



Research Paper

## International Drug Trafficking and Globalization

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*“With transnational threats, States have no choice but to work together. We are all affected – whether as countries of supply, trafficking or demand. Therefore, we have a shared responsibility to act.”*

-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon

The world drug problem had been exacerbated by the recent changes in the world economic system. Globalization, the liberalization of international markets and the suppression of borders, has allowed the drug trade to flourish. Globalization has transformed the world economy over the past forty years. The spread of ideas and technology across borders has facilitated new avenues of trade, creating new markets and expanding others. In this world of free trade, countries can access goods from around the world. Lines of communication and flows of trade have opened among the rich, the poor, and everyone in between. We are all connected; we all affect one another. The global situation with regard to emerging trends in drug abuse seems to be highly necessary. Cannabis continues to be the most widely illicitly produced drug worldwide, both in terms of the size and geographical spread of the area under cultivation and the volume actually produced. Over the period 2010-15, cultivation of cannabis was reported to UNODC, directly or indirectly, by 135 countries in all regions, covering 92 percent of the total global population. This is almost triple the 49 countries, mostly in Asia, where opium poppy cultivation might take place and more than 16 times the number of the eight countries, all located in the Americas, where coca bush cultivation might take place. Delivery of the drugs is usually carried out by public or private postal services, and parcels are often sent to anonymous post office boxes or automated booths, known as ‘pack stations’ designed for self-service parcel collection. The proportion of drug market operations through the Internet remains small, their rapid growth may represent a significant threat. Information on the extent to which drug user’s purchase drugs over the Internet can be found in the findings of the Global Drug Survey. Drug trafficking appears to have increased only slightly in recent years: from 2.1 million cases in 2013 to 2.4 million cases in 2015. It is estimated that a quarter of a billion people, or about 5 percent of the adult population aged 15-64 years, used drugs at least once in 2015 (range: 158 million to 351 million), meaning that the extent of drug use among the world population has remained stable over the past five years<sup>1</sup>.

The mobile communications revolution has offered new risk-averse opportunities. Rather than engaging in personal contact with clients, drug dealers can now use low-level runners to collect cash before letting the customer know by text message where to collect their drugs. But drug purchases on the dark net are growing rapidly in some countries and its more direct process cuts several links out of the supply chain. Most of the increase and involvement in drug trafficking

worldwide occurred after the Second World War. While there were some individuals involved in the illicit drug trade in the 1960s and 1970s, groups became dominant in the 1980s, when business became increasingly cross-border and complex. The drug problem and corruption have a mutually reinforcing relationship. Corruption facilitates the production and trafficking of illegal drugs and this, in turn, benefits corruption. The Cosa Nostra and 'Ndrangheta' have long benefited from high-level political connections in Italy. In a similar way, some Mexican drug cartels allegedly benefited from protection from local police and local politicians. Drug trade has been a significant source of income for some of terrorist groups. Since the UN Security Council has imposed sanctions in relation to the drug trade, the groups' overall income from the drug sector appears to have been rather modest<sup>2</sup>.

The menace has extended its tentacles sans geographical boundaries. A brief analysis of the situation in various nations is attempted here under:

## **AFRICA**

The history of psychoactive substance use in Africa is relatively short except for reports on the use of traditional substances such as alcohol, cannabis and *khat*. The introduction of *prescription drugs* to Africa drastically increased the availability and use of drugs. Notwithstanding this alcohol, cannabis and *khat* still remain the most common substances of abuse in Africa. Mexico is not the only victim in the illicit drug trade. Stories like that of Mexico are told across the globe: from the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent in Asia to the newly emerging markets in West Africa. The main illicit drug in Africa is cannabis, which is abused by over 34 million people in the region<sup>3</sup>. The cannabis plant is illegally cultivated throughout Africa, and cannabis is smuggled within the region and mainly into Europe and North America. Morocco continues to be one of the world's largest suppliers of cannabis resin<sup>4</sup>. Heroin from West and South-East Asia is smuggled through Eastern Africa, to be shipped to illicit markets in Europe, and to a lesser extent, to North America. The trafficking in cocaine in Africa is fueled by rising demand for, and abuse of, cocaine in Europe. Although the abuse of opiates has remained limited in Africa, the increasing abuse of such drugs, especially by injection, is becoming a cause of concern, particularly in African countries along the Indian Ocean<sup>5</sup>.

Methamphetamine is mainly smuggled from China; some of it is also illicitly manufactured in laboratories. To tackle these problems, national drug control master plans have been adopted by Algeria and South Africa. Similarly, a number of African Governments including Algeria, Morocco, Lesotho, Malawi, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Nigeria, Egypt, United Republic of Tanzania, Kenya, Tunisia etc. have adopted many legislative and administrative measures in tune with international conventions to combat drug abuse and trade. The international network of drug dependence treatment and rehabilitation resource centre was recently launched jointly by UNODC and WHO to improve the quality of treatment for drug-dependent persons through co-operation, information exchange and the empowerment of selected resource centre's in all regions of the world. It is feared that if left unchecked, the problem of drug trafficking in Africa might further aggravate existing social, economic and political problems<sup>6</sup>.

## **AMERICAS**

### **Central America and the Caribbean**

The region continues to be used as a major trans-shipment area for cocaine from South America destined for North America and Europe. About 90 percent of the cocaine entering North America every year passes through Central America, while the Caribbean region is situated along one of the main cocaine trafficking routes leading to Europe. In the Caribbean, the quantity of cocaine seized rose from 8 tons in 2010 to 15 tons in 2014 and 23 tons in 2015, with most seizures being reported by Puerto Rico, followed by the Dominican Republic. The main smuggling routes are the maritime corridor of the Pacific Ocean, and the Caribbean Sea, light aircraft operating from clandestine airstrips and landing in remote areas are increasingly being used to transport cocaine. Drug trafficking has become a major security threat and is contributing to an increase in drug abuse.

The number of homicides linked to organized crime has risen in areas where criminal groups fight to gain control of local drug distribution. Major tourist areas in the Caribbean continue to be a hub for drug abuse. There are indications that the abuse of psychotropic substances, particularly benzodiazepines, is increasing in the region. Jamaica continues to be a major producer and exporter of cannabis in the Caribbean, despite the efforts of its law enforcement agencies. The number of incidents of cocaine trafficking by air in Honduras has increased. There has also been an increase in drug trafficking by air in Haiti. The number of light aircraft landing on clandestine airfields has increased over the past three years. There appears to have been a resurgence of LSD trafficking in Central America. Institutional weaknesses and corruption seriously undermine efforts by Governments to combat the drug menace<sup>7</sup>.

### **North America**

The abuse and manufacture of drugs are major problems in North America, which is comprised of Canada, Mexico and the United States, and these countries devote substantial resources to counteract the drug problem within and beyond their borders. North America, the world's largest cocaine market, has shown an upward trend in the last few years following a sharp decline between 2006 and 2012. The result of changes in cocaine manufacture in Colombia, which fell by 50 percent over the period 2006-12, from 660 tons to 333 tons, before almost doubling again to 646 tons in 2015. As a result, the availability of cocaine in the United States was reported to have increased in 2015. In the United States, the annual survey, 'Monitoring the Future' has shown a decline for four consecutive years. As a result, the annual prevalence rate for various drugs is currently 10-30 percent lower than that prevailed ten years ago<sup>8</sup>.

Declines are largely related to the rising percentage of adolescents perceiving the abuse of these drugs as high risk. The spread in the abuse of prescription drugs is found to be related to the increasing use of the World Wide Web as a global drug market. Illegal internet pharmacies continue to proliferate, despite international law enforcement efforts. The threat posed to United States by the trafficking and abuse of methamphetamine is high and increasing. United States drug law enforcement agencies have been successful in closing down illicit methamphetamine laboratories; domestic illicit manufacturers of methamphetamine have largely been replaced by transnational drug trafficking organizations, based in Canada and Mexico<sup>9</sup>.

The biggest producer of cannabis in the region is, however, Mexico. In addition to cannabis grown in Mexico, Mexican drug mafia have increased the size and sophistication of their cannabis plant cultivation operations on public and private lands in the United States, producing cannabis with a higher THC content by the use of new techniques. The United States has enacted the Patriot Act for restricting even the sale of medication containing pseudo-ephedrine and ephedrine. Limits on imports of such drugs have also been introduced in Mexico.

The decline in the abuse of drugs, particularly cannabis, among youth in the United States is an encouraging sign. The use of illicit drugs among students aged 13-18 declined significantly during the period 1997-2008.

The rapidly expanding illicit drugs trade provided the rationale for escalation to an actual 'war on drugs.' In the United States, which was the most rapidly growing illicit drugs market, the political response was to declare war on the foreign providers rather than analyse and address the reasons for booming domestic demand. The military was first deployed in 1983 when Special Forces were sent to the Andes to provide counter-narcotics training. President Reagan subsequently issued a National Security Decision Directive in April 1986, declaring drug trafficking a 'lethal' threat to the United States. The directive set in motion Operation Blast Furnace from July to November 1986, the 'first publicized employment of United States Army to combat forces on the sovereign soil of another country to conduct joint anti-drug efforts'<sup>10</sup>.

### **South America**

Colombia is the world's top coca-cultivating nation and the source of about 90 percent of cocaine in the United States. The ability of coca bush growers to move their operations from one area to another adversely affected the results of eradication efforts by the Government of Colombia. The trend was then reversed, with the total area under coca bush cultivation increasing by 30

percent over the period 2013-15 to return to the level reported in 2011. That increase was driven by a doubling of the area under coca bush cultivation in Colombia by 44 percent in 2014 and by 39 percent in 2015, to reach 96,000 hectares. Cocaine continues to reach the principal markets of the United States and Europe through the main trafficking routes in Central America and the Caribbean, as well as through Africa. According to the United Nations Annual World Drug Report the United States consumes about twenty-five times more cocaine than Colombia, even though Colombia produces about fifty percent of the world's cocaine.

The third largest consumer market for cocaine is South America, home to some 2.4 million users. Most of this market is concentrated in the Southern Cone, and most of it emerged only recently. Due to its population size, the greatest number of users, nearly 1 million, is found in Brazil, but the problem is most intense in Argentina. The targeting of markets in the developing economies of South America represents a disturbing trend, as these countries have fewer resources to combat the negative effects cocaine can have on health and violent crime. Large amounts of precursor chemicals required for the illicit manufacture of drugs continue to be seized in most countries in South America, which indicates their availability for illicit purposes.

Cannabis is regarded as the most widely abused drug in South America, although data collected in 2001-05 indicate significant differences in the annual prevalence of abuse among the general population in the region. According to UNODC, nearly 1 million people in the region are treated annually for the abuse of illicit drugs. The demand for treatment for the abuse of cannabis has increased significantly in the region in the past few years. The eradication of illicitly cultivated coca bush and prevention of coca bush cultivation in new areas were among the main objectives of the Peruvian national strategy to combat drugs for the period 2007-11. The permeable borders and long coastlines of countries in South America pose challenges to drug law enforcement authorities in the region, especially considering their limited resources. Use of hallucinogenic new psychoactive substances is increasing in South America. NPS with hallucinogenic effects constitute roughly 16 percent as of December 2016.

The drug seizures reported by the Governments of countries in South America attest to the fact that almost all countries in the region are affected by drug trafficking. The eradication of illicitly cultivated coca bush and prevention of coca bush cultivation in new areas were among the main objectives of the Peruvian national strategy to combat drugs for the period 2007-11. The permeable borders and long coastlines of countries in South America pose challenges to drug law enforcement authorities in the region, especially considering their limited resources. The drug seizures reported by the Governments of countries in South America attest to the fact that almost all countries in the region are affected by drug trafficking. 0.2 percent of drug abusers in Brazil inject drugs. Uruguayan authorities estimate that 0.3 percent of drug abusers in their country inject drugs<sup>11</sup>.

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