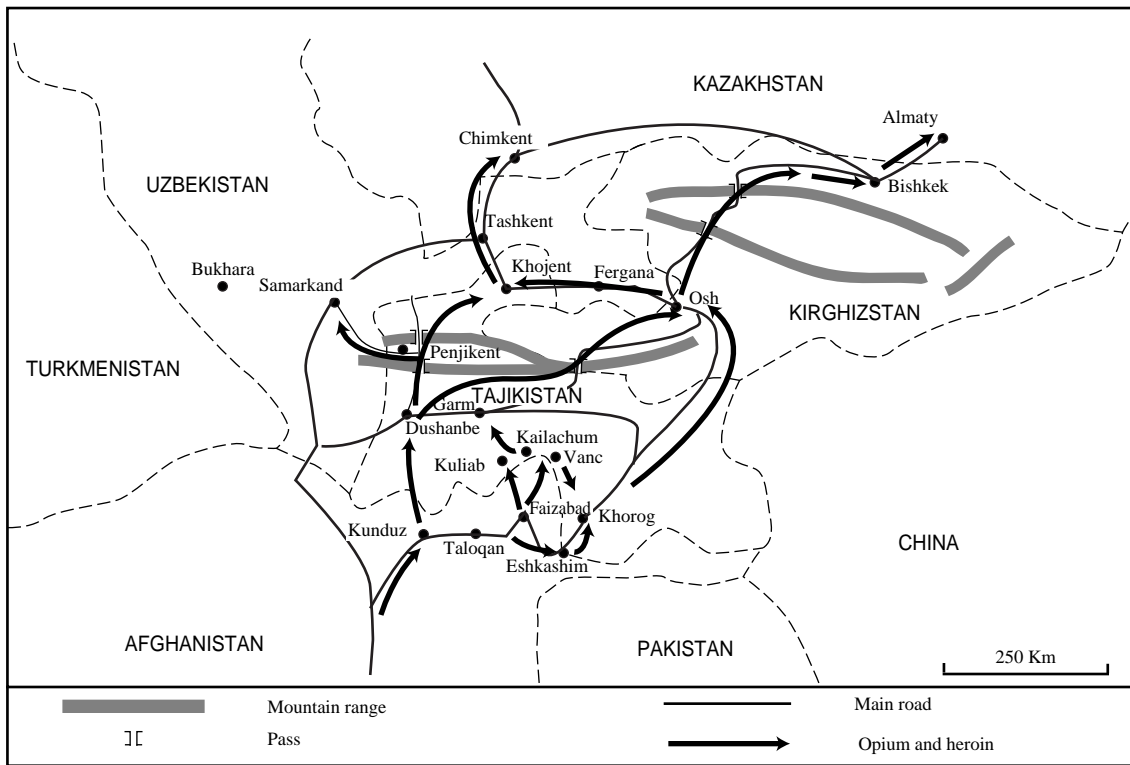


IV. CENTRAL ASIA, SOUTH-WEST ASIA

Afghanistan remains the principal opium supplier to heroin and morphine base laboratories located in Pakistan, the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and Turkey. But Afghanistan also exports increasing quantities of locally-manufactured heroin. The Taliban, who began by imposing an Islamic tax (zakat) on opium production, today tax the manufacture and export of the finished product. Opium production rose from 1996 to 1997, and preliminary data collected so far indicate that this growth will continue in 1998. In the north, Tajikistan is the principal export route for opiates used by all groups, whatever their ideology. Only the Russian Border Guards in Tajikistan and the government of Uzbekistan use the fight against narcotics as an instrument in the fight against Islamic fundamentalism.

In the southwest, the military successes of the Taliban have further reinforced the willingness of Iranian authorities to oppose the transit of drugs through their territory en route for Turkey, and to oppose the intrigues of Pakistani intelligence agencies along their common border. In the east, opium producing zones in Pakistan, in so much as they are inhabited by the same Pashtun tribes as in Afghanistan, are affected by the situation across the border in Afghanistan. Their desire to remain autonomous has been strengthened and the defense of poppy crops has become a high stakes issue with the central government, whose authority is losing ground in the face of mounting regionalism, bordering on outright separatism. The shock wave of Islamist machinations accompanied by drug production is felt all the way to India, in particular in Kashmir; in Nepal, battleground between Pakistani and Indian intelligence services; and in Sri Lanka, through which large quantities of Afghan and Pakistani hashish transit. In southeastern India, the situation is becoming increasingly complex with the activities of Tamil networks, some of which are linked to financing the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam guerrillas in their struggle against the Colombo government.



Map 7: Trafficking in opiates in Tajikistan

TAJIKISTAN

Tajikistan's geographical location and the atmosphere of latent civil war are encouraging trafficking of the opium No.3 (brown sugar) and even No.4 (white) heroin that is starting to be produced across the border with Afghanistan. This frontier stretching more than 600 miles from Hindu Kush to the Pamir foothills in Gorno Badakhshan can be divided into two distinct segments, each controlled by antagonistic political groups and with its own specific methods of drug trafficking. The first segment is in southern Tajikistan, a fairly flat region which begins at the Uzbek border to the west and runs east as far as the town of Kuliab, stronghold of the clans now in power in Dushanbe and rearbase of the military back-up given to the anti-Taliban coalition in Afghanistan. The other, Gorno Badakhshan, covers two-thirds of the border with Afghanistan, marked by the Amu Daria, which starts as a stream before becoming a mighty river in southern Tajikistan.

The Fundamentalists' Opium

The part of Afghanistan facing southern Tajikistan is also relatively flat, facilitating communications with the rest of the country and the opium-producing areas of Nangahar and Helmand. The town of Kunduz is only 35 miles away from the Tajik border, along a good road. Capital of the Afghan province of the same name, Kunduz, a Pashtun enclave in the north of the country, was until May 1997 under the control of the Hezb e-Islami, a Pashtun fundamentalist party led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, an ally of the Northern Coalition which opposes the Taliban and also includes Uzbek, Turkmen, Hazara and Tajik forces. According to accounts collected by OGD's special envoy, Hekmatyar's supporters had set up laboratories there that were producing high-quality heroin. It was packed in one-kilogram bags, each stamped with a poppy seed capsule design. The fundamentalists were exporting the drug to Tajikistan where the networks were controlled by clans representing the "secular" government in Dushanbe, which supports the forces opposing the Taliban. It seems also likely that some other leaders of the Northern Coalition were trading opium with their allies across the border. In May 1997, Kunduz was captured by the Taliban within a few hours after Hekmatyar's leaders changed their colors — although they probably carried on trading with their former Tajik partners. The Tajikistan warlords have not had a lot to say about the situation because they may soon have no allies other than Hekmatyar's former supporters who have gone over to the Taliban: indeed, the violent offensive carried out by the latter in mid-June from Kunduz against the town of Taloqan, held by commander Massud, could cut off the Northern Coalition's access routes to Tajikistan. One of the consequences of this would be a distinct strengthening of the influence of Pakistan — whose ties with the Taliban are well known — both on a political level and in terms of drug trafficking. This possibility has also been worrying Uzbekistan, which is anxious to curb the spread of fundamentalism in the region.

This explains the upholding in mid-June 1998 of the death penalty by an Uzbek court for two Kazakh citizens found guilty of bringing 40 kg of heroin into the country from Tajikistan. A few days later, Uzbekistan's President, Islam Karimov, while soliciting aid from the European Union, added: "in the areas of southern Afghanistan controlled by the Taliban, drug production has taken on an organized character and constitutes the principal source of revenue for the purchase of arms in the Taliban war effort."

The other border area, Gorno Badakhshan, divides into two groups speaking the same language and, in the Khorog region, members of the same Shi'ite religious community (in a mostly Sunni environment),

the Ismailis, who live in the hills and grow opium, their only means of existence. Here, the drug often travels along rocky roads and across steep terrain, and passes through areas controlled by various fundamentalist groups opposed to President Rakhmonov's government. It is usually carried by mules. According to UNDCP, Afghan Badakhshan produced about 60 metric tons of opium in 1997. Most of it is grown in the east of the province and the most direct route for exports goes through Tajik Gorno Badakhshan. Bazaaris (traders) from Faizabad, the provincial capital of Afghan Badakhshan, buy opium from local growers and organize mule caravans to transport it. In July and August, after the late harvest in this mountain region, convoys set out from Faizabad to, for example, the village of Khwahan, which is four days away on foot. Tons of opium at a time cross the border in various places. Each kilogram of opium bought from the growers for about US \$50 is sold for \$110 to traders in the border villages. Because of endemic poverty in the region, traders in central Asian towns have no trouble recruiting labor, despite the risks of being arrested by Russian border guards. The river-border is crossed in a large number of places by an army of minor couriers. Although Khorog, which used to be a showcase for Soviet Tajikistan, has become rather an ordinary little town, it is still the focal point for all the opium – and even heroin – crossing the Amu Daria from the border villages of Vanc, in the north, as far as Eshkashim, in the south. Only one road leaves Khorog, running for 500 miles across the Pamir mountains before finally reaching the Kirghiz town of Osh. Nonetheless, a commercial air route links the town to Dushanbe, and Russian military flights go directly to Moscow. One Russian soldier on leave told several witnesses that he belonged to a special unit responsible for attacking convoys of opium in Afghanistan. However, the report did not cause much concern to the Khorog drug baron, the local strongman, who arranges for the Russian border guards to close their eyes to Afghan drug imports. And the military aircraft leaving Khorog and Tajikistan for Moscow are not checked by Russian customs when they touch down.

The Common Market of Opiates

The capture of hundreds of minor couriers made reckless by poverty and lacking the resources to bribe customs officers enables the Tajik authorities to report the seizure of several tons of opium every year. On the other hand, the money that can be made from heroin means it is easy to “buy routes”, and that is doubtless why the amount seized is insignificant compared to what is actually transported: about 60 kg in 1997 and 80 kg in the first three months of 1998. And yet heroin is everywhere. In Khorog, small rectangular packets containing one kilogram can be purchased for \$7000 dollars. Opium trafficking is still more a “people's activity”, while heroin trafficking is in the hands of professionals and enjoys better protection. After Vanc, the drug leaves the village of Kailachum further east and is taken directly to Dushanbe by road. There, a kilo of opium sells for \$300: the lowest price in any central Asian city, confirming the Tajik capital's status as the first stop on the drug route. Opium leaves Dushanbe in three main directions. The first is westward to Uzbekistan and Samarkand. In May 1998, an “unidentified” helicopter arrived from the south and dropped 60 kg of opium and about 1 kg of heroin in the mountains near Penjikent. A farmer saw the load being picked up by a car and informed the local militia, who stopped the car as it was heading toward Samarkand. The second direction is northward, toward the Tajik town of Khojent, formerly Leninbad, where the cost of a kilogram of opium rises to about \$700. The third direction is northeast to Osh along the long rift valley where the towns of Garm, Komsomolabad and Tajikabad are located, some of them held by Tajik “Islamic resistance” groups. One small-scale trafficker in Osh told the OGD special envoy that a European had made contact with a guerrilla leader in Garm with a view to setting up a heroin laboratory. However, the trafficker was unable to say how far the deal had advanced. So, after Dushanbe, we find what might be termed a

second belt of hubs for the drug trade, where the price of a kilogram of opium for local consumption varies between \$600 and \$700: Osh in Kirghizstan, Khojent in Tajikistan and Samarkand in Uzbekistan. Osh is particularly affected. At the end of the road from Pamir, it is a destination for opium and to a lesser extent, heroin from Gorno Badakhshan, as well as for drugs arriving from Dushanbe. The strategic importance of Osh as a center for trafficking is continually increasing. It is located at the end of the Fergana basin, less than ten miles from the border with Uzbekistan, and all trade between Gorno Badakhshan and Khojent has to go through it because the state of the roads and the civil war make it impossible to take a faster route. Hundreds of young people turn up in Osh, willing to take risks to make their fortune.

These couriers, who take the road from Khorog to Osh, earn between 30% and 50% of the sale price of the opium when it reaches its destination. The “easier” transportation of batches of 5 kg of opium from Osh to Bishkek, is paid about \$100 to couriers. According to the small-scale traffickers the OGD special envoy met in Osh, Kirghiz wholesalers of Turkish origin have a virtual monopoly of the purchase of opium. “Real” Turks are also prominent throughout Kirghizstan. They arrived in force when the country achieved independence in 1991 and have now been largely replaced by American, European and Korean businessmen. The Turks have a reputation as wheeler-dealers who, in the name of a rather naive conception of Turkish unity, are insufferably condescending. Although they were the first to get involved in drugs, their lack of reliability meant they were unable to face up to international competition over major deals. Nonetheless, they had time to set up commercial networks throughout the country: they own a large number of restaurants, hotels and casinos in Osh and Bishkek, for instance. There is even a branch of the extreme-right Turkish party the Gray Wolves (MHP) in Bishkek. A large share of the opium that arrives in Osh is used “locally” (with the drug addicts processing it themselves), from central Asia to Russia. Transported by road, rail or air, it is sold in Bishkek (where a kilo fetches between \$1200 and \$1500), Almaty (about \$2000) and Moscow (where, once turned into home-made heroin, it fetches about \$7000). A kilo of heroin sells in Bishkek for between \$12,000 and \$15,000. This is very pure white heroin from Afghanistan. Although local demand for opium has expanded rapidly in central Asia in recent years, brown or white heroin is too expensive to be used by more than a few nouveaux riches. However, home-made heroin (*khanka*) produced by drug addicts from a dose of opium costing \$3 or \$4 and a dose of acid “given away” by their dealers is winning new converts: 2% of the population of Osh is reportedly affected. A similar percentage of people probably take the drug in other major central Asian cities.

And yet, all over this enormous region, efforts to combat drug use are only just getting off the ground. Only the Kirghiz authorities seem to be fully aware of the problem and to acknowledge that some of their own underpaid staff have been corrupted by it. The coordination of regional antidrug programs is supported by UNDCP in Tashkent and Bishkek. But it is worth asking whether in central Asia, where free trade and liberalization are still revered as ideals, an antidrug campaign on a scale other than one aimed at small-time couriers can be reconciled with the widespread murkiness of business in the former Soviet Union.

AFGHANISTAN

With the Taliban taking control of three-quarters of Afghan territory in August 1998, many democratic countries view this as a triumph of obscurantism, terrorist support, the oppression of women, and human rights violations. For some of Afghanistan’s neighbors – Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Russia, which

has put its troops stationed on the Afghan-Tajik border on alert – the Taliban victory also evokes fear of an increased flow of drugs into their countries.

In November 1997, when the Taliban were already in control of the main opium-producing zones for the previous three years (while poppies were grown in 55 districts in 8 provinces in 1994, 74 districts in 15 provinces were involved in 1998), the new United Nations Drug Control Program (UNDCP) director, Italian criminologist Pino Arlacchi, conducted negotiations with the Taliban in an effort to convince them to progressively stamp out poppy crops in exchange for economic investments. These “informal” accords were criticized, in particular by European Union officials, who believed the agreements may be interpreted as a form of recognition of the Taliban, which is not recognized by the United Nations as the government of Afghanistan. The debate should be settled in the spring of 1999, after the October-November 1998 poppy sowing season, if the rich countries prove willing to provide the UNDCP with the means to offer sizeable economic assistance to farmers.

Opium Production and Peasant Economy

Afghanistan remained in 1997 the world’s largest opium producer, ahead of Burma. The early date available during the May-June harvest do not suggest that this ranking will change in 1998. As traditional consumption of opium is relatively rare in Afghanistan, the majority of the harvest is transformed into heroin, either inside or outside the country. By contrast, in Burma, 500 metric tons of opium are smoked by ethnic minority populations.

According to the UNDCP’s 1997 estimations, 200,000 farmers are growing poppies on approximately 58,000 hectares of land, which will make 2,800 tons of dried opium. Given that only the Ismaili population of Badakhshan province nurtures a tradition of smoking opium, and that a small portion of the drug is also supplied to consumers in Central Asia, it is possible to estimate that the 1997 harvest will provide 200 to 250 tons of heroin.

In June, the UNDCP had not yet made its estimate for the 1998 harvest. But initial estimates from UNDCP officials, and confirmed by observations made by non-governmental organization personnel working in rural areas, the land area sown in poppies in Nangarhar province, one of Afghanistan’s two main poppy growing areas, has increased dramatically compared to 1997. This most likely represents a return to the 1996 situation, after which poppy crops in the region declined by 41% from 1996 to 1997.

In early spring 1998, reports indicated very heavy flooding in Helmand province, Afghanistan’s other large opium production area, allegedly destroying a portion of the poppy crop there. Experienced observers say the reports should be taken with a grain of salt, as they are made every year by authorities in the concerned provinces in an effort to minimize harvest estimations.

Opium production for 1997 grew by 25% over 1996 due to very favorable weather. In fact, the surface area under cultivation remained more or less stable at 58,416 ha. Helmand province witnessed the highest growth rate in both surface area dedicated to poppy cultivation (18% rise over 1996) and production (34.3%). Helmand and Nangarhar supply 75% of Afghanistan’s total opium production. Other large opium-producing provinces are Kandahar, Uruzgan, and Badakhshan. In 1997, poppies also made their appearance in new regions of the country, in Baghlan, Herat, and Balkh provinces. UNDCP has carried out research in some provinces of eastern Afghanistan where poppies were grown for the

first time in 1998⁶⁰. It seems that the “contamination” was essentially due to local farmers who hire themselves out as workers during the opium harvest in traditional opium-producing areas. These farmers, or their neighbors, then tested poppy growing back home on behalf of the whole village. By contrast, it seems that the opium collectors who sometimes give out seeds and make cash advances on future crops have not played a significant part in the spread of opium production to new regions. The farmers view opium-growing as an activity which is not banned by the authorities, and they have never heard of alternative development programs. They say that they are determined to carry on producing opium as long as it remains profitable.

Productivity per hectare varies from 22.8 kilograms in the mountains of Badakhshan to 64 kg in Uruzgan. The average is 48 kg per hectare, an extremely high figure when taken into consideration that productivity in neighboring Pakistan is less than 20 kg per hectare, under 10 kg in numerous regions of Burma and Laos, and 7 kg in Colombia.

Poppy and Heroin Profit

The price paid to opium producers by the middlemen collecting opium on behalf of traffickers are subject to significant fluctuations. During the 1997 harvest, damp opium (which loses around 30% of its weight when dried) was bought for US \$30 per kilogram from growers in Helmand and Kandahar, \$40 in Nangarhar, and \$65 in Badakhshan. The poorest farmers sell their produce two to three months in advance of the harvest, and are paid 20% to 30% less. However those farmers able to wait two or three months after the harvest before selling can expect double the price paid at the time of the harvest. This amounts in fact to about a 20% increase to the farmers, after taking into account the weight loss of the opium over this time. According to a study conducted by a French NGO in a district of Nangarhar province, one hectare of poppies brings farmers from three to six times more money than the same hectare planted in wheat, corn, or rice. Though maybe not making the farmers rich, it at least allows them to live in less poverty.

The total amount of the harvest sold by farmers in all of Afghanistan in 1997 can be estimated at some \$100 million. With the annual Islamic tax, or zakat, collected at a rate of 20% for the opium, the Taliban’s coffers receive around \$20 million each year from opium production alone.

That still represents a small amount compared to the Taliban’s overall needs. The lightning offensive in August 1998 allegedly received massive funding from Saudi Arabia. According to the French daily *Le Monde*, the Taliban reportedly received 400 new pick-up trucks fitted with machine gun mounts and still with license plates registered in the United Arab Emirates. In particular, the Taliban allegedly “bought over” numerous commanders from the enemy camp, which allowed them victory with little bloodshed. Opium money is thus not a critical factor in the Taliban’s war effort. Of course, if they benefit from the transformation of opium into heroin and from the marketing of the drug, the profits reach much higher levels. Various sources converged in late August 1998 that the Taliban government urgently needed funds, which can only increase the temptation to resort to drug money.

⁶⁰ UNDCP: *Afghanistan, Strategic study # 1. An Analysis of the Process of Expansion of Opium Poppy Cultivation to New Districts in Afghanistan*, Preliminary Report, Islamabad, June 1998.

From Theory to Practice

It is interesting to note the position of the Taliban's supreme leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar. Omar rarely grants interviews to foreign journalists, but he spoke recently to Bizhan Torabi, a journalist for *Deutsche Presse Agentur*, and the interview was reprinted in the French magazine *Politique Internationale*: "...in the long term our objective is to completely cleanse Afghanistan [of drug production]. But we cannot ask all those whose living depends entirely on the opium harvest to switch to other crops and find markets for them overnight. At any rate, one thing is certain: we will not allow opium and heroin to be sold in Afghanistan itself. If non-Moslems wish to buy drugs and intoxicate themselves, it is not our job to protect them... Our own objective, I repeat, is to gradually eradicate all drug production from our country in order to protect our young people. As to whether we are collecting taxes on income derived from drugs, I would say that in accordance with the precepts of Islam our administration collects a 20% tax on all revenue, whatever its origin". As can be seen, the Taliban leader does not formally reject that profit is made from the transformation of opium.

What is the situation on the ground? An OGD special envoy to the Nangahar Valley reports that certain commanders collect the zakat tax in kind, which is to say by levying 10% to 20% of the opium harvest. That means they sell it or transform it themselves into morphine-base. Due to the lack of acetic anhydride, southern Afghans are unable to produce heroin, and their morphine-base is transformed into heroin in Turkey. An OGD investigator also confirmed the existence of three heroin laboratories located close to the road in a district of Nangahar province completely controlled by the Taliban, located southeast of Jalalabad, the capital of Nangahar. Young villagers told the investigator that the labs did not work for the Taliban, but that the Taliban did charge a tax on all their production. Moreover, it has been observed that opium and heroin convoys pass unhindered through Taliban check points.

It is impossible to estimate the profits generated by this trade. But, once again, it is more likely that these funds line the pockets of local commanders (some of whom rallied to the Taliban at the last minute), rather than contribute to the improvement of the Taliban's logistics infrastructure. For drugs to become a major factor in the war, heroin production and export must become organized and centralized on a large scale. Now, however, the Taliban do not appear able to control, for example, even the large quantity of narcotics transiting the border into Iran.

In 1997, Iranian authorities seized 2 tons of heroin, 18 tons of morphine, and 162 tons of opium. Moreover, 3343 Afghan nationals are currently being held in Iranian prisons on drug trafficking charges. According to authorities in Tehran, several Taliban members are allegedly among them. This has proven impossible to confirm. However, according to information given to the OGD in July 1998 by an official of a Pakistani antidrug authority, a large quantity of drugs was allegedly sent to Europe in containers, via Central Asia, with the complicity of Taliban civil servants in the Afghan Government. This information was communicated to the Pakistani source by a trafficker arrested in an unrelated case.

In northern Afghanistan, groups belonging to the Northern Alliance began by controlling the transformation of opium. In the chapter on Tajikistan (see above), it is reported that when troops of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hezb e-Islami party were in control of Kunduz, they set up laboratories producing very high quality heroin. When the Taliban captured the city, the labs most likely continued to manufacture the drug for export to Tajikistan. The head of the Russian Federal Border Guard Service, Nikolai Bordyuzha, announced on August 8, 1998 that 700 kg of drugs coming from Afghanistan, including 100 kg of heroin, had been seized since the beginning of the year.

The Stakes of Poppy eradication

In a document adopted on October 23, 1997, the United Nations Narcotics Control Board formulated “a global strategy for the elimination of illegal crops,” targeting coca plants and poppies. In the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly’s Special Session on Drugs, held in early June 1998, “substantial reductions” are mentioned. The UNDCP policy concerning Afghanistan constituted a first step in the establishment of this strategy, as announced by Pino Arlacchi, the UNDCP executive director during his visit to the country in November 1997.

Following negotiations held in early November 1997 in Kabul between Pino Arlacchi, and the ruling Islamic guerrillas, Taliban said they were prepared to eradicate all opium poppy plantations in the country and destroy all heroin laboratories the following year. According to the New York Times, this statement, which went well beyond Taliban’s previous proposal to cut poppy production only in so far as funds for substitution crops became available, seems to have taken Arlacchi by surprise. He said the Taliban position was “too radical” and he had advised them to proceed more gradually, until the United Nations could come up with finance for development projects to give growers alternative sources of income.

An example he gave was the renovation of a textiles factory in Kandahar, which is expected to provide 1200 jobs, some of them “reserved for women”. The UNDCP director added that this agreement was based on an exchange of letters at a meeting in Kandahar, with no formal signature: “as the Taliban regime is not recognized by the United Nations, we cannot sign formal agreements with them”.

Pino Arlacchi’s caution probably stems from information furnished to him by specialists in alternative crops working in Pakistan’s Dir district, where the UNDCP project obtained excellent results. They did not fail to inform him that the success in eradicating crops is closely linked to the growing phase during which the program is applied. While it is possible for local authorities to prevent planting seeds, it is more difficult to plow up fields already sown, as attempted by Governor Haji Qader in Nangahar province in 1994⁶¹. And when the poppies have broken ground and the farmers can see clearly this crop which will allow them to live better all year round, they ferociously resist any attempts to snatch the bread from their mouths. The promises from the Taliban leaders came in November 1997, at the end of the planting season. As a consequence, a significant drop in the crop cannot be expected for the spring of 1998. In fact, the willingness, or ability, of the Taliban to suppress poppy production cannot be judged until 1999.

The first obstacle to overcome will be the resistance of the farmers themselves. The OGD envoy attended a *jirga*, or assembly of tribal elders, in late 1997 bringing together a tribe of Pashtun farmers and a representative of a development NGO. After presenting a long list of impossible-to-meet demands – irrigation ditches, seeds, tractors, etc. – the assembly’s spokesman, who is also the local Taliban spokesman, concluded by saying: “If all of these demands are met, then we will stop growing poppies.” The Taliban are reluctant to alienate the farmers by forcing them to stop growing this lucrative crop. Indeed they are aware that although they belong to the same ethnic group, they cannot oppose the Pashtun tribes, which are still very much united and remain hostile to whatever central power there may be in Kabul.

⁶¹ See GD (1996), pp 155-156.

In addition, policies decreed by the government in Kabul or by provincial governors are not necessarily applied by local leaders, all the more so in that many of these are not diehard Taliban, but rather only recent converts to the cause.

One element which could push the Taliban to eradicate opium in the long term is the drug's consumption by Afghans. While opium use is still very limited, hashish consumption, on the other hand, is very widespread. In the villages of Nangahar, where the OGD envoy lived, youths up to very recently regularly gathered along the river to smoke locally-produced hashish. Now, with pressure from the Taliban, it is increasingly difficult to grow cannabis around inhabited areas, or to consume the drug.

Youths in eastern Afghanistan find it increasingly difficult to go to Pakistan in search of work. Many of them now cross Afghanistan to go to Iran. They return from Iran with the newly-acquired habit of smoking opium, which is found in abundance in Iran. They introduce this practice to other youths in their village. These new phenomena, added to heroin use, which made its appearance in the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan, may push the Taliban to attack drug use at its root, in so much as drug production is no longer destined only for "infidels."

PAKISTAN

Though an unidentifiable portion of "Pakistani" hashish seized by authorities throughout the world is in fact made in Afghanistan, Pakistan is nevertheless the world's second largest producer/exporter of this drug, after Morocco. While it is not a major producer of opium (less than 100 metric tons per year), and while some of the transformation laboratories operating in the tribal areas have crossed over to the other side of the border into Afghanistan, Pakistan nevertheless remains one of world's largest exporters of morphine and heroin in the world. Some 4.2 tons of heroin were seized in 1997, compared to 18 tons in 1995. This phenomenon, which has remained steady for the past 20 years, or since the beginning of the war in Afghanistan, has several causes. The most important is corruption. This affects not only the administration, but also the political arena, reaching very high levels of the government. This probably explains why not a single drug lord was arrested in 1997. Of the 23 persons of whom the United States requested the extradition, only one has been arrested (but not extradited).

The economic sanctions which followed Pakistan's nuclear tests could cost the country US \$1.5 billion. Islamabad already must repay \$1.7 billion in external debt by December 1998, making recourse to drug money more tempting than ever. In addition, narcotics play a critical geostrategic role, particularly in the hands of Pakistan's military intelligence, in relations with neighboring countries, including Afghanistan, India, China, and Iran. Finally, drug trafficking and production also play a geostrategic role Pakistan's domestic affairs, frequently serving to aggravate regional and ethnic conflicts.

Narcotics and Internal Geopolitics

Poppy-growing and heroin-manufacturing zones, inhabited by Pashtun tribes whose land is often cut in two by the international border with Afghanistan, are the hardest hit by the centrifugal forces pushing Pakistan to the brink of implosion in 1998. The growing difficulties of the central government to enforce federal laws and to make the border with Afghanistan a reality are exacerbated by illegal activities and the attempts to suppress them.

These difficulties are rooted in the very origins of the state of Pakistan, which seceded from India in 1947. While the glue holding Pakistan together was Islam, there is no denying that the new nation was nevertheless pieced together from territorial odds and ends: a piece of the Punjab and Sindh east of the Indus River; a third of Baluchistan in the southwest; and a good half of Pashtunistan in the northwest. Pakistani Bengal, located on the other side of India from Western Pakistan, seceded in 1971 to become Bangladesh. And the question of Kashmir is still not resolved, 51 years after the creation of the country. The majority of Pashtuns were against the creation of Pakistan, following the example of their cousins in Afghanistan, who never accepted the partition and have always considered the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) as part of Afghanistan. Afghanistan itself was created in the mid-19th century as a confederation of Pashtun tribes, lead by Pashtuns incapable of ruling in any other fashion, despite the presence of Tajik, Uzbek, and Turkmen populations in the north. The still latent desire for a Pashtun reunification into a Greater Afghanistan has come to the forefront again today. The idea is encouraged by the attraction of Pakistani Pashtuns to the mainly Pashtun Taliban in Afghanistan; by the excessive “Punjabization” of Pakistani politics (the President, Prime Minister, and the majority of the military officer corps are all Punjabis), and by the uncompromising policies pursued by India and Pakistan concerning, among other areas, the Kashmir question.

Pashtuns in the North-West Frontier Province reminded Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif in February 1998, during a landslide victory in elections for the Provincial Assembly in Peshawar, of Sharif’s promise to change the administrative name of the province to a name identifying the province’s inhabitants: Pakhtunkva. The prime minister categorically refused to give in, keenly aware of the hegemonic designs of Afghanistan’s own Pashtun community. Deputies of the Pashtun party, the Awami National Party (ANP), supported by a large portion of the well-armed population of the NWFP’s tribal zones, suddenly withdrew from the governing coalition on both federal and provincial levels. It is against this background that the poppy eradication campaigns were carried out, in typically military style, only adding fuel to the fire of discontent.

Dir District produces nearly 40% of the Pakistan’s opium. A UNDCP-financed alternative development project was put in place beginning in 1984. It managed to secure a very progressive reduction in poppy crops. A more drastic drop was noted in spring 1997 when the land area dedicated to poppy crops was reduced by 34.71%. According to agreements made with the government, poppies were to be wiped out completely from Dir District in 1998. UNDCP representatives noted in March that the surface area sown in poppies increased from 335 hectares to 500 ha. Authorities implemented an eradication campaign, but the announced results do not correspond to observations made by UNDCP employees on the ground. The UNDCP subsequently threatened to suspend financing if more effective steps were not taken.

In Nihag Valley, the main production zone, the government launched a veritable military operation from April 20 to May 6. Some 3000 soldiers of the Frontier Corps, five armored troop carriers, and two 135 mm cannons were deployed for the operation. A 300-man militia (Levi) and 400 soldiers responsible for pulling up poppies by hand were also mobilized. All the members of the elders’ assembly (*jirga*) from the Sultan Khel and Pinda Khel tribes were arrested after negotiations with government representatives over voluntary eradication fell through in April. As a result of the operation, 35% of poppy crops in the valley were destroyed. But 40 opium-producing villages were untouched. The general in charge of the operation declared that it was not possible to do more and still respect the government’s orders that no blood should be shed (in December 1985, a similar operation resulted in 30 deaths). Despite the fact that political parties, even the Islamist party, eventually declared their support for the operation, resentment

is of course still strong in the region. Tribal leaders announced: “Before worrying about our crops, why doesn’t the government hand over royalties from the deforestation of our lands.” The argument that the fight against illegal crops allows the government to gain control over formerly autonomous zones is in fact a double-edged sword.

A border incident in March 1998 demonstrates how the Taliban could benefit from Pashtun tribal discontent in Pakistan. A truck loaded with smuggled computers and driven by Taliban members from Jalalabad to Peshawar was stopped by Pakistani Customs at the Torkham border post near the Khyber Pass. The Taliban refused to allow the Pakistanis to search the vehicle, arguing that they were driving through their own, Pashtun, country. The Border Police soon arrived, and exchanged gun fire with the Taliban. A Pakistani army detachment followed with reinforcements. After a two-hour pitched battle, a truce was called while the two sides awaited the arrival of Pakistan’s NWFP governor and a Taliban leader. In the end a *jirga* of both Afghan and Pakistani elders from the tribe living on both sides of the border resolved the conflict. The truck continued on its way, while the governor expressed his regret that the Taliban are “ignorant” of Pakistani laws. The fact remains that a *jirga*, a Pashtun tribal institution for resolving problems, prevailed over the army, a state instrument responsible for enforcing the country’s borders. This story shows how the Pakistani military and government, which support the Taliban in order to guarantee Pakistan’s access to Central Asia, are playing with fire.

Narcotics in Support of Asian Jihad

The government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the high federal administration, and the provincial administrations include numerous members from the Khattak, Saifullah, Afridi, and Arbab Pashtun tribes, and who are known to be deeply involved in the production, transformation, and trafficking of narcotics. In the Punjab, a center for arms and drug trafficking to India, many key administrative posts are obtained only by the recommendation of the Prime Minister’s brother-in-law, Zia Bakh Butt, who is on the United States DEA’s black list. One of Zia’s partners is Seth Ibrahim Dawood, an Indian Muslim mafia leader and mastermind behind the 1993 bombings in Bombay, India. In an effort to divert attention away from the involvement of its supporters in drug trafficking, the Nawaz Sharif government allegedly tried to implicate Senator Asif Zardari, the husband of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, in a case involving several tons of hashish in Baluchistan province. While Zardari may be accused of many other crimes, Western antidrug officials themselves informed Pakistani authorities that Zardari was not involved in the Baluchistan case.

The various intelligence services, in particular the army’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), continue to use drug money to finance the work of about ten fundamentalist organizations operating in Kashmir, such as Al Umma Harakat ul Ansar and Jihad ul Kashmiri, as well as groups in Tajikistan and even Chechnya. Drug money helps support groups such as the National Movement of Uighur Moslems and the Xinjiang Moslem Liberation Front, 2000 of whose members fled to Pakistan’s Gilgit region in March following riots in the autonomous Chinese region of Xinjiang. The refugees later moved to Afghanistan, where they were looked after by Saudi billionaire Ussama Ben Ladden, who is regarded as the world’s biggest financier of fundamentalist movements.

The ISI also allegedly uses ill-gotten funds to support fundamentalist movements. They include Lashkare Tayyeba (Soldiers of the Only God) and Harakat ul Ansar (Hospitality Movement). They have a powerful network in Europe through the Hij az University in Manchester, which is supported by Yussuf al Islam, the singer-songwriter known in the 1970s as Cat Stevens.

Influential Pakistani community leaders in Britain say that during the autumn of 1996, a Taliban leader went to Brussels several times to meet European representatives of Harakat ul Ansar, Idara Mihanjul Quram (Organization for the Respect of the Koran), led by Tahirul Qadri, and the Jammaat e Islami, one of the most active fundamentalist parties in Pakistan led by Kazi Hussein Ahmad. These movements all enjoy financial support from Pakistani arms dealers living in Belgium, especially those belonging to the Khattak family from Pakistan's North Western Frontier Province, which is very influential in the higher echelons of the army and in the foreign and interior ministries.

In early 1990, tax officials in Karachi, Pakistan told the OGD correspondent that they estimate the number of Pakistani Air Force officers directly implicated in drug and arms trafficking at 140. It is difficult to distinguish those who are ordered to take part in these activities from those working on their own behalf, or those working on their own behalf but using contacts they have made through their work. Air Force Major Farooq Ahmed was arrested in New York on April 9, 1997 while trying to sell two kilograms of heroin. The drug was brought into the country on a transport plane coming to pick up spare parts for American-built F-16 fighters. A Pakistani court convicted the US DEA's Pakistani collaborator who brought about Farooq Ahmed's arrest. Shortly afterwards, another air force officer was arrested in Karachi when it was discovered that the same drug ring was smuggling electronic equipment on Air Force flights abroad. On April 16 a retired ISI officer Major Munawar Shah was arrested with 2 kg of heroin that he was planning to smuggle to London. He was also in possession of uranium.

ISI Underhandedness

The competition between the military secret services and their civilian counterparts in the interior ministry that became apparent over support for the Taliban in Afghanistan under Benazir Bhutto is still in the news under Nawaz Sharif. Military intelligence claimed in late December 1997 to have arrested four Iranians who had murdered four American engineers in Karachi on November 12. The civilian secret service retorted that the four members of the Nabi Islam and Buledi groups, Sunni sects which are violently opposed to the Shia clergy in Tehran, were actually drug and arms traffickers operating all along the Makran coast in southern Baluchistan under the protection of Pakistani coastguards and, indirectly, working for the defense ministry.

The interior ministry's Federal Investigation Agency, Crime Investigation Agency and Joint Task Force of Investigation added that it was their inquiries that had led to the arrests and to the seizure of hundreds of kilograms of heroin, a ton of hashish (which has apparently gone "missing" since) and a ton of opium, as well as electronic rocket launchers and ammunition. Inter Services Intelligence, Military Intelligence and the Anti-Narcotics Task Force did not take up the information collected by their civilian counterparts (which showed that the Iranians were merely drug traffickers) in order to blackmail the Iranian government by describing the four men as state-hired terrorists.

The blackmail was an oblique way of answering Tehran's allegation that the Pakistani government "lacked political determination in the fight against drugs". The Pakistani military authorities are particularly sensitive to this type of criticism because one of their intelligence and intervention services, ISI, uses income from heroin and hashish trafficking to finance its "secret" operations, especially in India. The official Pakistani version of events was also liable to appeal to the American authorities, but it was not borne out by the facts. It is unlikely that Iran was involved in the case because it was an Iranian intelligence service, the Mukhbrat Khariji, close to the moderate majority in parliament, which told Pakistani military intelligence in Baluchistan in July 1997 that three traffickers had escaped from Tehran

jails with the help of a policeman. The sect to which the traffickers belonged, which is Sunni and opposed to the central government, controls some weapons and drugs trafficking in the Mand and Dalbandeen regions near the border with Iran. These illegal activities are conducted alongside a campaign against the Shia government in Tehran.

But the “intelligence war” is not only raging between civilians agencies and the military. Even within the ISI itself, a “moderate” element is in competition with a “fundamentalist” wing. The moderates were responsible for leaks, during Pakistan’s recent nuclear tests, that the country’s nuclear research program was financed by drug money.

That is also the long-standing conviction of certain Western intelligence services, though no formal proof has been found. Pakistani intelligence officials opposed to the tests allegedly were convinced of this while “listening to” Pakistan President Chaudry Rafiq Tarrar and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif congratulate Seth Hajji Amin Ashraf and his brother, Seth Abid, during a telephone conversation. These two financiers are responsible for the presidential family’s “secret” financial networks, in particular laundering networks operating in the United Arab Emirates, Great Britain, Singapore, and Hong Kong.

NEPAL

Nepal has turned into a hub for all kinds of illicit activity during the last 15 years. This is due to the country’s geographic position between Southwest and Southeast Asia, endemic corruption and the authorities’ failure to control its borders efficiently. Traffickers are taking advantage of increasing poverty in rural areas to encourage the growing of cannabis crops, which are increasing steadily throughout the country. They use export networks for legal products to send large quantities of hashish to consumer markets in the West. But European traffickers, in particular Dutch and Germans, have settled in Nepal and are also operating on their own behalf.

Asian mafia heads have felt so secure in Nepal for the past two to three years that they meet several times each year in the country, from where they take care of their worldwide business dealings. Nepal is also a rearmbase for several insurrectionist movements, from various Islamist groups to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), as well as a haven for intelligence agents from different countries in the region. None of these elements hesitates to use narcotics transiting Nepal as a means to finance their activities.

Hashish: The Farmer’s Salary

The basis of Nepal’s drug economy is the export of hashish, which indicates the abundant presence of cannabis crops in the country. A law passed in 1976 banned the production, possession and sale of cannabis and its derivatives, whatever the quantity involved, thus putting an end to Kathmandu’s reputation as a Mecca for hippies. The United States government gave its Nepalese counterpart financial assistance to help compensate small farmers who were forced to stop growing cannabis or to enable them to make a start with alternative crops. The shortage of funds allocated, embezzlement of the little money available and the authorities’ scant interest in enforcement have meant that after years of efforts to replace cannabis by cash crops that provide a similar income, farmers are now returning to growing the drug in several parts of the country. Whereas the amount of corn and millet they can produce is hardly enough to feed a family for six months, cannabis grows wild on the mountainsides and can be picked and sold without difficulty, even by poor people with no land of their own.

In Makwanpur district, a very poor part of central Nepal, members of the two main ethnic minorities, the Chepang and the Tamang, told the OGD correspondent most enthusiastically how traffickers from local towns and from India had taught them to grow, prepare and store cannabis. Illegal cultivation has also become established around the villages of Sarikhel, Kalikatar, Martar, Khairang and Raksirang. The growers, who claim they had never heard of cannabis until five years ago, are earning up to 2500 rupees a kilogram (which can be exchanged for US \$50 on the black market) by selling their production (between 5 kg and 10 kg per family) on the Indian market. Cannabis cultivation has also begun to affect the development committees set up by the government in neighboring villages. The local people are finding it an alternative to being neglected by the state.

The drug is exported via about 15 footpaths cut through the forest to India. Some farmers, who do not want to take the risk of growing cannabis themselves, allow tenants to farm their land, while others hoping to make a fortune rent out their plots to neighbors. The few policemen who get as far as these remote areas do not receive any help from the local people, who simply refuse to say who owns the crops, so the officers have to make do with symbolically destroying a few plants. The government does not seem very concerned to give them more resources. Influential people in the region eventually set up Cannabis Protection Committees which are financed by monthly payments of 500 rupees from each grower. The money is used to start development projects which merely act as a screen for the growers' illegal activities.

Hashish Export Networks

Traffickers thus have an inexhaustible source of raw material. Once packaged, the hashish can take any number of highly diverse routes. For example, the Nepalese town of Birgunj, lying on the other side of the border from Raxaul, India, has been specializing in exporting hashish to Europe and the United States. According to Helmant Malla, the deputy director of the Narcotic Drugs Control Law Enforcement Unit (NDCLEU), the traffickers ship drugs in exports of artefacts. Hashish is concealed in the base of Chinese statues manufactured locally, or in Tibetan carpets. In March 1997, the Tokyo authorities found 40 kg inside a statue of Buddha.

Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport is also an exit point for numerous drug shipments: on July 1st, 203 kg were confiscated in wooden sculptures bound for Denmark; on September 21, 300 kg in artefacts en route to the Netherlands. Two days later the police searched premises manufacturing hashish capsules of 5 to 10 grams which were then concealed inside artefacts ready for export. A month later, two Nepalese nationals were arrested at the airport in possession of 80 statues representing the "laughing Buddha", the "meditating Buddha", Confucius and the goddess Tara. After they tried and failed to open up the statues, customs drilled a hole in them and the strong smell that came out left no doubt that they contained hashish. In the workshop where they were manufactured, the police discovered that the artefacts had received a coating of a product that made the hashish inside undetectable to both X-rays and sniffer dogs. The drug-stuffed statues were going to be shipped to Hong Kong, Malaysia, Japan, Singapore, Indonesia, Europe and the United States. One of the craftsmen involved had received two years' "training" in a village near Chiang Mai in northern Thailand, which makes it probable that the gang was well organized. The police are also convinced that some of the gold smuggled into Nepal serves to bankroll hashish operations.

In early 1998, police seized 300 kg of hashish among a batch of wood crafts destined for export to the Netherlands via Frankfurt airport. A few months later, another seizure took place in the airport's freight area among a shipment belonging to a Dutch national married to a Nepalese woman. The Nepalese

authorities were tipped off by German police following the confiscation of 250 kg of hashish at Frankfurt airport. The operation resulted in the arrest of 11 Nepalese accomplices in the network, including airport employees, Customs officials, police officers, porters, and drivers. Observers believe that these are only the small fry, and that much higher ranking airport officials are also involved in the trafficking. It appears that the management at Kathmandu's *Everest Hotel* was also linked to the network. Nepal's antidrug institution, the NDCLEU, fears the case could be swept under the carpet because members of the Dutch-Nepalese gang have offered the investigating magistrate \$900,000 for the couple's release. Also in early 1998, some 576 kg of hashish were seized in Toronto, Canada. The seizure resulted in still more arrests of Customs agents at Kathmandu's airport.

Police officials are not discouraged, despite the rampant corruption. On June 12 they arrested four German citizens who were found hiding 250 kg of hashish in a minibus specially fitted for the purpose. A Nepalese accomplice confessed that she had been involved in smuggling for the past 20 years, and that on one occasion she had succeeded in bringing 400 kg of hashish into Germany via Iran. The confiscation of another minibus showed police that the German networks were operating from the tourist site at Deurali, 35 kilometers west of Kathmandu. The Germans rented villas there with underground garages.

The Bridge over the River Mechi

Though police controls are becoming more thorough in Kathmandu, the rest of the country offers a wide array of possibilities for all kinds of smuggling. This is supported by the results of an investigation undertaken by an OGD correspondent in Kakarbhitta, a small town located in the far east of Nepal, 578 km east of Kathmandu, Nepal's capital. Because of its links with Darjeeling district in western Bengal, India, Kakarbhitta is a transit point for a pipeline of foreign currency, arms, explosives, precious and strategic metals like uranium, and drugs such as Burmese heroin, Mandrax and LSD flowing into Nepal. In the opposite direction, gold, rhino horns, tiger bones, significant amounts of hashish and precursor chemicals bound for heroin laboratories are exported to India.

The bridge linking Kakarbhitta to the Indian town of Panitanki affords a good view of a long line of porters carrying contraband goods across the ford on the river Mechi about 100 yards away. Every porter makes a halt in front of a tent and pays a five-rupee "protection" fee to local gangsters. The scene takes place in broad daylight and in full view of Indian and Nepalese police and customs officers.

Once delivered to some of the 200 hotels and tea-rooms operating in Kakarbhitta, the drugs leave town on the numerous buses connecting it to the rest of Nepal. Usually, the porters get 1% of the price of the goods they smuggle. About 5000 rupees will ensure safe passage across the border for an illegal immigrant carrying false papers obtained from a corrupt official. The trafficking is made easier because of the 8000-odd "tourists" crossing the border at Kakarbhitta in both directions each year. These include Iranians, Taiwanese, Kenyans, Nigerians, Bhutanese and even Argentineans. An Iranian national, who was arrested recently on drug trafficking charges in India, had crossed the border at Kakarbhitta on several occasions.

The Nepalese police try to justify their apparently benevolent approach to cross-border smuggling, claiming that when they seize goods and arrest people, local politicians have the offenders released in no time. And indeed the region's nouveaux riches have the means to buy such favors. For instance, a sandal vendor turned big businessman, who opened offices in Bangkok, Dubai and Germany, is involved in

several trafficking activities: foreign currency, gold, precursor chemicals and narcotics. Although he was caught in the act twice he was never prosecuted.

In the villages close to Itabhata, near Dhulabari, Indian traffickers have rented houses with help from their Nepalese partners and use them to store heroin. The pipeline works as follows: “They take a train in Dimmapur in Nagaland state, to Moreh, Manipur state, India. Moreh is on the border with Burma and it plays a part similar to Kakarbhitta’s with regards to India... but out there, the river is wider”. “Night and day”, he continued, “porters ferry goods and heroin. Then the heroin can easily be smuggled into Nepal”. Furthermore, it seems that some of the movements fighting for autonomy from India, especially those of the northeast like Nagaland, Assam, and Darjeeling, are involved in the drug trade.

Indian and Pakistani Intelligence Services at War

Reports by the Nepalese intelligence service have also accused Pakistan of using parts of Nepal to transport heroin to Europe. The same sources claim that proceeds from the drug go to finance Moslem fundamentalist groups. Apparently a recent meeting about heroin between ministers of the South Asia Association (SAAR), to which Nepal belongs, and those of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), to which Pakistan belongs, did not help to solve this difference of opinion.

Afghan-Pakistani networks of a Wahabite Sunni persuasion have been working in Nepal since 1983, when the Pakistani army’s intelligence department, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), decided to make the country the centre of their efforts to destabilize India by providing assistance to minorities fighting for independence and terrorist groups. Not only did the Nepalese authorities give them a free hand, their own secret service even cooperated with the movement to “bleed India to submission by a collective force of small nations of the Indian subcontinent”, according to a Nepalese high official. With Pakistan as the driving force, this informal group brought together Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, and received support from China and the United States. With the end of the Cold War, Nepal once again attempted to maintain a balance in its relations with China and India, and began to fear the repercussions of allowing terrorism and drug trafficking to develop on its territory and the problems this could cause in relations with its powerful neighbors.

One scandal in 1997 would appear to confirm the Nepalese authorities’ fears. On August 22, 1997, the NDCLEU stopped two Afghans carrying Pakistani passports who were trying to sell four coats with 870 grams of heroin hidden in the lining. They were asking \$25,000 for each of the coats. One of the men, Abdul Khaliq Azami, had made three trips to Nepal between March and May 1997. According to the Nepalese police, he was arrested in the United States in 1996 in possession of a kilogram of heroin before being mysteriously released.

Pakistan’s ISI, and India’s Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), are waging a merciless war against each other in Nepal. The OGD correspondent in Karachi was told by the Pakistan Excise and Taxation Department that the ISI had reactivated Ibrahim Dawood’s ethnic-Gujar networks after Nawaz Sharif returned to his post as prime minister. Dawood is head of the Indian Moslem mafia and is accused of being behind bomb attacks in Bombay in March 1993. He has now taken refuge in Dubai. One spin-off of the drug trafficking is money-laundering, in particular with a view to buying weapons.

India’s RAW responded by employing the services of another influential baron, Rajendra Sadashiva Nikhalja, alias Chotta Rajan. Rajan operates out of Malaysia, but has a subsidiary in Nepal. Formerly very close to Dawood, Rajan won the good graces of the Indian government by supplying it with

information implicating the head of the Muslim mafia in the terrorist attacks in Bombay in 1993. His network's objective is to eliminate Dawood's network in Nepal.

Chotta Rajan's first victim was a Nepalese member of Parliament and a minister on several occasions over the past years, Mirja Dislad Beg. He was assassinated on June 28, 1998 in the town of Krishnanagar, located not far from the Indian border. Dislad Beg was indicted on criminal charges by several Indian Courts, which tried in vain to secure his extradition. Indian newspapers accused him among other things of being a pawn of Pakistan's military intelligence, and of helping them establish the Dawood network in Nepal in order to furnish arms to Muslim rebels in Kashmir. In an interview published in India's India Today magazine on July 14, Chotta Rajan claimed responsibility for the crime, perhaps to divert suspicions from the Pakistanis who could be directly involved.

It is all the more difficult to find the truth behind these mafia wars in that successive Nepalese governments are themselves swimming in corruption. For example, it is known that a Minister of Finance handed over responsibility for Customs administration at the Kathmandu airport to a well-known drug and gold trafficker, in exchange for daily payments of several tens of thousands of dollars. Police tell the OGD correspondent that this move has allowed the trafficker to set up his import-export business in all types of merchandise, and without the slightest hindrance.

INDIA-SRI LANKA

The states of southern India, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, plus the territory of Pondicherry, have in the past few years become one of the main centers of drug trafficking in the country. However, in this part of India, it is Tamil Nadu, populated, as in northeast Sri Lanka, by a Tamil majority, that appears to be most vulnerable because of its closeness to this island, of which the capital, Colombo, is only six hours away by boat. Around the port of Tuticorin (300,000 inhabitants), the capital of Tamil Nadu located 600 kilometers from Chennai at the tip of the subcontinent, the Indian authorities have pinpointed 25 spots where smugglers are likely to moor. Sri Lanka, given its unstable situation, is increasingly used as a transit territory for narcotics, in particular coming from Southwest Asia. Sri Lankan authorities constantly announce the involvement of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the drug trade. But the deteriorating situation with the civil war in 1997-1998 means the authorities have placed the fight against drug trafficking on the back burner. This is exacerbated by the fact that the country's anti-narcotics budget (including prevention campaigns) comes under the responsibility of the Ministry of Defense.

Links with India's Tamil Nadu

In October of that year, customs seized 10 kilograms of heroin. A month later, 1463 kg of Mandrax brought through Gujarat were intercepted. In 1995 and 1996, 37 seizures were made, the biggest, in February 1996, involving 3.6 metric tons of hashish. For the drug squad, there is no doubt that local criminal organizations have established ties with Pakistani and Indian traffickers. Meanwhile the Indian police have pointed out that traffickers have tended to neglect Bombay, a hub for drugs arriving from Pakistan, since a wave of attacks in 1993 led to police checks being stepped up. Nowadays the drugs continue to arrive in the isolated creeks of the coast of Maharashtra and Gujarat, but a large proportion of the loads are brought in from the south, by road, to big cities like Chennai and Bangalore. From there,

other transporters take them to Mangalore, Trivandrum, Tuticorin and in particular to small towns on the south coast where there is less police surveillance.

Fishing boats take the drugs out to big ships offshore, which then set sail for war-torn Sri Lanka where couriers are waiting to go on to Australia, Europe, Africa and the United States. The role of drugs center recently assumed by the port of Tuticorin is not due solely to its proximity to Sri Lanka: other factors may also help to explain the phenomenon. Between 2000 and 3000 trucks loaded with containers arrive every day from different parts of India, and dozens of ships anchor there. Moreover, 250 fishing boats working in the Gulf of Mannar and 50 cargo vessels plying back and forth between Tuticorin and Sri Lanka carrying building materials serve as a cover for the traffickers. Coral reefs make it difficult for the coast-guards, two speedboats to patrol the area, which includes about 100 uninhabited islets, and shallows prevent navy ships on patrol since the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 from going further than Nagapattinam, a small town in the Bay of Bengal.

In 1996, Indian narcotics police made a large number of drug seizures in various Tamil Nadu cities such as Madurai. The drugs were found in the homes of militants and Tamil Tigers sympathizers. The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) confiscated “ \$71 million-worth of heroin” in November from the home of a Tuticorin Raja. The heroin was destined for shipment to Sri Lanka. On the other hand, they had arrested only 37 Sri Lankans between 1987 and the first quarter of 1997. Of the 11 Sri Lankan traffickers caught by Tuticorin customs in 1996, only two were Tamils (the others were Sinhalese from the Colombo region in the south, whereas the LTTE is based in the north).

But the Indian authorities have not ruled out the possibility that the Tigers may be involved. The traffickers probably picked Colombo because of strict surveillance of the largely Tamil Jaffna region by the Sri Lankan navy. The Indians also believe that the LTTE may have reached an agreement with Sinhalese trafficking organizations to the effect that they only handle drug imports. It is worth pointing out in this respect that the drug routes between southern India and Sri Lanka are the same as those used to supply weapons and fuel to the Tigers.

Is the LTTE Involved in Sri Lankan Trafficking?

In Sri Lanka, 23,000 people were sentenced for handling various substances. But the number of seizures decreased in 1997 (61.8 tons for all narcotics combined) compared to 1996 (96.4 tons) due to the authorities’ concentration on the fight against the LTTE. Usually they are small-scale couriers from Sri Lanka, India (many are from Tamil Nadu state), Pakistan and Nepal who bring hashish or heroin into the country. Indeed, in December 1996, the police, discovered 18 kg of “brown sugar” heroin and arrested five people, including a Pakistani, at Katurneriya, near Negombo, a fishing port in the Colombo region. Early in 1997, 37.5 kg of the drug were seized in two separate operations. Some of the drugs are intended for a market of an estimated 100,000 consumers which is expanding fast, especially where heroin is concerned.

Both Sri Lankan and Indian authorities suspect the LTTE of taking part in the trafficking, although no formal proof has been presented to date. Even though Tamil militia were selling heroin in Europe, especially France, in the 1980s to finance a movement that now has some 10,000 men, we have only a few indications as to whether the LTTE is involved in trafficking on a large scale. Its considerable resources may come from the large contributions made voluntarily or otherwise – by the diaspora in countries such as Switzerland, Britain and Canada, as well as from other trafficking carried out in Asia with the movement’s fleet of five or six small cargo ships flying flags of convenience.

Although several militants are currently serving prison sentences in a number of countries, including France and Germany, the quantity of heroin seized from their networks is seldom more than 500 grams. The latest scandals involving heroin trafficking, forged identity documents and contraband include: two LTTE militants were arrested in Kathmandu in 1996 with forged German papers and 500 grams of brown sugar; six others were arrested in possession of 25 passports from different countries, along with rubber stamps and other tools for making them. Several others were expelled from Nepal in 1997 and 1998.

The organization has probably decided to deal in heroin on a retail basis, for ideological as well as security reasons. Of course this involves a larger number of people, but it also spreads out the profits and protects the organization as a whole from being accused of large-scale trafficking. Nonetheless, the LTTE was physically close to sources of the drug in Burma, because until 1995 the country's military rulers – who are themselves involved in heroin trafficking – allowed the LTTE to open a training base there. In 1995 the LTTE got involved in inter-ethnic fighting in the state of Manipur, north-east India, a major hub of Burmese heroin trafficking. Seven Tamil traders, allies of the rebel Naga guerrillas, were killed in the town of Moreh by members of the Kuki, another ethnic group, during a row over payment for a heroin shipment. The victims' families called on the LTTE, who reportedly gave them weapons in exchange for help with the trafficking.

Further evidence has come to light recently. On January 10, 1997, the Sri Lanka Police Narcotics Bureau arrested a Tamil, Sivadas Nandakumar (known as Casey) and a Pakistani. The arrest was connected with another in Australia in May 1996 of a Sri Lankan and a Frenchman found in possession of 273 grams of heroin and 500 grams of hashish. Sivadas Nandakumar had already been arrested in Australia for drug trafficking, and deported from the United States for using a forged passport. The Sri Lankan police are now trying to establish whether this network has ties with the LTTE.

Sea Transit of Hashish

But alongside this hive of minor activity, large-scale sea trafficking in cannabis derivatives is flourishing, made easier by the Coast Guard and Navy deployed only on the northeast coast in order to interdict LTTE supplies. Seizures on the sea are therefore extremely rare. Nevertheless, in 1997, 7 tons of marijuana were discovered in Cambodia, on a ship about to set sail for Sri Lanka.

Another major scandal came to a head in March 1998. Information given by the Sri Lanka Police Narcotics Bureau (PNB) to the Netherlands' National Crime Squad led to the arrest of three Dutchmen involved in big hashish importing operations. Documents found at their homes enabled police to confirm that they were behind the operation that came to light when just over ten tons of hashish were seized by Chilaw police off the west coast of Sri Lanka on December 23, 1996. The drug was found on a fishing trawler, hidden in bundles of fabric. Each packet was labeled "Freedom for Afghanistan". The origin of the hashish was confirmed a few weeks later when a similarly labeled load was found in Karachi by Pakistani police. In the Sri Lankan case, the hashish had been transferred from a freighter to a trawler 200 miles south of the coastal town of Hambantota. The four Sri Lankan sailors arrested told police that a Pakistani skipper had piloted them to the freighter, then went ashore on the island of Beruwela. All four were Moslems, which led the police to think there might be a fundamentalist connection, although there has been no confirmation of this. They added that only some of the hashish on board the freighter had been transferred to their boat.

The information supplied by the four men led to the arrest of the head of a Colombo import-export company, also a Moslem. The three Dutchmen arrested in the Netherlands had come to meet him several times and had financed the purchase of the trawler and of a warehouse in Peliyagoda, in the Colombo suburbs, where the drug was stored while waiting to be taken to the Netherlands. The method used was as follows: clay imported from the Netherlands was used in Sri Lanka to make pottery items in which the hashish was concealed. The goods were then re-exported. Several consignments had already reached the Netherlands in this way without it being possible to establish that they contained drugs.