

States, was that the new government would become a terrorist government; that Afghanistan would be a platform for expanding terrorism all over the world. Exactly the opposite occurred! You did an intelligent action against ISIS, and this is recognized also outside of Afghanistan.

So if you put together this big success that you wrought against terrorism, and against narcotics, you can present the new Afghanistan to the world, in a very positive way. I am sure that there will be enough countries that will appreciate that very much, and a process of recognition will take place. You must be recognized. Not only because you are the legitimate government of Afghanistan, but because you are acting very positively and favorably for the international community.

I conclude by saying that if you want to take this route, you can be very successful and you will consolidate all of the goals of your country now. Thank you so much. Thank you. [Applause]

Following is the full text of Prof. Arlacchi's presentation, prepared in advance, for the Conference, "Operation Ibn Sina: Toward an Economic Miracle in Afghanistan," in Kabul, Nov. 6–8, 2023. It has been edited by EIR. An embedded link has been added.

Some Ideas About Elimination of Opium Poppy Production in Afghanistan

by Professor Pino Arlacchi

After the United States escape from Kabul, which occurred just over two years ago, in August 2021, on the heels of the withdrawal from Syria and Iraq, the world expected the Taliban to turn Afghanistan into the world hub of terrorism and illicit trafficking of all kinds, flooding neighboring countries and Western Europe with opiates, amphetamines, and with stranded warriors seeking new battlefields.

Well, precisely the opposite has happened. The Taliban embarked on a campaign to destroy ISIS and related groups, so effective that it has baffled Americans.

The *New York Times* (3/25/2023) noted that the Taliban had identified and eliminated, among other

things, the ISIS cell responsible for the August 2021 attack on the Kabul airport, which occurred during the chaotic U.S. troop evacuation that had cost the lives of 13 U.S. servicemen, plus the lives of dozens of Afghan collaborators of the occupation forces, who were also on the run.

The same newspaper published (Dec. 18, 2021) a series of secret documents in which the Pentagon unintentionally brings out one of the reasons for the deep anti-American odium that has accumulated in the Afghan population during 20 years of invasion: the massacre of thousands of unarmed civilians by drones programmed to bomb any kind of assemblage, and in particular festivals, markets, weddings, and even funerals.

The air war in Afghanistan, described by President Barack Obama as a masterpiece of precision aimed at sparing innocent lives, was actually a carnage that ended only with ignominious defeat.

The Pax Taliban reduced terrorist domestic attacks by 75%—thus reducing the risk of terrorism for the West. This is good news for all of us, but it is carefully ignored by Western media.

Those media are also engaged in hiding or downplaying a parallel, even more sensational development that has taken place in Afghanistan: The new government in Kabul re-enacted, shortly after taking office, the ban on opium production and enforced it this year with minimal use of force. The result is an 80% collapse of drugs destined to supply the Western European market.

You read that right. It was European satellites that detected this past June that the “infamous” Taliban, instead of cartelizing the production of a substance that destroys the health of a million European consumers, and appropriating the profits from a skyrocketing opium price, banned it. The ban is based on the *Quran*'s directive prohibiting intoxicants. And it follows on a UN strategy dating back to the late 1990s that had already encouraged them, in 2001, to zero out poppy cultivation for the first time.

When the U.S. Army entered Kabul in October 2001, no opium poppies were being grown in Afghanistan. It would not have been particularly difficult for an occupying force with extensive resources to sustain the opium-free situation in the following years by implementing local development projects militarily protected against attacks by traffickers and warlords. But, we know that the George W. Bush Administration deliber-

ately decided not to do so, preferring to cooperate with the warlords with a view to combating terrorism, in exchange for renouncing any attempt to repeat the opium-free situation that existed in 2001.

The opium problem was not a priority for the military intervention in Afghanistan during all the U.S. occupation of the country. The “hidden pact” between the occupying authorities and the opium community was described as follows, in soft but clear diplomatic terminology, on page 1 of an Aug. 12, 2009 [report](#) by the Congressional Research Service, titled “Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy”:

Coalition forces pursuing regional security and counter-terrorism objectives may rely on the cooperation of security commanders, tribal leaders, and local officials who may be involved in the narcotics trade.

The *de facto* impunity enjoyed by growers and major traffickers triggered the resumption of large-scale illicit opium growing, which returned to pre-2001 levels in the space of two years and saw the appearance for the first time in Afghanistan of a trafficking cartel made up of six or seven leading warlords.

This cartel was able to generate a rise of farm-gate opium prices from USD 30 per kilogram in 1999–2000 to USD 400–500 per kilogram in 2004–2005. As a result, the number of people involved in the opium businesses rapidly grew to 3.5 million, with the share of Afghan GDP accounted for by drugs rising to 40–50%.

Farm-gate opium prices subsequently fell as a result of excess production, but this huge illicit sector had become an established part of the Afghan economy. The foolish decision to make a pact with the devil created fertile ground for instability, terrorism and insurgency in southern Afghanistan.

This situation now is over.

Proposal

Any plan to get rid of illicit opium growing must focus on growers’ livelihoods. The only strategy that has been successful wherever it has been employed



FAO/Farshad Usyan

An Afghan farmer in a wheat field in Nangarhar province at harvest time in 2021.

on a sufficient scale with the proper consistency and political will involves the development of alternatives to opium cultivation. No large-scale attempts have been made so far to implement this strategy in Afghanistan. Even though this may appear strange in a country that is the world’s leading opium producer, after 2001 no one has ever drawn up a *multi-annual national plan, with a dedicated budget and specific deadlines and benchmarks, for the elimination of the illicit crops.*

Between 2001 and 2009, the United States and the international community spent USD 1.61 billion on counter-narcotics measures without having any significant impact on production and trafficking. Afghanistan remains the source of over 90% of the world’s illicit opium. This expenditure has not produced results because no efforts have been made to phase out opium growing through alternative development.

A five-year plan to eliminate opium production, involving *the creation of a dedicated office with an appropriate budget and staff,* needs to be drawn up. The office should be put under the direct responsibility of the Afghan President; it should employ Afghan staff; it should be given technical assistance by donor countries; and should be headed up by a figure who has the trust of both the President and the international community.

On the basis of the successful attempts to phase out opium cultivation in Pakistan, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and other countries, the amount required to put an end to illicit production in Afghanistan through sustainable alternative production options may be put at €100 million per year.