

د افغانستان لوی وزارت - واشنگتن ډی سی



نارت کبرای افغانستان - واشنگتن ډی سی

*The Embassy of Afghanistan*  
WASHINGTON, DC

**UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE**

**“AFGHANISTAN’S DRUG PROBLEM: COSTS, CONSEQUENCES, AND  
COUNTER-NARCOTICS STRATEGIES”**

**REMARKS BY**

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**MAY 15, 2007**



Thank you, Ms. Beth Cole.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the US Institute of Peace for providing this timely forum to discuss drugs as a common problem in every society and as one of the key sources of instability in Afghanistan. I hope today's discussion with Ambassador Schweich and Mr. Byrd will help inform us of the critical need for the international community to address this problem together, and to coordinate our efforts with the Government of Afghanistan to ensure sustainable results in counter-narcotics.

I think a bit of background information helps us put today's discussion into context, and that is to answer the question of why Afghanistan has become the largest producer of opium poppy in the world. First, economics teaches us that demand equals supply. We know from international experience how drug supply sources have moved geographically from one region to another, that is, for example, from Southeast Asia (the Golden Triangle) to Southwest, and Central Asia (the Golden Crescent).

In these regions, as drug-producing countries developed, they were able to eliminate narcotics through sustainable rural development and effective law enforcement. But in spite of their success, we know that drug supply did not end in the world but it simply moved on into other environments where state institutions were weak or non-existent, where general instability was high, where poverty was rife, and where people were extremely vulnerable to illicit sources of livelihood for mere survival.

This exact condition has been brought upon Afghanistan by the past three decades of war, destruction, and human suffering. I think that if it took destruction thirty years to make Afghanistan a major victim of transnational drug mafia, it should realistically take reconstruction sixty years to free us of the drug problem.

This is a job that Afghanistan cannot do alone, but together with international stakeholders who join us in the belief that narcotics is a common enemy of the international community, one that takes millions of young lives across the world every year, one that causes HIV/AIDS, one that finances urban violence and crime, and one that increasingly fuels terrorism in our already dangerous world.



To overcome this common challenge facing humanity, the Government of Afghanistan has been doing our part since the establishment of the Interim Administration in 2002. It has been our policy goal to secure a sustainable decrease in cultivation, production, trafficking, and consumption of illicit drugs with a view to complete and sustainable elimination.

To facilitate the implementation of this long-term policy objective, we have passed a series of decrees, legislated a counter-narcotics law, established the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics, created a counter-narcotics police force, and adopted an eight-pillar National Drug Control Strategy. Where none of these existed almost six years ago under the Taliban, we now have the appropriate mechanisms in place with a committed leadership to fighting and eliminating drugs in Afghanistan.

In hundreds of provincial meetings and visits, President Karzai has stressed his commitment to eradicating narcotics in Afghanistan, and asked farmers to cooperate with the Government and the international community in return for alternative development assistance. The President has effectively garnered the full support of the *Ulema*, who passed a *Fatwa* in 2004, forbidding the cultivation, production, trafficking, and use of drugs throughout Afghanistan.

In January 2006, our Ministry of Counter Narcotics launched an updated National Drug Control Strategy with a focus on four national priorities in order to make the most sustainable impact on drug production and trafficking in the near term. Our priorities include:

1. **Disrupting the drug trade** by targeting traffickers and their backers;
2. **Strengthening and diversifying legal rural livelihoods**;
3. **Reducing the demand for illicit drugs** and treatment of problem drug users; and
4. **Developing state institutions** at the central and provincial level vital to the delivery of our counter-narcotics strategy.

Because we are keenly aware of the nexus between extreme poverty and opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, we have avoided an eradication-led strategy. However, eradication is an integral pillar of our Drug Control Strategy which we have used in a targeted manner to inject risk for poppy



cultivation in areas where alternative livelihoods do exist and where the Government with international support has been able to deliver alternative development assistance to people. Nonetheless, we caution against premature eradication which can alienate destitute farmers and strengthen narco-terrorists against the Government, particularly in southern Afghanistan where the Taliban and drug traffickers work hand in hand to achieve just that.

To implement our national priorities, we will need sustainable resources from our partners to help us eradicate the root causes of drug production in Afghanistan. International experience has shown that only through long-term rural development, increased security, expanded rule of law, enhanced institutional capacity, and proactive regional cooperation, can narcotics be eliminated in Afghanistan.

In 2006, a lack of resources for alternative development coupled with weak coordination across the donor community led to further increase in drug production in Afghanistan. The Government was unable to deliver on the alternative assistance that was promised to the farmers in 2005. The increase was also caused by insecurity and weak governance in the southeast of Afghanistan where more than 60% of the drugs is produced and where the Government is either absent or maintains weak presence due to a lack of capacity and resources.

Meantime, this area of the country has received little or no reconstruction assistance over the past five years. The prevailing abject poverty and vulnerability of Afghan farmers in the southeast of Afghanistan have played in the hands of the Taliban who are not only taxing opium poppy cultivation in return for protection against law enforcement but also are facilitating drug trafficking. In 2006, the Taliban terrorists and drug traffickers were able to integrate their anti-government efforts to undermine security and governance to ensure the enabling environment for terrorism and drug production.

Despite our very limited resources, the Government of Afghanistan will continue to do our part, reaching out to all stake-holders for assistance based on the realization that Afghanistan's drug problem is a transnational security threat that the international community must address together.

Thank you.