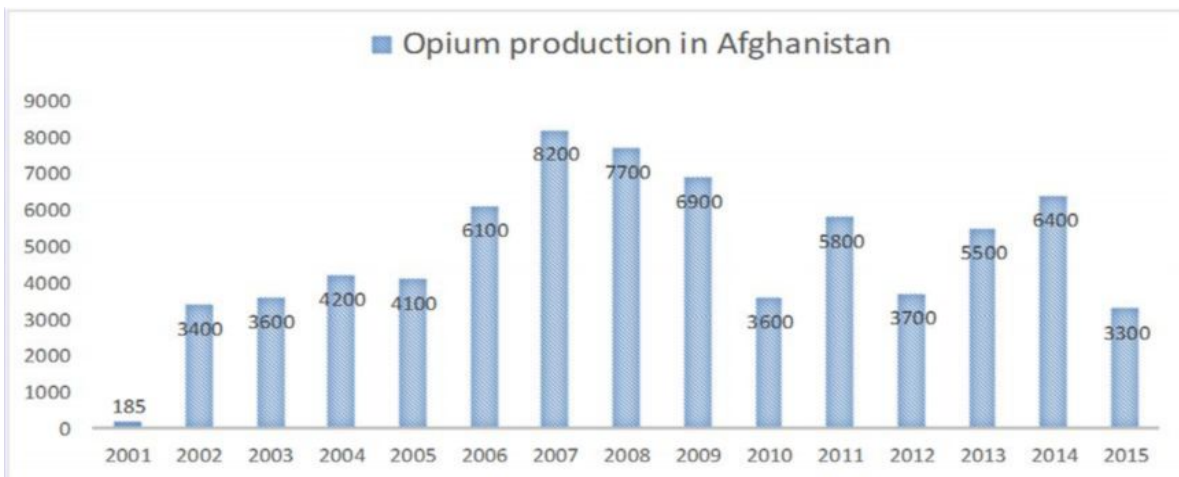
The joint report of the Afghan government and the UN shows that in 2016 the cultivation of poppy in Afghanistan has increased by 10% and its production has augmented by 43%. The cultivation of narcotics has also increased in 2017 compared to 2016. Authorities in the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics believe the ongoing insecurities to be behind the increase.

Chart-1: opium cultivation in Afghanistan (2001-2015) (hectares)



Source: UNODC/MCN

Chart-2: Opium production in Afghanistan (2001-2015) (tons)



Source: UNODC/MCN

The fight against narcotics in Afghanistan

Drug smuggling is the fourth global crisis. Based on some statistics there are 250 million drug addicts around the world. Nevertheless, Afghanistan is one of the countries that suffer great losses due to the cultivation of narcotics. This phenomenon, on the one hand, has affected the prestige of Afghanistan and, on the other hand, 3.5 million Afghans, somehow, use drugs, the condition of 1.5 million of which is presumed concerning. Some statistics suggest that 30% of these addicts are children and 7% are women.

After the collapse of the Taliban regime, the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics was established in the Bonn Conference. In 1393, the then-Afghan President Hamid Karzai announced the fight against drugs to be one of the priorities of the state and banned the cultivation and production of narcotics.

In the past one and half decades, there were many institutions that worked in areas of fighting poppy cultivation and production in Afghanistan, and after all these efforts still, Afghanistan produces 90% of drugs in the world. UNODC, the Afghan deputy Ministry of Counter Narcotics in the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Public Health and Ministry of Agriculture are institutions that are involved in the fight against drugs. However, the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics is responsible for leading and coordinating the relevant activities.

Based on the report of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan's Reconstruction (SIGAR), until 2014, the US has spent \$600m in the fight against narcotics in Afghanistan. Despite all these expenses, the Afghan government has failed in all aspects of the fight against drugs including preventing the cultivation, production, and smuggling of drugs as well as addiction to drugs and curing drug addicts, something that the Afghan authorities accept too. In Saratan [solar month] this year, the Second Afghan Vice President Sarwar Danish said the Afghan government's efforts to fight narcotics had not produced desirable outcomes.

Moreover, the failure of the counter-narcotics efforts and the presence of drug mafia in the country have resulted in the increase in crime incidents, particularly the organized crimes.

Why was the counter-narcotics fight not a success?

While entering Afghanistan, the US and its allies claimed that “terrorism” and narcotics were in interrelation with each other and that in order to eliminate “terrorism” it was necessary to prevent the cultivation of poppy in this country. The question that remains unanswered is why the cultivation of poppy in Afghanistan is ascending since 2001?

One cannot mention one single factor to be behind the increase in the cultivation and smuggling of poppy in the past one and half decade, but there are a bunch of internal and external factors behind it, the most important of them being lack of firm international and internal will in the fight against drugs.

Influence, power and the role of the elements with links to the internal, regional and international gangs and mafias as well as the high level of corruption in the administrations of the country are the main factors behind the failure of counter-narcotics efforts.

Insecurity and war in the country, with 40% of the Afghan territory under the control of the armed opposition of the government, lack of a strong government that has the support of its people, encouragement of poppy cultivation by the armed opposition of the government in insecure provinces, high demands for these substances in foreign countries particularly in Western countries are factors that have challenged the fight against drugs in Afghanistan.

Regional counter-narcotic efforts

Drug trade comes third after oil and weapons’ trade in the world in importance and profit. Based on the statistics of UNODC, Afghan farmers gain only \$2bn out of \$70bn income produced by their poppy productions, and the remaining \$66bn goes into the pockets of drug-smugglers and international mafia out of Afghanistan.

The poppy cultivated in Afghanistan makes its way to Europe and other countries in the region through Afghanistan’s neighboring countries. That is why the neighboring countries always criticize Afghanistan for its failure in the counter-

narcotics fight. However, it should also be noted that these substances would not make their way to European and other countries if the leaders of the neighboring countries did not assist drug smugglers and mafia in their respective countries. Therefore, the presences of drug mafia and the open transit way have, somehow, provided the way for the cultivation of narcotics in Afghanistan. Moreover, the decrease in the demands for drugs in regional and international markets can play a decisive role in the success of counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan.

Based on the report that the senior Pakistani representative Mohammad Besharat Taherzada Malek presented in the above-mentioned conference, only in Pakistan, there are 6.7m drug addicts, who receive their required drugs from Afghanistan.

If the neighboring and regional countries froze the bank accounts of drug smugglers and prevented the sales of substances that are needed to process heroin, the fight against narcotics would to some extent succeed.

Although there are many challenges on the way of the fight against drugs, in this regard, the recent initiative to prepare a joint strategy is one of the solutions, and if there exist strong will and determination to fight against this phenomenon, these efforts will succeed.

The End

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Note: Please let us know your feedback and suggestions for the improvement of Weekly analysis.

