

Afghanistan's Opium Trade and its Legal Implications for Pakistan

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Abstract

This research examines the impact of Afghanistan's opium trade on Pakistan, addressing the complex legal, socio-economic, and security challenges posed by the illicit drug trade. The study focuses on the exploitation of the porous Pakistan-Afghanistan border, particularly through regions like Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which are major trafficking routes for opium. It investigates the links between drug trafficking and organized crime networks that facilitate the trade across borders. The paper further explores the social consequences of Afghanistan's opium trade, including the alarming rise in drug addiction rates in Pakistan, placing a significant burden on the country's public health and rehabilitation systems. Economically, the research highlights how drug money contributes to Pakistan's informal economy, fueling money laundering activities that undermine the formal financial system. The security implications are also a critical aspect of the study, particularly the relationship between drug trafficking and terrorism financing, with a focus on how militant groups are involved in narcotics smuggling to fund their operations. The legal frameworks in Pakistan, including the Control of Narcotic Substances Act, 1997, and related laws, are assessed for their effectiveness in addressing the challenges of cross-border drug trafficking. The paper emphasizes the enforcement difficulties due to corruption, jurisdictional issues, and the need for better coordination between law enforcement agencies.

Keywords: Opium Trade, Drug Trafficking, Pakistan, Legal Implications, Narcotics Law, Border Security.

Introduction

Afghanistan's position as the world's largest producer of opium has far-reaching implications for its neighbors, particularly Pakistan. The opium trade, deeply entrenched in Afghanistan's economy and political landscape, contributes significantly to regional instability. With over 85% of the global opium supply originating from Afghanistan, the illicit trade is a critical issue, fueling addiction, crime, and terrorism. Pakistan, sharing a porous 2,600-kilometer border with Afghanistan, is acutely affected, not just as a transit route but also as a destination for narcotics. This dual role amplifies the legal and socio-economic challenges that Pakistan faces, making it a focal point in the international fight against

drug trafficking (Shelley & Hussain, 2009).

As a transit country, Pakistan is a key link in the trafficking routes that carry opiates from Afghanistan to international markets, particularly Europe and Asia. The provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with their mountainous terrain and underdeveloped infrastructure, are primary conduits for smuggling. Karachi, as a major port city, serves as a hub for maritime shipments of narcotics. However, Pakistan is not merely a passage for these drugs; the domestic drug problem has grown substantially, with heroin and opium becoming widespread. According to a UNODC report, Pakistan has an estimated 6.7 million drug users, creating immense public health and social challenges (Shelley & Hussain, 2009).

In response, Pakistan has implemented a robust legal framework to combat drug trafficking. The Control of Narcotic Substances Act, 1997, serves as the cornerstone of Pakistan's anti-narcotics legislation. This law criminalizes the production, trafficking, and possession of narcotics, with severe penalties, including capital punishment for large-scale offenses. Provisions such as Section 9, which prohibits possession and trafficking, and Section 12, targeting the financing of narcotics operations, reflect the comprehensive nature of this legislation. Pakistan is also a signatory to key international treaties, including the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961) and the United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (1988), committing the country to align its laws with global standards (UNODC, 2003).

Despite these legal measures, Pakistan faces significant challenges in enforcement. Corruption within law enforcement agencies, resource constraints, and lack of coordination between different governmental bodies hinder effective action. Additionally, the porous Pakistan-Afghanistan border, which facilitates the easy movement of traffickers, poses a critical obstacle. The nexus between narcotics and terrorism further complicates this issue, as groups like the Taliban use drug proceeds to fund their operations, exacerbating security concerns for Pakistan (Shelley & Hussain, 2009).

The consequences of this trade extend beyond law enforcement and security. The economic burden of drug addiction, combined with the influence of drug money on informal economies and money laundering networks, undermines Pakistan's economic stability. Socially, the rise in addiction has strained public health systems, with rehabilitation services being inadequate for the scale of the crisis (UNODC, 2003).

This research aims to analyze the legal implications of Afghanistan's opium trade for Pakistan, focusing on the effectiveness of current laws and the challenges in their enforcement. While the legal framework is comprehensive, gaps in enforcement, resource allocation, and regional cooperation persist. The opium trade's entanglement with organized crime and terrorism underscores the need for stronger policies, international collaboration, and innovative approaches to mitigate its impact. By addressing these issues, Pakistan can take significant steps toward curbing the influence of the opium trade and its devastating consequences.

Afghanistan's Opium Trade: Context and Dynamics

Afghanistan's opium trade has long been a subject of international concern, given its extensive economic, social, and political implications. The country's dominance in the global opium market is rooted in historical patterns, exacerbated by decades of political instability, conflict, and weak governance. To understand the dynamics of this trade, it is essential to examine its historical origins, current trends, and the underlying drivers that sustain it.

Historical Overview

Opium cultivation in Afghanistan has deep historical roots, initially limited to local medicinal and recreational use. However, as global demand for opiates surged in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Afghanistan's role in the international opium market expanded due to its favorable geography and climate (Ward & Byrd, 2004).

The Soviet invasion in the 1980s marked a pivotal point, as insurgent groups and warlords turned to opium to finance their operations. The Mujahedeen's reliance on the opium trade, bolstered by

international support, entrenched the drug within Afghanistan's war economy (Rubin, 1999). When the Taliban rose to power in the mid-1990s, they initially profited from taxing the trade. Their 2000 ban on cultivation, framed as an Islamic directive, temporarily reduced opium production but also manipulated prices by exploiting stockpiles (UNODC, 2001). After the 2001 U.S. invasion, weak governance and conflict led to a resurgence in opium production (Goodhand, 2005).

Current Trends

Today, Afghanistan dominates the global opium market, supplying approximately 85% of the world's opiates. Annual production often exceeds 6,000 metric tons, underscoring its integration into local economies, particularly as a livelihood for impoverished farmers (UNODC, 2023).

Key trafficking routes include the "Southern Route" through Pakistan, especially via Baluchistan and Karachi, as well as the "Northern Route" into Central Asia and the "Western Route" into Iran. These routes facilitate not just drug trafficking but also weapons and contraband smuggling, exacerbating regional instability (UNODC, 2023).

Bribery and informal border crossings sustain these networks, highlighting the complexities of addressing the opium trade amid ongoing conflict and corruption (Goodhand, 2005).

Drivers of the Opium Trade in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's opium trade is shaped by interconnected structural and socio-political factors, including poverty, weak governance, and decades of conflict, which collectively sustain its dominance in the region. These elements not only fuel domestic challenges but also create ripple effects on neighboring countries, exacerbating issues like trafficking and regional instability. The subsequent sections delve into these factors in detail, exploring their roles in perpetuating the opium trade and the broader regional implications they entail.

Role of Poverty

Afghanistan's rural population, which constitutes the majority, is heavily reliant on agriculture for subsistence. Poppy cultivation offers significantly higher returns than traditional crops like wheat, making it an attractive option for impoverished farmers. A UNODC, 2003 report highlights that, in many provinces like **Helmand, Kandahar, Farah, Uruzgan, and Nangarhar**, poppy cultivation is often the only means of survival for families struggling with food insecurity and debt. The lack of alternative livelihoods and limited access to markets for legal crops further entrenches poppy cultivation in Afghanistan's rural economy (Pain, 2024).

Weak Governance and Legal Frameworks

Decades of conflict have eroded state institutions in Afghanistan, creating a power vacuum that allows narcotics networks to thrive. Corruption within the government and law enforcement agencies exacerbates the problem. Officials at various levels are often complicit in the drug trade, either turning a blind eye or actively participating for financial gain. This systemic corruption undermines efforts to combat drug production and trafficking, leaving Afghanistan vulnerable to exploitation by criminal syndicates and insurgent groups (Kugelman, 2016).

Internationally, Afghanistan is bound by treaties such as the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs and the 1988 United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. However, enforcement remains a challenge due to the lack of state capacity and political will (Ebrahim, 2010).

Armed Conflict

The opium trade and armed conflict in Afghanistan are deeply interconnected, with each fueling the other. Insurgent groups, including the Taliban, rely heavily on drug money to fund their operations. The Taliban, for instance, imposes taxes on farmers and traffickers, generating hundreds of millions of dollars annually. This revenue funds the purchase of weapons, recruitment of fighters, and

maintenance of their shadow governance structures in rural areas. At the same time, the insecurity caused by conflict drives more farmers to cultivate poppy, as they perceive it as a reliable source of income in an uncertain environment. The cyclical nature of this relationship makes it exceedingly difficult to break the narcotics-terrorism nexus (Ebrahim, 2010).

Global Demand and International Networks

Afghanistan's opium trade is sustained not only by domestic factors but also by strong international demand for narcotics. Criminal syndicates across the globe facilitate the distribution of Afghan opiates, creating a lucrative market that incentivizes production. The lack of a coordinated global response to disrupt these networks has allowed the trade to persist, with devastating consequences for countries like Pakistan (Kreutzmann, 2007).

The historical roots, current trends, and drivers of Afghanistan's opium trade underscore its complexity and resilience. The interplay of poverty, weak governance, armed conflict, and global demand creates a deeply entrenched system that is difficult to dismantle. For neighboring countries like Pakistan, the implications of this trade are profound, necessitating comprehensive strategies that address both the supply and demand sides of the narcotics economy. Understanding the dynamics of Afghanistan's opium trade is a crucial step toward formulating effective policies to combat its regional and global impact (Kienberger et al., 2017).

Impact of Afghanistan's Opium Trade on Pakistan

The opium trade from Afghanistan has long been a significant challenge for Pakistan, affecting various aspects of the country's social, economic, and security landscape. With Afghanistan being the world's largest producer of opium, the illegal drug trade has not only fueled addiction and social decay within Pakistan but also exacerbated issues related to organized crime, money laundering, and terrorism financing. This section explores the far-reaching impact of Afghanistan's opium trade on Pakistan, examining key issues such as trafficking routes, social consequences, economic repercussions, and security challenges (Usman & Khan, 2013).

Drug Trafficking and Border Challenges

The vast and porous border between Afghanistan and Pakistan has facilitated the rampant trafficking of opium and other narcotics, contributing to significant challenges in controlling the flow of drugs (Usman & Khan, 2013). This section delves into the major trafficking routes, the difficulties in monitoring the border, and the links between narcotics trafficking and organized crime networks that thrive in these regions.

Overview of Trafficking Routes

Pakistan's strategic location as a neighbor to Afghanistan places it at the heart of the global drug trade. Afghanistan is the world's largest producer of opium, which is the primary source of heroin production. The drugs are trafficked through Pakistan, either by land, air, or sea, to reach international markets. The major trafficking routes pass through the provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), which border Afghanistan (Memon et al., 2024).

Balochistan is a key smuggling corridor where traffickers use both land and maritime routes. Narcotics are transported through Quetta, then shipped via the Makran Coast, leading to the deep-sea ports of Karachi and Gwadar, from where they are smuggled globally. Similarly, the KP province, with its proximity to Afghanistan's Khyber Pass, serves as another vital entry point for drugs into Pakistan. These routes, historically exploited by smuggling syndicates, provide access to Peshawar, and from there, to the rest of Pakistan or across the Durand Line into Afghanistan (Memon et al., 2024).

Challenges of Monitoring the Porous Pakistan-Afghanistan Border

The Afghanistan-Pakistan border, spanning over 2,640 kilometers, has long been a source of major challenges in monitoring drug trafficking. The Durand Line, drawn in 1893, is not only politically

disputed but also poorly patrolled, making it a convenient passage for traffickers. The FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas), now merged into KP, had historically been a safe haven for smugglers due to limited law enforcement presence. Despite efforts to curb drug trafficking, the rugged terrain and local sympathies towards trafficking syndicates have made it difficult for Pakistan's Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) and Border Security Force (BSF) to patrol effectively (Zulfiqar, 2020). Pakistan's Control of Narcotic Substances Act (CNSA), 1997, serves as the primary legislative tool for combating drug trafficking. However, despite the act's provisions under Section 9 (which criminalizes the possession, manufacture, and trafficking of narcotics), border control remains an issue due to lack of coordination between the law enforcement agencies and insufficient resources. Furthermore, the UNODC reported that Pakistan's Baluchistan province alone accounts for a significant percentage of the heroin smuggled into international markets, highlighting the persistence of the trafficking routes across this porous border (Jain, 2018).

Links between Narcotics Trafficking and Organized Crime Networks

Narcotics trafficking in Pakistan is closely tied to organized crime networks, which operate across the border areas and within urban centers. These groups, often linked to international syndicates, exploit local militias and corrupt officials to facilitate the smuggling process. The revenues generated from this trade not only fund further illegal activities but also destabilize local governance and economies. These organized crime syndicates collaborate with militant groups, creating a complex web of narcotics trafficking and extremism (Kleemans & Van de Bunt, 1999).

Social Consequences

The influx of Afghan opium has led to a sharp rise in drug addiction within Pakistan, placing enormous pressure on public health systems and rehabilitation efforts. This section explores the social ramifications of the opium trade, including the escalating addiction rates and the burden on rehabilitation systems, while also highlighting key statistics on the growing addiction crisis.

Rise in Drug Addiction in Pakistan

The influx of Afghan heroin has led to a significant rise in drug addiction in Pakistan. The UNODC's World Drug Report, 2019 estimates that over 6.7 million people in Pakistan are addicted to drugs, and a significant proportion of this addiction is linked to opiate use, primarily heroin. Pakistan, once a major transit country, has transformed into a significant consumer nation as well. The issue is most acute in provinces like Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where access to drugs is widespread due to their proximity to Afghanistan (Siddiqui et al., 2024).

The Anti-Narcotics Policy of 2019 set forth strategies to address the growing drug problem, including demand reduction, awareness campaigns, and a focus on reducing drug addiction. However, the success of these initiatives has been limited, as drug availability continues to outpace recovery efforts (Kan, 2009).

Public Health Implications and the Burden on Rehabilitation Systems

Drug addiction poses a grave public health challenge, exacerbating an already overstretched healthcare system. The Pakistani government spends limited resources on drug treatment, and the number of rehabilitation centers is insufficient. Furthermore, public health infrastructure is underdeveloped, and rehabilitation programs often lack the necessary resources to cater to the growing number of addicts. The country faces a shortage of qualified professionals, and addiction treatment is often stigmatized, resulting in addicts not seeking help (Ali, 1999).

The Drug Rehabilitation Centers Ordinance, 2001, established to regulate and improve rehabilitation facilities, has had minimal impact due to financial constraints and a lack of awareness. Pakistan's public health system continues to struggle to provide adequate care to millions of drug users. The burden on the healthcare system is substantial, with addiction contributing to other social problems, such as poverty, crime, and family breakdowns (Ali, 1999).

Economic Consequences

Afghanistan's opium trade has significant implications for Pakistan's economy, particularly through the infusion of drug money into informal sectors and money laundering activities. This section examines the economic effects of the drug trade, including its role in fueling the informal economy and the challenges of combating money laundering within Pakistan's financial system (Goodhand, 2000).

The Role of Drug Money in Fueling Pakistan's Informal Economy

The narcotics trade has significant economic implications, particularly in Pakistan's informal economy. Much of the drug money, rather than circulating within the formal economy, fuels illegal businesses such as arms dealing, human trafficking, and illicit money lending. These businesses undermine legitimate economic activities, contribute to tax evasion, and create a parallel economy outside the formal fiscal systems. The drug trade also facilitates corruption, as smugglers use their profits to bribe government officials, which further distorts the national economy (Mughal & Schneider, 2020).

The informal economy in Pakistan is vast, and much of its growth can be traced to the profits made through narcotics. Money laundering from drug trafficking activities permeates the formal financial system, making it difficult to trace illicit financial flows. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has warned Pakistan about its failure to fully implement anti-money laundering regulations, and the Anti-Money Laundering Act, 2010 was introduced to address this concern. However, the act's enforcement has been weak, leading to continued illicit financial flows that destabilize Pakistan's economy (Mughal & Schneider, 2020).

Money Laundering and Its Impact on the Formal Financial System

The drug trade generates enormous sums of money, a large portion of which is laundered through financial institutions. This illegal influx of money distorts Pakistan's financial markets and introduces volatility. The Anti-Money Laundering Act, 2010 requires financial institutions to report suspicious transactions and establish robust anti-money laundering mechanisms. However, corruption, lack of awareness, and the complexities of tracing illicit transactions mean that money laundering continues to be a significant issue in Pakistan (Khan & Aslam, 2017).

Security Challenges

The connection between drug trafficking and terrorism financing presents a serious security threat to Pakistan, with militant groups increasingly relying on narcotics smuggling to fund their activities (Felbab-Brown, 2013). This section discusses the security challenges posed by the opium trade, focusing on the links between drug money and terrorism, as well as the involvement of militant groups in smuggling operations.

Links between Drug Trafficking and Terrorism Financing

One of the most significant security challenges posed by Afghanistan's opium trade is its connection to terrorism financing. The revenue from narcotics trafficking has long been used to fund insurgent groups in Pakistan, including the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and various other militant organizations. These groups engage in attacks against the state, utilizing drug profits to buy weapons, recruit fighters, and carry out terrorist activities. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has raised concerns about Pakistan's failure to curb these financial links between drugs and terrorism (Zaheer & Akhtar, 2019).

The Role of Militant Groups in Narcotics Smuggling

Militant groups operating in Pakistan, particularly in tribal regions and Balochistan, have become deeply involved in narcotics smuggling as a source of funding. The Taliban in Afghanistan have also historically used opium profits to finance their operations, and many of these narcotics cross the border

into Pakistan. Militant organizations often use routes that are difficult to monitor or control, making it challenging for Pakistan's security forces to interdict narcotics and prevent terrorism financing effectively (Wright, 2019).

The Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997, contains provisions to combat terrorism financing, including the freezing of assets linked to terrorism. However, the implementation of these laws has been inconsistent, and the scale of the illicit drug trade makes it difficult to dismantle the financing networks that support these militant groups (Ghani & Zaman, 2017).

In short, the impact of Afghanistan's opium trade on Pakistan is indeed complex, influencing various dimensions such as drug trafficking, public health crises, economic instability, and national security challenges. Despite the implementation of key laws like the Control of Narcotic Substances Act (1997) and the Anti-Terrorism Act (1997), Pakistan faces considerable challenges in curbing the flow of narcotics. The persistence of narcotics trafficking exacerbates security concerns, especially as militant groups exploit the trade to fund their activities, undermining Pakistan's stability. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms, fostering international cooperation, and refining legal frameworks are essential to effectively address this persistent issue.

Implications for Pakistan

The pervasive impact of Afghanistan's opium trade extends deeply into Pakistan's legal, political, and enforcement frameworks, creating significant challenges. Addressing these requires a robust domestic legal system, adherence to international obligations, and effective enforcement mechanisms. This section examines Pakistan's legal frameworks, international commitments, enforcement challenges, and real-world case studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implications and necessary reforms.

Domestic Legal Framework

Pakistan has a well-defined legal framework to combat narcotics trafficking, primarily governed by the *Control of Narcotic Substances Act, 1997 (CNSA)*. This legislation consolidates and strengthens laws for controlling drug-related offenses. Section 9 of the CNSA outlines severe punishments, including the death penalty or life imprisonment, for manufacturing, possessing, or trafficking large quantities of narcotics. The Act also includes provisions for asset confiscation under Sections 12 and 13, targeting the financial networks sustaining drug cartels (CNSA, 1997).

Despite the comprehensiveness of the CNSA, its application to cross-border trafficking poses challenges. While the law criminalizes smuggling, effective prosecution requires coordination between border control agencies, law enforcement, and the judiciary. The porous Pakistan-Afghanistan border often allows traffickers to evade legal consequences. Moreover, gaps in intelligence sharing and inadequate infrastructure in regions like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa hinder the implementation of legal provisions (Akhtar & Rana, 2018).

The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), established under the CNSA, is tasked with enforcing drug laws. However, limited resources and jurisdictional overlaps with provincial law enforcement agencies dilute its efficacy. Strengthening inter-agency cooperation and addressing systemic inefficiencies is crucial for tackling cross-border trafficking under Pakistan's domestic laws (ANF, 2020).

International Legal Obligations

Pakistan's fight against narcotics trafficking is not confined to its borders; it is also shaped by international commitments under UN conventions. As a signatory to the *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961*, the *Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971*, and the *UN Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988*, Pakistan is obligated to criminalize all drug-related activities and collaborate internationally to curb narcotics trafficking (Khan, 2018).

In compliance with these conventions, Pakistan has implemented mechanisms for international cooperation, such as extradition treaties and joint task forces. However, the complexity of combating

trafficking networks that traverse multiple jurisdictions underscores the need for enhanced regional collaboration. The *South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances* provides a regional framework for coordinating efforts. Under this initiative, Pakistan actively participates in the SAARC Narcotics Control Program, which aims to harmonize laws and promote intelligence sharing (UNODC, 2020).

Despite these efforts, challenges remain in fulfilling international obligations. The lack of standardized enforcement across countries and insufficient capacity-building initiatives weakens the impact of these conventions. Addressing these gaps through diplomatic channels and bolstering regional frameworks is essential for effective control.

Enforcement Challenges

Enforcement of narcotics laws in Pakistan faces multiple challenges, including systemic corruption and jurisdictional issues. Corruption within law enforcement agencies and the judiciary significantly undermines efforts to prosecute traffickers. Reports of bribes, selective enforcement, and collusion with trafficking networks have been documented, particularly in border provinces. Such practices allow offenders to evade punishment, rendering legal provisions ineffective (Shah, 2019).

Jurisdictional issues further complicate enforcement, particularly in cases involving cross-border crimes. The overlapping responsibilities of federal and provincial agencies create inefficiencies, while the lack of specialized training for handling narcotics cases diminishes the capacity to prosecute offenders effectively. For instance, provincial police often lack expertise in implementing the CNSA, leading to procedural delays and weakened cases (Bukhari & Yousuf, 2020).

Another critical enforcement gap lies in border security. Pakistan shares a 2,640-kilometer border with Afghanistan, much of which is difficult to monitor due to rugged terrain and limited resources. The fencing project along the border, initiated in 2017, aims to curtail smuggling, but its completion has been delayed, leaving significant vulnerabilities. Enhancing technological surveillance and integrating intelligence systems across agencies are necessary steps to bridge these enforcement gaps (Nadeem, 2021).

Case Studies

Examining legal cases involving cross-border narcotics trafficking highlights the systemic challenges and the need for reform. In one notable case from 2019, the ANF intercepted a truck carrying over 100 kilograms of heroin near the Pak-Afghan border in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Although arrests were made, the prosecution faced delays due to jurisdictional disputes between provincial police and the ANF. The accused individuals were eventually released on bail, exposing weaknesses in the coordination between agencies and the judiciary (ANF, 2021).

Another case in 2021 involved the seizure of 200 kilograms of opium in Balochistan (Balochistan Times, 2021). Despite concrete evidence, the case faltered in court due to procedural lapses, such as mishandling evidence and failing to secure witness testimonies. Such incidents underscore the urgent need for capacity-building initiatives for law enforcement and judicial officials (Khan, 2020).

On the international front, Pakistan has collaborated with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to dismantle transnational trafficking networks. In a joint operation with Afghan authorities in 2020, a significant smuggling ring was uncovered, resulting in the confiscation of narcotics worth millions of dollars. This case highlights the potential of international cooperation in addressing cross-border crimes but also emphasizes the necessity of sustained efforts to maintain such collaborations (UNODC, 2020).

These interconnected aspects underline the complex implications of Afghanistan's opium trade for Pakistan. Strengthening the domestic legal framework, fulfilling international obligations, addressing enforcement challenges, and learning from case studies are pivotal for formulating a comprehensive response to this multifaceted issue (Khan, 2020).

Countermeasures and Policy Responses

Pakistan has been grappling with the challenges posed by Afghanistan's opium trade through a range of countermeasures. Efforts have been made to strengthen enforcement mechanisms, enhance border control, and collaborate with international organizations. However, significant policy gaps remain, particularly in inter-agency coordination and demand-side reduction strategies. This section explores existing efforts and highlights policy gaps that need to be addressed for a comprehensive response (Mughal, 2022).

Existing Efforts

To combat the challenges of narcotics trafficking, Pakistan has implemented various measures, spearheaded by institutions like the ANF and supported by border control initiatives and international collaborations which are as follows.

The Role of the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF)

The ANF, established under the *Control of Narcotic Substances Act, 1997 (CNSA)*, is the primary enforcement body responsible for countering drug trafficking in Pakistan. Section 5 of the CNSA empowers the ANF to investigate, arrest, and prosecute individuals involved in drug-related offenses. In recent years, the ANF has made significant strides in intercepting drug shipments and dismantling trafficking networks. For example, in 2021, the ANF seized over 1,200 kilograms of heroin and 3,000 kilograms of hashish, reflecting its robust operational capacity. Despite these successes, the ANF faces challenges such as resource constraints, limited manpower, and jurisdictional overlaps with provincial law enforcement agencies. Strengthening the ANF's capacity through increased funding, advanced training, and inter-agency cooperation is essential for sustaining its effectiveness (Pakistan Ministry of Narcotics Control, 2021).

Border Control Initiatives

Pakistan shares a long, porous border with Afghanistan, which has been a major conduit for narcotics trafficking. In response, Pakistan initiated the *Border Fencing Project* in 2017, aiming to secure the 2,640-kilometer frontier with physical barriers and surveillance systems. By 2024, over 90% of the fencing had been completed, significantly reducing the movement of traffickers. Additionally, border security has been bolstered with the deployment of specialized units and the installation of technological tools such as thermal imaging cameras and drones (The Express Tribune, 2021). Efforts have also been made to establish *Border Liaison Offices (BLOs)* in collaboration with Afghanistan, facilitating real-time intelligence sharing. However, gaps remain in monitoring remote areas, and the lack of cross-border cooperation from Afghan authorities has hindered progress. Enhancing border security requires a more comprehensive approach, integrating human and technological resources with diplomatic engagement (The Express Tribune, 2021).

Collaboration with International Organizations

Pakistan has partnered with international organizations like the *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)* to address the transnational nature of narcotics trafficking. Through initiatives such as the *Pakistan Country Program (2016-2020)*, the UNODC has supported Pakistan in strengthening its enforcement capacity, improving data collection, and fostering regional cooperation (UNODC, 2016).

Additionally, Pakistan participates in the *Triangular Initiative*, a collaborative effort with Afghanistan and Iran to combat drug trafficking. Under this framework, joint operations have led to the interception of large drug consignments and the dismantling of smuggling networks. While such collaborations have shown promise, sustaining them requires political will and consistent funding (UNODC, 2016).

Policy Gaps

Despite the progress made through existing measures, significant policy gaps undermine the

effectiveness of Pakistan's counter-narcotics efforts. Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing a holistic strategy.

Weaknesses in Inter-Agency Coordination

One of the primary challenges in Pakistan's counter-narcotics efforts is the lack of coordination between federal and provincial agencies. The ANF, provincial police, customs authorities, and border security forces often operate in silos, leading to duplication of efforts and jurisdictional conflicts. For instance, the CNSA grants overlapping powers to multiple agencies, resulting in inefficiencies in investigations and prosecutions (Shah, 2022).

The absence of a centralized database for tracking narcotics cases further exacerbates the issue, limiting information-sharing and hindering effective enforcement. Establishing an integrated platform for inter-agency coordination and clearly defining roles under the CNSA are critical for addressing these challenges (Shah, 2022).

Lack of Focus on Demand-Side Reduction

While significant resources have been allocated to supply-side control measures, demand-side reduction strategies have received comparatively little attention. The rise in drug addiction in Pakistan underscores the need for a balanced approach that addresses both supply and demand. According to a 2013 report by the *UNODC*, Pakistan has over 6.7 million drug users, with heroin and opium accounting for a significant proportion. Rehabilitation centers in Pakistan are insufficient to meet the growing demand, with only 90 treatment facilities catering to millions of addicts. Public awareness campaigns about the dangers of drug use are also sporadic and lack a consistent message. Section 52 of the CNSA mandates the establishment of rehabilitation centers and awareness programs, but its implementation has been limited due to budgetary constraints (UNODC, 2013).

Investing in comprehensive rehabilitation programs, expanding treatment facilities, and launching sustained awareness campaigns are essential for reducing demand. Collaborations with civil society organizations and private sector stakeholders can also enhance the impact of these initiatives.

Challenges in Tackling Financial Networks

The financial networks supporting drug trafficking are a critical area where policy gaps persist. The *Anti-Money Laundering Act, 2010* provides a legal framework for combating the laundering of drug money. However, enforcement remains weak due to limited expertise within investigative agencies and the complexity of tracing illicit financial flows (Khan, 2020).

Strengthening financial intelligence units and leveraging technology for tracking transactions are necessary steps for disrupting the economic backbone of trafficking networks. Moreover, collaboration with international financial institutions can enhance Pakistan's capacity to address this issue (Ali & Shaikh, 2021).

Addressing these policy gaps requires a multi-faceted approach that integrates existing measures with new initiatives targeting identified weaknesses. The subsequent section explores additional strategies and reforms necessary to strengthen Pakistan's counter-narcotics framework and mitigate the impact of Afghanistan's opium trade (Ali & Shaikh, 2021).

Recommendations

To effectively counter the challenges posed by Afghanistan's opium trade, Pakistan must adopt a holistic approach. This requires strengthening border security, reforming legal frameworks, enhancing international cooperation, and addressing public awareness and demand reduction. Below are detailed recommendations to address these key areas.

Strengthening Border Security

The porous nature of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border facilitates the movement of narcotics, making border security critical. Despite ongoing efforts such as fencing projects and the deployment of

security personnel, gaps remain that require advanced technological solutions.

Deploy Advanced Technologies

Introducing cutting-edge surveillance technologies like drones, biometric systems, and thermal imaging can significantly improve border monitoring. Drones equipped with real-time imaging can patrol remote terrains, while biometric identification systems at border checkpoints can help identify and track repeat offenders involved in trafficking. Such initiatives align with the *Control of Narcotic Substances Act (CNSA) 1997*, which emphasizes controlling the transport of drugs across borders under Section 12.

Expanding Border Liaison Mechanisms

Pakistan should collaborate with Afghanistan to establish more *Border Liaison Offices (BLOs)* under the *Triangular Initiative*, a regional framework supported by the *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)*. BLOs facilitate intelligence sharing, joint operations, and trust-building between border forces, reducing the chances of trafficking.

Capacity Building of Border Forces

Regular training programs for security personnel are essential to equip them with the skills needed to identify and intercept narcotics. Partnerships with international organizations like the *UNODC* can provide technical expertise and funding for capacity-building initiatives.

Reforming Legal Frameworks

While Pakistan has established laws like the *Control of Narcotic Substances Act, 1997 (CNSA)*, their enforcement and deterrent impact need significant strengthening to combat cross-border drug trafficking effectively.

Introduce Stricter Penalties

Amendments to the CNSA should be made to introduce harsher penalties for high-volume traffickers. Section 9 of the CNSA, which prescribes punishments for drug possession and trafficking, could be revised to impose mandatory life imprisonment for repeat offenders. Increasing penalties can act as a stronger deterrent against large-scale trafficking operations.

Enhance Judicial Efficiency

The slow pace of legal proceedings undermines the effectiveness of anti-narcotics laws. Establishing specialized courts for narcotics-related offenses can expedite case resolution. Additionally, judges and prosecutors should be trained on the complexities of international drug trafficking, ensuring effective application of the law.

Clarify Inter-Agency Jurisdictions

To avoid overlaps and inefficiencies between federal and provincial agencies, a comprehensive framework for inter-agency cooperation should be introduced. This framework should be integrated into the CNSA to provide a legal mandate for coordination.

Enhancing International Cooperation

Given the transnational nature of the opium trade, regional and global collaboration is vital for a coordinated response.

Strengthen Bilateral Agreements with Afghanistan

Pakistan should engage in bilateral negotiations with Afghanistan to establish agreements focused on joint anti-narcotics efforts. These agreements should include provisions for intelligence sharing, coordinated operations, and mutual extradition of traffickers. Diplomatic efforts must ensure sustained cooperation, even amid political instability in Afghanistan.

Expand Regional Frameworks

Active participation in regional initiatives like the *South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)* and global frameworks like the *1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances* is essential. These platforms provide opportunities for technical assistance, funding, and sharing best practices.

Leverage International Support

Pakistan can seek support from global organizations like the *UNODC* and the *World Bank* to fund counter-narcotics programs. This support could be used for capacity building, improving technology, and implementing community-based initiatives.

Public Awareness and Demand Reduction

Reducing the demand for narcotics within Pakistan is as critical as controlling their supply. This requires targeted awareness campaigns and the expansion of rehabilitation facilities.

Launch Targeted Awareness Campaigns

Public awareness campaigns should focus on educating at-risk populations, especially youth, about the dangers of drug addiction. Using platforms like social media, television, and community outreach programs can maximize reach. Initiatives like the *Anti-Narcotics Force's Zindagi app*, which educates users on drug prevention, should be expanded and integrated into national strategies.

Expand Rehabilitation Facilities

Section 52 of the CNSA mandates the establishment of rehabilitation centers for drug addicts, but implementation has been limited. To address the growing addiction problem, Pakistan must increase funding for rehabilitation centers, particularly in drug-prone regions like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Public-private partnerships could be leveraged to build and manage these facilities effectively.

Community-Based Interventions

Engaging local communities in drug prevention efforts can amplify the impact of awareness campaigns. Religious leaders, educators, and social workers should be mobilized to spread anti-drug messages and support rehabilitation efforts.

Monitoring and Accountability

Ensuring the success of these measures requires robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

Strengthen Oversight Bodies

The ANF should be given greater autonomy and resources to monitor the implementation of anti-drug policies. Regular audits and transparent reporting of its activities can enhance public trust and effectiveness.

Combat Corruption in Law Enforcement

Corruption within law enforcement agencies often undermines counter-narcotics efforts. Establishing independent anti-corruption units within agencies and implementing whistleblower protection laws can deter corrupt practices.

Enhance Data Collection

Accurate data on drug production, trafficking, and addiction is essential for informed policymaking. Pakistan should establish a centralized database to track trends, coordinate efforts, and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.

By adopting these recommendations, Pakistan can develop a more comprehensive and effective

response to the challenges posed by Afghanistan’s opium trade. Strengthening border security, reforming legal frameworks, enhancing international cooperation, and prioritizing public awareness and demand reduction are critical steps. With coordinated efforts and sustained commitment, Pakistan can mitigate the socio-economic and security risks associated with the narcotics trade. All these recommendations are summarised in the following table.

Table 1: Summary of Recommendations for Strengthening Anti-Narcotics Efforts in Pakistan

Recommendations	Action Details	Relevant Laws / Sections	Required Legal Reforms
1.Strengthening Border Security			
Deploy Advanced Technologies	Introduce drones, biometric systems, and thermal imaging for improved border monitoring and interception of narcotics.	Control of Narcotic Substances Act (CNSA) 1997 - Section 12 (Transport of drugs across borders).	Amend CNSA Section 12 to explicitly include the use of advanced technologies such as drones, thermal imaging, and biometrics for border surveillance.
Expand Border Liaison Offices (BLOs)	Establish more Border Liaison Offices (BLOs) with Afghanistan for intelligence sharing, joint operations, and mutual cooperation.	No specific law currently regulating BLOs. BLOs operate informally, based on bilateral agreements or working arrangements.	Create a new law that formalizes BLOs under a structured legal framework, potentially by amending the CNSA or creating a new bilateral cooperation law.
Capacity Building of Border Forces	Provide specialized training for border security personnel to improve narcotics identification and interception skills.	Anti-Narcotics Force Act (ANF) 1997 - Section 4 (Powers of the Anti-Narcotics Force).	Amend ANF Act Section 4 to mandate comprehensive training programs for border personnel, including specialized courses on advanced narcotics identification and border security technologies.
2.Reforming Legal Frameworks			
Introduce Stricter Penalties	Amend CNSA to impose mandatory life imprisonment for high-volume traffickers and repeat offenders.	Control of Narcotic Substances Act (CNSA) 1997 - Section 9 (Punishment for possession and trafficking).	Amend CNSA Section 9 to introduce mandatory life imprisonment for repeat offenders and high-volume traffickers. Extend provisions to impose asset forfeiture for drug trafficking

			syndicates.
Establish Specialized Narcotics Courts	Establish specialized narcotics courts to speed up legal proceedings, and provide training for judges on drug trafficking cases.	Criminal Procedure Code (Cr.P.C) 1898 - Sections related to jurisdiction and trial of cases.	Amend Sections 11, 12, 7, 265, and 344 of the Cr.P.C to establish specialized narcotics courts, grant them jurisdiction, and expedite the trial of drug-related cases.
			Create a new section to outline the establishment, jurisdiction, and procedures for specialized narcotics courts.
Clarify Jurisdictions for Inter-Agency Cooperation	Clarify Jurisdictions for Inter-Agency Cooperation	Control of Narcotic Substances Act (CNSA) 1997 - Amendments needed to provide clear mandates for coordination between agencies.	Amend CNSA Section 13 to establish a framework for coordination among the ANF, customs, and provincial law enforcement agencies, with clear operational guidelines.
3.Enhancing International Cooperation			
Strengthen Bilateral Agreements with Afghanistan	Engage in bilateral negotiations with Afghanistan for joint anti-narcotics agreements focusing on intelligence sharing, coordinated operations, and mutual extradition.	No existing law for this cooperation. There is no formal law governing these types of cross-border arrangements.	Create a new law specifically for Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral agreements on anti-narcotics, ensuring clarity on intelligence sharing, joint operations, and mutual legal assistance for extradition of drug traffickers.
Participate in International Frameworks	Participate in regional initiatives like SAARC and global frameworks such as the 1988 UN Narcotics Convention to enhance technical assistance and cooperation.	Narcotics Substances (Control) Act, 1997 - Current act does not fully align with the 1988 UN Convention on Narcotics.	Amend CNSA 1997 to align with international conventions such as the 1988 UN Narcotics Convention and introduce provisions for technical assistance, joint operations, and capacity-building programs.
4. Public Awareness			

and Demand Reduction			
Launch National Awareness Campaigns	Use social media, TV, and community outreach to educate the public, especially youth, on the dangers of drug addiction.	No existing law for public drug prevention campaigns.	Create a new law requiring government-funded national drug prevention and awareness campaigns through media, schools, and community groups.
Expand Rehabilitation Programs	Increase funding and support for rehabilitation centers, especially in high-risk regions like Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.	Control of Narcotic Substances Act (CNSA) 1997 - Section 52 (Rehabilitation of drug addicts).	Amend CNSA Section 52 to increase resources for rehabilitation programs and provide incentives for private sector participation in rehabilitation efforts.
Community-Based Prevention Programs	Support community-based drug prevention programs to help local leaders and communities address the issue at grassroots level.	No specific law for community-driven programs.	Create a new law to facilitate and regulate community-based drug prevention programs, including partnerships with local organizations, schools, and religious groups.
5. Monitoring and Accountability			
	Establish independent anti-corruption units within law enforcement agencies, along with whistleblower protection laws.	Anti-Corruption Act 1997, Whistleblower Protection Act 2017 (Draft Bill).	Amend Anti-Corruption Act to establish specialized anti-corruption units within the ANF and other law enforcement agencies. Implement provisions from the Whistleblower Protection Act for protecting informants within the anti-narcotics operations.
Strengthen Monitoring of Law Enforcement	Increase oversight and monitoring of anti-narcotics agencies to ensure transparency, efficiency, and accountability in drug law enforcement operations.	Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) Act, 1997 - Section 4 (Powers of the Anti-Narcotics Force).	Amend ANF Act Section 4 to expand powers of oversight bodies and introduce annual audits of the force's performance. Add a public reporting mechanism for greater transparency in

			operations.
Data and Intelligence Sharing			
Create Centralized Drug Tracking Database	Establish a national database for tracking trends in drug trafficking, production, and addiction to inform law enforcement and policymaking.	No existing law regulating a national drug database.	Create a new law to regulate the establishment and operation of a national drug trafficking database, linking agencies like ANF, Customs, and Intelligence Services for real-time information sharing.

This table summarizes key recommendations for strengthening Pakistan's anti-narcotics efforts, focusing on border security, legal reforms, international cooperation, public awareness, and accountability. It outlines targeted actions for improving border monitoring, reforming legal frameworks, enhancing rehabilitation programs, and strengthening inter-agency coordination. These recommendations aim to create a more efficient, transparent, and coordinated approach to tackling drug trafficking in Pakistan.

Conclusion

Afghanistan's opium trade has profound and far-reaching implications for Pakistan, encompassing security, economic, and social challenges. This study has explored the historical evolution of the opium trade, its drivers, and its impact on Pakistan while analyzing existing policies and proposing actionable recommendations. The findings reveal a deeply entrenched issue that demands a multifaceted response.

The opium trade, driven by factors such as poverty, conflict, and weak governance in Afghanistan, has established strong trafficking routes through Pakistan, particularly in regions like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These porous borders enable the proliferation of organized crime, money laundering, and terrorism financing. Consequently, Pakistan faces heightened security threats, economic destabilization, and a surge in drug addiction, which burdens public health systems and rehabilitation facilities.

While Pakistan has implemented measures like the *Control of Narcotic Substances Act, 1997* and strengthened collaboration with international organizations such as the *UNODC*, enforcement remains inconsistent. Corruption, inter-agency coordination gaps, and limited focus on demand reduction hinder the country's ability to effectively combat cross-border trafficking and drug-related crimes.

The study highlights that the current strategies, though valuable, fall short of addressing the complex dynamics of the opium trade. Strengthening border security through technological advancements such as drones and biometric systems is essential. Simultaneously, reforms in legal frameworks must prioritize stricter penalties, faster judicial processes, and improved mechanisms to tackle money laundering and trafficking networks.

Additionally, Pakistan's international commitments, including the UN drug control conventions, require stronger enforcement through bilateral and regional cooperation, particularly with Afghanistan. Addressing the demand side is equally critical. Public awareness campaigns and improved access to rehabilitation facilities are necessary to mitigate the social consequences of drug addiction.

Future challenges such as the rise of synthetic drugs and the evolving methods of trafficking underscore the need for adaptive policymaking. Integrating technologies like artificial intelligence and block chain can enhance surveillance and financial tracking, offering more robust tools to combat this

transnational issue.

In conclusion, Afghanistan's opium trade is not just an Afghan problem but a regional crisis with Pakistan at the forefront of its impacts. To mitigate its effects, a holistic approach encompassing stronger laws, effective enforcement, international collaboration, and social reforms is imperative. By addressing both supply and demand, Pakistan can build a more resilient framework to combat the ongoing challenges posed by the narcotics trade. While this paper has addressed key aspects of the issue, further research into synthetic drugs and technological interventions will be vital to sustaining progress in this critical area.

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