



Countering crime export through increased control of international trafficking of illicit drugs and narcotics

Introduction

Whenever we learn that a government has prohibited the use or sale of certain goods, there is one thing we can be sure of - sooner or later, people willing to break the law will take advantage of the situation and sell the goods at a black market. The most prominent example of this phenomenon is the illicit drug trade. As a consequence of the fact that some drugs can only be grown and cultivated in a limited number of countries, the drug trade has always been an international issue. Since the end of the 20th century, it has become a global problem and a concern for many countries. The international trafficking of narcotics is dangerous for many reasons. The goods traded themselves have the potential to destroy countless lives and damage social structures beyond repair, but the crime associated with it is even worse. To many countries, drug trafficking organizations have brought death and violence. In some countries, like Mexico or Columbia in the 1980's, the narcomafia has threatened even the essential functioning of government. For all these reasons, illicit drug trade should be of concern to the United Nations.

Overview of the status quo

Link to crime

According to a UN report, the global illegal drug trade is worth approximately 350 billion USD, which accounts for approximately 1% of the world's GDP. The effects of this trade on countries are overwhelmingly negative - in 2011, the number of drug-related deaths was estimated at 211,000. Most of these were among the younger population of users and were, to a large extent, preventable. Drug trade is also directly linked to crime and violence - for example Honduras, through which an estimated 80% of cocaine traveling to the United States of America is being smuggled, has the highest murder rate in the world. In the United States, approximately 82% of murders are drug-related. In the United Kingdom, the cost of crime committed to support illegal drug trade is estimated at £16 billion per year.

Trafficking

Given the large quantities of legal substances that make their way across oceans and continents every day, in containers and small boats, maritime trafficking poses a particularly difficult challenge for the authorities.

East and West Africa seem to be gaining prominence with regard to routes for maritime trafficking. A new maritime route going southward from Afghanistan via ports in the Islamic Republic of Iran or Pakistan is increasingly being used by traffickers to reach consumer markets through East and West African ports. Since 2009, seizures of heroin have risen sharply in Africa, especially in the eastern regions, where they increased almost 10-fold.

Traffickers are more frequently searching for new routes to supplement the old ones. New land routes for heroin smuggling seem to be emerging, e.g. in addition to the established Balkan and northern routes, heroin is trafficked southward from Afghanistan using the Islamic Republic of Iran or Pakistan, leading through the Middle East via Iraq. While the Balkan trafficking route remains the most popular one, a decrease in the amount of heroin being trafficked on this route has been noted.

Drug-specific information:

Cannabis

It is by far the most widely produced, seized and consumed drug worldwide, causing increased health problems in many countries, linked to its spread and rising potency in several (mostly developed) countries over the last decade. Deaths related to cannabis use are rare and dependency tends to emerge only after long periods of use. As cannabis production is widespread, most of its production is intended for local or regional consumption. Overseas trafficking of cannabis is less frequent and appears to have further lost importance with the development of high-potency cannabis production in greenhouses in the industrialized countries. The role of transnational organized crime groups in the cannabis market is thus more limited than for other drugs, and so are the security threats related to its production, trafficking and consumption.

Opiates

The limited available data suggest that opioid use (prescription opioids, heroin and opium) has sharply risen in parts of Asia (East and South-East Asia, as well as Central and West Asia) and Africa since 2009. Production-wise, Afghanistan retained its position as the leading producer and cultivator of opium globally (74% of global illicit opium production in 2012). While the global area used for poppy cultivation rose by 15% in 2012, driven largely by increases in Afghanistan and Myanmar, global opium production fell by almost 30%, to less than 5,000 tons in 2012. This was mainly due to poor yields in Afghanistan. Mexico remained the largest producer of opium in the Americas. The Balkan and northern routes are the main heroin

trafficking corridors linking Afghanistan to the huge markets of the Russian Federation and Western Europe. The Balkan route traverses the Islamic Republic of Iran (often through Pakistan), Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria across South-East Europe to the Western European market, with an annual market value of approximately \$20 billion. The northern route runs mainly through Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (or through either Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan) to Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation. The value of the transitions made at this market is estimated to total \$13 billion per year. In 2008, global heroin seizures reached a record level of 73.7 metric tons. Most of the heroin was seized in the Near and Middle East and South-West Asia (39% of the global confiscations total), South-East Europe (24 %) and Western and Central Europe (10 %). The global increase in heroin requisitions over the period 2006-2008 was driven mainly by continued burgeoning seizures in the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey. In 2008, those two countries accounted for more than half of the global heroin seizures and registered, for third consecutive year, the highest and second highest seizures worldwide, respectively.

Cocaine

In 2007 and 2008, cocaine was used by some 17 million people worldwide, similar to the number of global opiate users. North America accounted for more than 40 % of global cocaine consumption (the total was estimated at around 470 tons), while the 27 European Union and 4 European Free Trade Association countries accounted for more than a quarter of total consumption. These two regions account for about 80 per cent of the total value of the global cocaine market, which was estimated at \$88 billion in 2008.

For the North American market, cocaine is typically transported from Colombia to Mexico or Central America by sea and then onwards by land to the United States and Canada. Cocaine is trafficked to Europe also mostly by sea, often using container shipments. Colombia remains the main source of cocaine and its derivatives found in Europe. On top of that, direct shipments from Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia are far more common than in the United States market.

Following a significant increase over the period 2002-2005, global cocaine seizure totals have recently followed a stable trend, amounting to 712 tons in 2007 and 711 tons in 2008. Seizures continued to be mostly concentrated in the Americas and Europe. However, the transition from 2007 to 2008 brought a geographical shift in confiscations towards the source countries of cocaine. Seizures in South America accounted for 59 % of the global total for 2008, compared with 45 % in 2007.

New Psychoactive Substances

While new harmful substances have been emerging with unfailing regularity on the drug scene, the international drug control system is floundering, for the first time, under the speed and creativity of the phenomenon known as new psychoactive substances (NPS).

The number of NPS reported by Member States to UNODC rose from 166 at the end of 2009 to 251 by mid-2012, an increase of more than 50%. For the first time, the number of NPS actually exceeded the total number of substances under international control (234).

NPS are substances of abuse, either in a pure form or a preparation, that are not controlled by international drug conventions, but which may pose a public health threat. In this context, the term "new" does not necessarily refer to new inventions but to substances that have newly become available in specific markets. In general, NPS is an umbrella term for unregulated (new) psychoactive substances or products intended to mimic the effects of controlled drugs. The problem of NPS is a hydra-headed one in that manufacturers produce new variants to escape the new legal frameworks that are constantly being developed to control known substances. These substances include synthetic and plant-based psychoactive substances, and have rapidly spread in widely dispersed markets.

Challenges and possible changes

One of the biggest problem of controlling illegal drug trafficking is the lack of available data - this is partially due to the clandestine nature of the business, however, it is quite clear that there is a great need for improvements. A perfect example are the African countries, which have become increasingly important and vulnerable in terms of illegal drug trade. In order to tackle this trend, there is an urgent need to increase the analytic and data-collection capacities in the region. Having more data and information available would certainly help the countries and the international community in the fight against drug trafficking.

Another notable area is maritime trafficking - although the seizures are less often than in cases of land-based or aerial trafficking, the average amount seized is almost 30 times higher. Therefore, this might be a significant area of focus and international cooperation.

A completely new and dangerous phenomenon is the emergence of the new psychoactive substances - they are much more mercurial, and therefore harder to regulate, than traditional drugs. A possible partial solution is the introduction of a warning system that would allow countries to share information between each other about newly emerging illegal substances, and the methods of fighting against them.

Overall, it is apparent that the solution to the problem of international drug trade has to be global, and it ought to involve as much international cooperation as possible. We believe this is a job that the delegates will gladly accept.

Sources and further reading:

<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-trafficking/index.html>

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