

# AFMUN 2025

ANTALYA FEN MODEL UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE

## UNODC

### STUDY GUIDE

AGENDA ITEM:

MIDDLE EASTERN DRUG CARTELS AND RELATED  
DRUG TRAFFICKING ROUTES

UNDER SECRETARY-GENERAL:

SELIN ESIN

ACADEMIC ASSISTANT:

KUZEY KARLIK

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# 1. Letter From the Secretary-General

Fellow countrymen and countrywomen;

I, as the Secretary-General of the conference, am deeply honored to welcome you, participants, to AFMUN'25. I owe each of you a gramercy for saving yourselves from the darkness of ignorance by attending such an event.

A thank must also be given to our unrelenting academic and organization teams. Without their labor, the light that we are trying to bring to our generation wouldn't have been ignited.

We live in a twilight world; wars, crimes, famines, genocides, drought, environmental crises, economic collapses, etc. The idea of organizing AFMUN was shaped around these core motivations. Our objective is to show the aforementioned aspects of the world to you, our participants, and to provide a world-class MUN experience that is organized in line with our objectives. During the conference, you will expand your horizons and change the way you see the world. Do not forget; we will illuminate the future together.

Let us bow our heads; the king is returning...

Çağrı Taylan ÖZGÜN

Secretary-General of AFMUN

## 2. Letter From the Under-Secretary-General

Dear Delegates, Respected Academic Team, and Fellow Participants, I extend a warm welcome to all of you as the Under Secretary General of UNODC committee to the AFMUN'25. My name is Selin Esin and I am a student at Erunal Social Science High School.

The purpose of our agenda item is to increase awareness and, if you haven't already, get you to take notice of these problems. As a result, the committee should attempt to approach the situation with a little more empathy and try to comprehend why these problems arise and what needs to be done.

Please take the time to carefully read this guide and respond to questions at the Questions To Be Addressed section. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to meet and see each of you as active members of this committee and If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to get in touch with me.

seloosesin@hotmail.com

Sincerely, Selin Esin

Under-Secretary General of UNODC

+905301348576

### 3. Letter from the Academic Assistant

Dear Delegates,

I would like to welcome you all to the UNODC committee! I am Kuzey Karlik and it is my utmost pleasure to serve you as the Academic Assistant of this committee.

First, I would like to thank the executive team for granting me this opportunity in this marvelous conference. And I would like to thank my Under Secretary General Selin, For supporting me all the way through.

The study guide we wrote contains crucial information for this committee. Yet as its name states it's only a guide for you, so I am highly encouraging you to do your research both about the topic and your country allocation and don't forget to answer the questions to be addressed part.

I am sure this committee will be a blast, and I am looking forward to meeting you all on 2-4 May. If you have any questions you can always contact me through direct messages or mail.

Sincerely,

Kuzey, Academic Assistant of UNODC.

+90 5339160890

kuzeykarlik@gmail.com

### 4. Introductions

#### 4.1. Introduction to the Committee

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is a global organization that operates under the umbrella of the United Nations and serves as a leading authority in the fight against illicit drugs, organized crime, corruption, and terrorism. UNODC works to promote justice, security, and integrity in various areas related to crime prevention and criminal justice.

The primary objectives of UNODC are to assist member states in their efforts to combat drug trafficking, reduce drug abuse and its associated health and social consequences, dismantle transnational organized criminal networks, prevent and address corruption, counterterrorism, and promote the rule of law and effective criminal justice systems.

#### 4.1.1. History of the Committee

The UNODC has a rich history that dates back to the 1970s. It was established in 1997 through the merger of two precursor entities: the United Nations Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and the Centre for International Crime Prevention (CICP).

The UNDCP was founded in 1991 as a response to the growing global drug problem. Its primary focus was to coordinate and support international efforts in combating illicit drug production, trafficking, and drug abuse. The CICP, established in 1992, aimed to address a broader range of transnational crimes, including organized crime, corruption, and terrorism.

The merger of these two entities resulted in the creation of UNODC, which brought together expertise and resources in the fields of drug control and crime prevention under a unified structure. Since its inception, UNODC has expanded its mandate and activities to encompass a wide range of global challenges related to drugs, crime, corruption, and terrorism.

Today, UNODC is comprised of four main divisions, each of which oversee specific areas. These divisions cover operations, treaties and support, partnerships and research, as well as budgeting and management. Although the headquarters of the agency is located in Vienna, Austria, the agency has over 20 field offices worldwide, divided into regional sections. The decentralization of facilities allows the UNODC to adapt to the specific needs of the regions and countries in which it operates. All sections of the UNODC are led by an Executive Director, appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who, alongside leaders of the other branches, bear responsibility for the implementation of the organization's policies and programs.

#### 4.1.2. Functions of the Committee

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is a global leader in the fight against illicit drugs and international crime, in addition to being responsible for implementing the United Nations lead programme on terrorism.

The main objectives of UNODC includes:

- Tackling the world drug problem through balanced, evidence-based responses to address --drug abuse and drug use disorders, as well as the production and trafficking of illicit drugs.
- Preventing corruption by promoting integrity and good governance and helping recover stolen assets.
- Countering terrorism through effective, accountable and inclusive legal, crime prevention and criminal justice measures in line with international norms and the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy.

- Combating organized crime by providing technical assistance and support and strengthening international cooperation to address organized criminal activity and all forms of trafficking.
- Preventing crime and promoting criminal justice through human rights-based and victim centered approaches that strengthen the rule of law and access to justice.

In order to achieve these objectives, UNODC has 3 main pillars for their work that they follow. Which are:

- Normative work, to assist in the ratification and implementation of international treaties, and the development of national legislation on drugs, crime and terrorism.
- Research and analysis, to enrich knowledge and broaden understanding of drug and crime problems and to establish evidence-based policies and strategies.
- Technical assistance through international cooperation, to enable Member States to provide effective responses to drug-related issues, organized crime and terrorism.

UNODC's normative, research and technical assistance work are mutually reinforcing, which helps them to work with governments and other stakeholders to rapidly identify new trends and threats, develop effective responses to counter them and support Member States in taking strategic action.

The funding of the committee comes from voluntary contributions from Member States, multilateral organizations, private sector and other sources.

## 4.2. Introduction to the Agenda Item

### 4.2.1. The Middle East Region

Middle East, the lands around the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, encompassing at least the Arabian Peninsula and, by some definitions, Iran, North Africa, and sometimes beyond. The central part of this general area was formerly called the Near East, a name given to it by some of the first modern Western geographers and historians, who tended to divide what they called the Orient into three regions. Near East applied to the region nearest Europe, extending from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf; Middle East, from the Persian Gulf to Southeast Asia; and Far East, those regions facing the Pacific Ocean.



The total area of all the countries which are usually accepted to comprise the region combined stands at nearly 2.7 square miles (7 million km<sup>2</sup>) with a population of over 430 million. The most populous countries are Egypt, Iran, and Turkey, which account for almost 40% of the total population.

The Middle East has long been one of the most unstable regions in the world, and there are no present prospects for change in the near future. This instability is the result of ongoing conflicts and tensions, and a variety of political tensions and divisions. It also, however, is the result of a wide variety of long-term pressures growing out of poor governance, corruption, economic failures, demographic pressures and other forces within the civil sector.

With all the ongoing conflicts and unresolved issues, the region is getting more unstable day by day. As one of the results, drug usage and drug trafficking activities are seeing great increases.

#### 4.2.2. What is Drug Trafficking?

Drug trafficking, also known as illegal drug trade or narcotrafficking, is the illegal production, distribution, and sale of controlled substances. It's a global criminal enterprise involving complex networks that profit from widespread drug abuse.

Criminal networks traffic a range of drugs including cannabis, cocaine, heroin and synthetics such as methamphetamine and fentanyl. As international borders become



increasingly porous, global abuse and accessibility to drugs have become increasingly widespread.

This international trade involves growers, producers, transporters, suppliers and dealers. It affects all of the member countries, undermining political and economic stability, ruining the lives of individuals and damaging communities. The end-users and addicts are often the victims of a powerful and manipulative business.

Drug trafficking is often associated with other forms of crime, such as money laundering or corruption. Trafficking routes are used by criminal networks to transport other illicit products including firearms, uncut diamonds and live pangolins creating a convergence of crime.

As criminals devise ever-more creative ways of disguising illegal drugs for transport, law enforcement officials face challenges in detecting such concealed substances. In addition, new synthetic drugs are produced on a regular basis, so police need to be aware of new trends and products on the illicit market.

Since the types of drugs trafficked and the routes used are constantly evolving, it is essential that countries work together in a united and coordinated way to constantly analyze, detect and make plans in order to achieve a drug-free community and maintain it.

There are many reasons why drug trafficking even emerges in the first place. For example:

- *Economic problems*, in many parts of the world, poverty and lack of job opportunities make drug trafficking an attractive option for financial survival. For example, in Colombia, high poverty levels push many individuals into the drug trade as a way to escape economic hardship. The significant profits from drugs, such as cocaine, where wholesale prices can reach up to \$25,000 per kilogram in the U.S., contrast sharply with their much lower production costs in source countries. It is estimated that around 10-15% of all drug trafficking is motivated by poverty and unemployment.
- *Political Instability*, political corruption and instability further fuel drug trafficking. In Mexico, for instance, high levels of corruption enable drug cartels to operate with relative freedom. The influence of corrupt officials can allow traffickers to bypass legal constraints and evade law enforcement, exacerbating the issue. Not just corruption, ongoing disputes such as military conflicts, coup d'états, protests, interstate wars etc. can cause the central authority to weaken, resulting in near non-existent law enforcements and the convergence of local and international drug cartels.
- *Demand*, high demand for illicit drugs drives trafficking networks. In the U.S., for example, around 16 million people have used cocaine in their lifetime, creating a strong market for traffickers. Additionally, in regions where drug use is culturally

ingrained, such as parts of Southeast Asia, the normalization of drug consumption can sustain and expand trafficking operations.

- *Addiction*, addiction to drugs can also lead individuals to traffic drugs to support their habits. With around 23% of heroin users developing an addiction, the cycle of addiction and trafficking is a significant issue.

## 5. Effects of Drug Usage and Addiction

Usage of drugs has very severe effects on many areas. These areas vary from individual effects such as decaying mental and physical health, addiction, financial problems to communal and international issues such as a disturbed and lawless community, low economic output and an increase of illegal activities.

Drugs affect the body's central nervous system. They affect how a person thinks, feels and behaves. The seven main types are depressants, psychedelics, stimulants, empathogens, opioids, cannabinoids, and dissociatives.

- Depressants slow down the messages travelling between the brain and the body. They can reduce arousal and stimulation, making a person feel relaxed or drowsy.
- Psychedelics affect all the senses, altering a person's thinking, sense of time and emotions. They can also cause a person to hallucinate—seeing or hearing things that do not exist or are distorted.
- Stimulants are a class of drugs that speed up messages travelling between the brain and body. They can make a person feel more awake, alert, confident or energetic.
- Empathogens increase a person's feeling of empathy and kindness towards others, as well as feelings of being socially accepted and connected.
- Opioids include any drug that acts on opioid receptors in the brain, and any natural or synthetic drugs that are made from or related to the opium poppy. Opioids slow heart rate and breathing and provide sensations of pleasure and pain relief.
- Cannabinoids are chemical compounds found in all parts of the cannabis plant. They are responsible for the psychoactive effect when cannabis is consumed. They can make a person feel happy, relaxed, anxious or paranoid.
- Dissociatives (also referred to as 'dissociative anaesthetics') can cause people to feel separated or detached from reality. They can also cause hallucinations or other changes in thoughts, emotions and consciousness.

NSDUH data show that in 2008, 14.2 percent of individuals 12 years of age and older had used illicit drugs during the past year. Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug, with 25.8 million individuals 12 years of age and older (10.3%) reporting past year use. That rate remains stable from the previous year (10.1%). Psychotherapeutics ranked second, with 15.2 million individuals reporting

past year "nonmedical use" in 2008, a decrease from 16.3 million in 2007. In 2008, approximately 5.3 million individuals aged 12 and older reported past year cocaine use, 850,000 reported past year methamphetamine use, and 453,000 reported past year heroin use.

Rates of drug use vary by age. Rates are highest for young adults aged 18 to 25, with 33.5 percent reporting illicit drug use in the past year. Nineteen percent of youth aged 12 to 17 report past year illicit drug use. Finally, 10.3 percent of adults aged 26 and older report past year illicit drug use. These rates are relatively stable when compared with 2007 rates.

In 2008, approximately 2.9 million individuals tried an illicit drug or used a prescription drug nonmedically for the first time, representing nearly 8,000 initiates per day. More than half of these new users (56.6%) report that marijuana was the first illicit substance that they had tried. Other past year illicit drug initiates report that their first drug was a psychotherapeutic drug used nonmedically (29.6%), an inhalant (9.7%), or a hallucinogen (3.2%). By drug category, marijuana and pain relievers used non-medically each had an estimated 2.2 million past year first-time users. Also identified frequently as the first drug used by initiates were tranquilizers (nonmedical use--1.1 million), ecstasy/MDMA (0.9 million), inhalants (0.7 million), cocaine (0.7 million), and stimulants (0.6 million). Methamphetamine appears to be fading in popularity among initiates. In 2008, an estimated 95,000 individuals tried methamphetamine for the first time--a 39 percent decrease from the 2007 estimate (157,000) and a 70 percent decrease from the 2004 estimate (318,000).

## 5.1. Individual Effects

The main reason behind drugs being so dangerous is drug abuse and addiction. Drug addiction is a chronic brain disease. It causes a person to take drugs repeatedly, despite the harm they cause. Drug abuse is when a substance is consumed at high doses and/or too frequently. The effects on the body depend on the type of substance a person uses and their health history. Examples of common drugs include: alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, heroin, hallucinogens, inhalants, prescription opioids, prescription stimulants, methamphetamine, tobacco or nicotine.

Deaths as a result of drug abuse are a major source of concern. Recent informal estimates are that perhaps 200,000 drug-injecting-related deaths may occur per annum based on the estimated size of the current world population of injecting drug abusers of approximately 5.3 million. WHO has reported as follows: "Existing data indicated a several-fold increase in drug-related deaths over the past decade ... . The yearly mortality rates (or "lethality") among intravenous drug users or drug addicts on treatment programmes ranged between one and two percent in Europe and the United States". WHO's examination found that, during the period of 1980 to 1988, mortality related to drugs increased in some countries and decreased in others. It decreased in Japan and Thailand and showed little change in Austria, New Zealand and former Yugoslavia. Slight increases were seen in the former Czechoslovakia, the predecessor States of Germany, the Netherlands and Spain. Steeper increases in mortality were noted in Australia, Canada, France, Italy, Poland,

the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States. High variability in mortality rates, however, was found within countries and from year to year.

Substances commonly associated with drug abuse-related deaths are cocaine, heroin (and other opiates), barbiturates and amphetamines (and amphetamine derivatives). Benzodiazepines, hallucinogens, cannabis and other substances are less frequently implicated. Combinations of drugs and alcohol were frequently noted. Availability, cost, chemical contents of the drugs (e.g. adulterants), preexisting and potentially life-threatening health problems and patterns of use are all factors that may play key roles in determining whether harmful effects occur in any individual case. The most widely used controlled drug, cannabis, could be associated with some fatal accidents despite its low acute toxicity. As levels of GNP per capita rise, third world populations age, and noxious substances are more widely marketed and distributed in developing countries, the number of deaths can only be expected to increase. 15 major health report states: "Decisions about the control of tobacco and other addictive substances are among the most important health-related choices that societies can make collectively. In many populations, prolonged cigarette smoking is already the greatest single cause of premature death. Alcohol and other drugs also contribute to disease and disability. The damage from substance abuse is not limited to the individuals involved; others also suffer indirectly because of drunk driving, fires, passive smoking, and drug related crime and violence".

Mental health problems such as depression, developmental lags, apathy, withdrawal, and other psychosocial dysfunctions are also frequently linked to substance abuse among adolescents. Substance-abusing youth are at higher risk than nonusers for mental health problems, including depression, conduct problems, personality disorders, suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide, and suicide. Marijuana use, which is prevalent among youth, has been shown to interfere with short-term memory, learning, and psychomotor skills.

The proportion of all drug users and abusers who end up with serious health and social problems is not known. Whatever that proportion, illicit drug use more frequently results in problems or disease rather than death. Since substance abuse is not evenly spread throughout the population, it is advisable to determine the characteristics of the specific groups involved in order to plan interventions. Drug abuse may be influenced by the social-cultural milieu, the degree to which a person is part of a structured environment, his or her personal characteristics, the specific drugs involved and the circumstances of use.

## 5.2. Communal Effects

Drug usage also effects societies in a very negative way. Problems with violence, lawbreaking, and social unrestness can all stem from drug abuse. Therefore, it is important to learn how drug addiction affects society if we are to successfully handle this problem.

Addicts are typically stigmatised and shunned by the general public because of the widespread belief that they are solely to blame for their substance misuse and that they are

only causing harm to themselves. However, this narrow viewpoint on a social issue of this magnitude is deceptive. Substance abuse has far-reaching consequences for society, including but not limited to participation in criminal activity and the criminal justice system, victimisation, and trauma caused by traffic accidents.

Rising crime in several countries has been linked to various factors, including drug abuse. Studies show a strong correlation between drug abuse and increased crime rates, such as theft, violence and drug trafficking.

The costs associated with drug addiction, such as healthcare expenses, rehabilitation programs, and law enforcement efforts, place a heavy burden on society as a whole. Furthermore, the negative consequences of drug abuse, such as reduced productivity, increased crime rates, and strained social services, further exacerbate the economic impact on the community. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the estimated cost of drug abuse in the United States is more than \$740 billion a year. These costs include illegal drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. Some estimated costs of each substance include:

- Alcohol: The estimated cost of alcohol abuse in the U.S. reached \$249 billion in 2010 or about \$2.05 per drink. Most of these costs resulted from decreased workplace productivity (72%), alcohol addiction treatment and health care expenses (11%), law enforcement and other related expenses (10%), and losses from car crashes (5%).
- Illegal Drug Abuse: The estimated cost of illicit drug abuse is \$193 billion, including \$11 billion in health care costs.
- Prescription Opioids: The estimated cost of prescription opioid abuse is \$78.5 billion, with \$26 billion due to direct health care and addiction treatment costs.

How drug abuse affects society also goes beyond financial costs and includes other costs like crime, unemployment, domestic abuse, divorce, homelessness, foster care, overdose-related deaths, birth defects in children, and the spread of diseases like HIV/AIDS and hepatitis. Addictions also significantly impact on the tax burden, due to costs for treatment incarceration and social welfare to care for addicted individuals and their families.

## 6. What is the role of drug cartels in drug trafficking?

Drug cartel, an illicit consortium of independent organizations formed to limit competition and control the production and distribution of illegal drugs. Drug cartels are extremely well-organized, well-financed, efficient, and ruthless. Since the 1980s, they have dominated the international narcotics trade.

### 6.1. Different Drug Cartels Throughout the World

#### **Colombian drug cartels**

The Medellín cartel, the first major drug cartel in Colombia, began in the mid-1970s when Colombian marijuana traffickers began smuggling small quantities of cocaine into the United States. As the trade grew, a diverse group of entrepreneurs became involved, ranging from well-respected individuals with backgrounds in ranching and horsing to petty criminals. The growing demand for cocaine soon prompted the expansion of the trade beyond small amounts tucked into suitcases. The cartel purchased private planes to carry its shipments, constructed more sophisticated drug laboratories, and even purchased a small island in the Caribbean for refueling its aircraft.

Violence, lapses in organization, and competition from the emergent Cali cartel (centered in Cali, Colombia) fractured the Medellín cartel in the late 1980s and early '90s. Pablo Escobar, leader of the Medellín cartel, became one of the most wanted men in the world and was forced into hiding. In 1993 he was killed during a shoot-out with a special Colombian police task force, leading to the primacy of the Cali cartel.

The Cali cartel had a more subtle style and sophisticated approach than the Medellín cartel. The members of the Cali cartel quickly reinvested their drug profits into legitimate businesses. They deliberately undermined the Medellín cartel as it became increasingly unpopular and violent. The Cali cartel went so far as to help Colombian police and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) track down Escobar. Many leaders of the Cali cartel were arrested in the 1990s, and by the next decade the organization had largely disbanded. While other cartels in Colombia filled the void, their power failed to match that of their predecessors.

### **Mexican drug cartels**

In the 1960s and early '70s, Mexico was known primarily as a supplier of marijuana. However, as U.S. efforts in Colombia slowed the flow of drugs from South America, Mexico emerged as a source of cocaine. The Tijuana cartel—created by members of the Arellano Félix family, especially the brothers Ramon and Benjamin—was founded in the late 1980s and became one of the most powerful cartels in Mexico, responsible for shipping hundreds of millions of dollars worth of cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine into the United States.

However, Tijuana faced fierce—and often violent—competition from other drug organizations, notably the Juárez, Gulf, and Sinaloa cartels. Under the leadership of Joaquín Guzmán Loera—commonly known as El Chapo (“Shorty”), the Sinaloa cartel emerged as one of the world’s most powerful drug cartels in the early 21st century; according to various reports at the time, it accounted for the majority of illegal drugs in the United States. The Sinaloa cartel amassed power through murder, bribes, and innovative smuggling techniques, notably the use of tunnels. In the early 2000s, the Mexican government, aided by U.S. officials, intensified its efforts to crack down on cartels, imprisoning numerous leaders. The resulting turf battles sparked unprecedented violence in Mexico.

## 6.2. Cartel like Drug Trafficking Organisations in Middle East

Drug cartels in the Middle East are not as prominent or widespread as in other regions like Latin America, but there are several organizations and regions where drug trafficking plays a significant role in the region's illicit economy. These cartel-like organisations' activities are among the key reasons of drug trafficking

One of the most prominent drug trafficking organisations in the middle east are the terrorist groups. The nexus between drugs and terror is growing at light speed. There have been numerous links identified between drugs and terror over the last twenty-five years. Of the forty-three officially designated foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs), 19 of them has been linked by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to some aspect of the global drug trade, and it is believed that up to sixty percent of terror organizations are connected with the illegal narcotics trade.

Terrorist organizations have chosen to participate in the narcotics market for several reasons. State sponsorship of terrorism is declining and terrorist groups, therefore, are increasingly in need of new sources of funds. The drug business fills this need perfectly. The UN estimates that the international drug trade generates \$322 billion per year in revenue, making drugs by far the most lucrative illicit activity. According to the UN, revenues from other types of illicit transnational activity, such as arms trafficking and alien smuggling, are small by comparison. Drugs provide many different avenues of revenue, including the taxing of farmers and local cartels, and the provision of security for all aspects of production, trade, and distribution. Terror organizations do not, in general, require massive sums of money for their operations, but must finance training, infrastructure needs, equipping their members, bribing local officials, recruiting, and logistics. The al-Qaeda or affiliate cell that carried out the Madrid train bombing funded that operation in almost its entirety through the sale of illicit drugs.

There are many similarities between a terrorist organization and a global drug cartel. Both oppose nation-state sovereignty, function best in ungoverned spaces, depend on mutual shadow facilitators, have no regard for human rights, rely on the hallmarks of organized crime such as corruption, intimidation, and violence, and are highly sophisticated organizations that operate with the latest technology. Most analysts believe that FTOs copied their decentralized structure of cells and nodes from drug cartels. Both FTOs and drug cartels often rely on the same money launderers and have a capacity to regenerate themselves when dealt a blow, often reemerging in a new or unrecognizable form. The main difference is motivation; drug cartels are motivated entirely by profit, whereas terrorist organizations have political or ideological motivations.

### 6.2.1. Hezbollah

Hezbollah's international criminal activity dates back to the 1980s when the newly-established organization began laundering money for drug cartels through Lebanese

immigrants in Latin America. Since then, it has become one of the world's largest drug suppliers and money laundering organizations, working in close cooperation with a string of Latin American paramilitary and criminal organizations, including Colombia's Medellin cartel, La Oficina de Envigado, North Valley cartel, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (People's Army, FARC), as well as Brazil's First Command of the Capital (PCC) and the Mexican Los Zetas.

The terrorist group establishes, operates, and maintains cells and networks of activists, logistical warehouses where stolen and counterfeit goods are stored, and supply chains around the world, particularly in Africa and Latin America. Hezbollah operatives are also deployed throughout the United States and Europe where they distribute the organization's criminal goods and services—primarily by trafficking drugs, counterfeiting consumer products, and laundering money.

Hezbollah's criminal network operates relatively independently from the organization's political and military wings, which are closely aligned with Tehran. The network is strategically managed and led by a chain of senior officials but maintains an intricate system of buffers to avoid linking the organization to criminal activity. At times, operatives carry out criminal activities on direct orders from Hezbollah officials; at other times, they share their activities with these officials without necessarily seeking direct orders. This allows Hezbollah to maintain ambiguity, deniability, and obscurity regarding its activities as a transnational criminal organization.

Hezbollah operatives carry out robberies around the world and send the proceeds to Iran from where they are subsequently transferred to the organization's Lebanese bank accounts. Profits from drug deals of Latin American cartels in Europe and the United States are also sent to Hezbollah, which deducts a commission before laundering the rest of the money and returning it to the drug cartels. According to the U.S Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), this laundering activity is done through the purchase and sale of luxury cars, as well as by other means. In some cases, the money is hidden in the cars themselves when they are transported to locations around the world.

Since Hezbollah's budget is not open to public scrutiny, it is difficult to ascertain the share of the organization's criminal profits in its overall budget. According to Israeli security sources, about 90 percent of Hezbollah's annual budget (an estimated \$700 million) comes from Iran. Brian Hook, U.S special envoy for Iran in 2018-20, estimated that Tehran provides 70 percent of the organization's budget while Lebanese anti-Hezbollah sources set the figure at 70-80 percent.

Apart from the desire to boost its financial standing and self-sufficiency, it can be assumed that Hezbollah views its transnational criminal activities as a way to weaken its enemies by spreading drug addiction in Western societies. In its perception, a drug-afflicted society is a weak society that can be exploited for the establishment of terrorist networks and the recruitment of operatives; can be attacked from within if necessary; and can be



more effectively defended against in the event of interstate conflict. Furthermore, law enforcement and intelligence agencies that dedicate most of their time and resources to fighting criminal activity may be less attentive to stymying terrorist activities.

### 6.2.2. Taliban

Taliban, ultraconservative political and religious faction that emerged in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s following the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the collapse of Afghanistan's communist regime, and the subsequent breakdown in civil order. It began as a small force of Afghan religious students and scholars seeking to confront crime and corruption; the faction owes its name, Taliban (Pashto: *Ṭālebān*, "Students"), to this initial membership.

The Taliban is possibly the only terrorist organisation which does not have multinational footprints in this transnational illicit trade. However, it does control the production and supply of opiates, becoming one of the most prolific organisations in the drug business. While it was uprooted in 2001 by the alliance of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Northern Alliance, successive weak governments allowed it to regroup and a resurgence of the Taliban became imminent. By the time NATO pulled out of Afghanistan, the Taliban was controlling a significant size of the country's territory. Control over territories allowed the Taliban to become a major player of the drug business in Afghanistan. In 2016, around 92 per cent of opium poppies were grown in either Taliban-controlled areas or 'high-confidence Taliban support zone'. Most Afghan opium is grown in the southern provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, Farah, Nimroz and Uruzgan. There is also evidence of the presence of the ISIS in poppy cultivation and sales business in Afghanistan, although it is estimated that the ISIS only controls around 1 per cent of the total opium poppy cultivation. The enthusiasm of organisations to reap profits from the drug business is so high that the ISIS fought with the Taliban to control the drug trafficking profits in Nangarhar, which it eventually lost to the Taliban.

The Taliban's increasing control over Afghani territories has some justification as it has created an ecosystem of sustainable supply chain model. It does not cultivate poppies on its own, but facilitates production by supporting local farmers. These farmers are neither terrorists nor insurgents. They do not have any business with the Taliban's or any terrorist organisation's ideology. In the absence of any alternative means of livelihood, the poppy business provides them with a source of income. The Taliban further supports these farmers by guaranteeing the purchase of their products. It also provides local farmers with advance loan 'to obtain their backing while simultaneously ensuring a future source of revenue'. In areas it has full control, the Taliban exercises the functions of a proper government. It taxes the same farmers it supports (or promotes) to grow poppies. The income generated through tax levies and sale of poppies helps to sustain the insurgencies. The Taliban also taxes other actors involved in the opium chain in territories it does not control but requires transit access.

In 2022, Afghanistan accounted for roughly 80 per cent of the world's opiate supply and was a major global exporter of opium and heroin. But in April that year, the newly installed Taliban regime announced a ban on poppy cultivation and all types of narcotics, leading to plummeting levels of production. Immediately following the ban, international observers predicted a total disruption of global heroin supply chains, and questions were raised about the ban's sustainability, its impact on the Afghan population and its effect on Afghanistan's growing methamphetamine production.

While opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan did not cease completely after the ban, the market was severely disrupted. By pressuring farmers to stop growing opium poppy and carrying out a targeted eradication campaign, the Taliban succeeded in drastically reducing cultivation. The change was particularly apparent in the south-western provinces, which had previously been the heart of opium farming. The drop in cultivation caused prices to soar.

However, limited cultivation still continued: some farmers replanted poppy where crops had been destroyed, and others relocated to remote areas away from Taliban control, such as the northern province of Badakhshan or the Balochistan region in Pakistan. The Taliban also avoided widespread popular opposition to the ban by granting a two-month reprieve for the 2022 autumn harvest. The opium collected was thus added to the already substantial stockpiles built up over several years of abundant harvests. With cultivation drastically reduced, these stockpiles continued to supply opium to demand markets, allowing landowners and traffickers to profit from the high prices.

After peaking at the end of 2023, opium prices began to decline, potentially pointing to a steady supply. Later that year, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime recorded the first significant increase (by almost a fifth) in opium cultivation in Afghanistan since the announcement of the ban, largely due to poppy cultivation in the north-east. Cultivation also occurred in Pakistan, reversing the historical import–export dynamic between the two countries, where Afghan opium was exported to Pakistan.

Fieldwork in Afghanistan in 2024 found that the sale of opium continued unabated and had even become more ubiquitous. While notorious 'drug bazaars' had been closed down, vendors had begun to sell opium alongside food and other common products in legal markets, operating with the tacit approval of the authorities.

It is likely that the continued availability of opium has prevented the dramatic increase in the trade in Afghan methamphetamine that the international community had anticipated. In the long term, however, the methamphetamine trade may prove more resilient to the Taliban's ban: the drug is made from the ephedra shrub, which grows abundantly in Afghanistan, laboratories are relatively simple and inexpensive to set up, and, if destroyed, can be quickly rebuilt elsewhere. In fact, the methamphetamine industry has responded to the threat of disruption with revised production practices. While this led to moderate increases in the costs of production of the drug, the Afghan methamphetamine trade was able to continue. Recently, the drug has been found for sale in Afghan markets

alongside opium, cannabis resin and a collection of synthetic drugs. From an export perspective, while methamphetamine seizures in and around Afghanistan were reported to be increasing in 2023, the downstream supply of methamphetamine to common destination markets in places such as east and southern Africa has remained largely unaffected.

Contrary to initial predictions, the opium ban has not put an end to the illicit drug trade in Afghanistan. The powerful traffickers who were the main source of funding for the Taliban during the insurgency continued to operate freely. Moreover, the Taliban provided an informal 10-month reprieve for the sale of opium from existing stockpiles. This delay in enforcing the ban may also have given large landowners and drug traffickers time to diversify their incomes, for example by seeking greater involvement in the mining industry or moving into the synthetic drug or methamphetamine trades. Some of these actors were reportedly given influential roles in Taliban structures, and were involved in negotiating the Taliban's mineral exploitation contracts and securing trade contracts for licit goods. Despite the Taliban's show of strength, the resurgence of cultivation and the continued trade in illicit drugs are testament to the deep roots and resilience of Afghanistan's illicit drug economy.

### 6.2.3. Al Qaeda

al-Qaeda, broad-based militant Islamist organization founded by Osama bin Laden in the late 1980s and became one of the world's most notorious terrorist organizations after carrying out the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Al-Qaeda began as a logistical network to support Muslims fighting against the Soviet Union during the Afghan War; members were recruited throughout the Islamic world. When the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, the organization dispersed but continued to oppose what its leaders considered corrupt Islamic regimes and foreign (i.e., U.S.) presence in Islamic lands. Based in Sudan for a period in the early 1990s, the group eventually reestablished its headquarters in Afghanistan (c. 1996) under the patronage of the Taliban militia.

Even though Al Qaeda is not one of the most active terrorist groups in drug trafficking, their connections with other groups and their affiliates connections with drug traffickers results in them being a part of the drug trafficking problem.

### 6.2.4. Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS)

ISIS is a Salafi-jihadist group that has conducted and inspired terrorist attacks worldwide, resulting in thousands killed or injured. In 2004, an Iraqi extremist network led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi merged with al-Qa'ida to form ISIS's predecessor group, al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI), which Zarqawi led until his death in 2006. Now-deceased amir Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi took over the group in 2010 and began to expand its operations into eastern Syria in 2011. In 2013, AQI changed its name to ISIS; and in 2014, the group separated from al-Qa'ida, declared itself a caliphate, and took over vast swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria.

With increasing surveillance on the traditional financial routes, the terror organisations are regularly looking for resources to fund their activities. The Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) is a case in point. Until recently, it was termed as the world's richest terror group, earning its revenues mainly from the sale of oil and taxation of the population it controlled. However, since its defeat in Baghuz in Syria—the last stronghold of the ISIS, effectively bringing the geographical caliphate to the end—it has lost access to its primary sources of revenue. To ensure a regular supply of funds, it is now exploring alternative revenue sources and in this regard, drug trafficking provides a lucrative opportunity. As a result, we see an increasing involvement of the ISIS jihadis in the drug trade. Likewise, when Al Qaeda lost its usual stream of funding—Islamic charities and wealthy patrons from the Gulf—its affiliates moved to drug trafficking. It is a lucrative source of money on 'which terrorists rely on financing their organisations and activities'.<sup>1</sup> The investment in drug trafficking is low, and profits are high, which provides terror groups with an adequate alternative means to generate funds.

The ISIS benefits from the sale of drugs, particularly synthetic opioids, in the territories controlled by it and in countries where it has a strong presence, like Libya, and Al Shabab cuts its share in Somalia, Kenya and Tanzania.

## 7. Human trafficking related to Drug Usage

Human trafficking is the modern-day counterpart of slavery in its most basic form. People, particularly women, youth, and immigrants, are compelled to work for little or no compensation and are denied basic liberties. These "trafficked" individuals are frequently transported far from their families and placed completely under the authority of another individual or organization. Although some of the job they are compelled to do is manual labor, the majority of it includes sexual exploitation, such as prostitution. Illegal substances are one of the ways that traffickers entice and control their victims.

Prostitution is considered sex trafficking, but victims are not given the option of having someone pay for sex, so they can receive any amount of money, as we might see in movies or on television. Instead, if the victims do not comply with their sexual responsibilities, they are subjected to constant mental and physical threats. Victims are isolated, sold into financial bondage, and shackled to their traffickers' sexual and physical torture. Victims are either persuaded into the nation or kidnapped with the goal of sex trafficking in other countries where security is lacking.

Human trafficking (HT) and substance use disorders (SUD) are both public health and safety crises that impact local, state, and tribal communities.

Though seemingly disconnected, these issues often overlap in the lives of impacted people and in the systems that respond to them. For example, victims and survivors of HT often have co-occurring SUD. Traffickers use illicit substances both as a means of recruiting

potential new victims and many more reasons. Given this overlap, government agencies and service providers who engage with people with SUD are highly likely to encounter HT victims and survivors. However, many providers either do not have the training to identify and respond to victims of trafficking, or do not feel qualified to treat these individuals.

Individuals that have struggled with substance use and/or addiction may have an increased vulnerability to being trafficked. They may be targeted due to their dependence through the enticement of a promise of substances or money by traffickers. Additionally, traffickers have been shown to recruit directly from substance use disorder treatment facilities, whether with direct or indirect methods such as working alongside the staff or opening the center as a method to access vulnerable people.

Traffickers will use substances as a means of control. If the trafficked individual is addicted to substances, the trafficker can withhold the drugs to coerce the survivor into engaging in trafficking activities to get their next high or prevent a painful withdrawal. In addition, many traffickers know that that drug use by those who are trafficked helps them to avoid criminal charges. This is the case because those under the influence of drugs when apprehended by law enforcement may lose their credibility and presumed innocence, distracting from their victimization. Considering the fact that foreign national adult trafficking victims with confiscated passports, undocumented statuses, language barriers and isolation from their families are already vulnerable, drug abuse compounds the abuse, making the victims susceptible to the harshest of conditions and therefore, not viewed from a trauma-informed lens of victimization, thus furthering their distrust in systems that are supposed to protect them.

Traffickers have also been known to get their victims addicted as a means of control, or to make them easier to “manage” for sex or labor trafficking. Traffickers use substances in hopes that they will force the victim to develop an addiction which makes them more vulnerable to additional trauma, decreases escape attempts, and encourage illicit drug production and distribution, thus additionally serving the trafficker’s financial intents. Traffickers will use substances as a “reward” for productivity, intensifying the quantity, desire to use, and amount which all contribute to an addiction. Alternately, some traffickers have been known to withhold substances as a power play, then convincing the victim that they’ve been empowered from addiction, all thanks to the trafficker. While an outsider recognizes the serious power differential and manipulation of these actions, someone being trafficked may not realize what is happening. Or they may find that it’s easier to comply than risk their life by conflicting with the trafficker.

## 8. Measures Taken Against Drug Trafficking

At both the national and local levels, campaigns against drug trafficking have numerous sides and are generally created to address whatever issues each nation is facing. The most prevalent methodology is most likely the strict enforcement of aggressive drug legislation. In most countries, trafficking in drugs is a crime, generally the source of extensive imprisonment and huge fines. Judicial penalties are at the same time intended to function as punishment plus a deterrent, deterrence being aimed at discouraging individuals from any endeavor in drug commerce.

But law enforcement is not limited to legislatures and courts. The majority of nations have created specialized branches of their police or military that are exclusively devoted to narcotics. They are typically trained to target drug trafficking organizations, engage in intelligence-led operations, and work with foreign agencies when drug trafficking routes cross borders. Their actions are critical to breaking up organized drug operations and preventing shipments from reaching consumers.

Securing the border is of utmost importance to the fight against trafficking. Law enforcement officials spend significant amounts of money on technology—such as tracking systems and spy apparatus, X-ray machines, sniffing dogs, and biometric readers—to increase security at entry and exit points, such as airports, seaports, and borders. Lack of sufficient trained staff, together with the aforementioned technologies, is the most important reason for the detection and interception of illegal drugs before they reach circulation.

Apart from enforcement, public education is also used most times as a means of prevention by most governments. Public education campaigns are launched in schools, public facilities, and in the media to sensitize the masses—particularly youths—about the risks and impact of drug use and trafficking. Through this practice, demand is reduced by enabling the public through information and provision of tools they can use when making informed decisions.

Community partnership is also at the center of the strategy. Through neighborhood partnerships and community policing, the agencies encourage citizens to report suspicious activity and try to identify and dismantle neighborhood-level drug networks. This neighborhood-level approach is very effective in areas where mainstream law enforcement does not have easy access

Where economic compulsion compels drug activity, alternative development schemes have been implemented. These schemes aim to better the lives of people—such as farmers who grow illicit crops—by enabling them to switch to environmentally sustainable, legal sources of sustenance. This approach recognizes that law enforcement alone will not be effective without also addressing the socioeconomic factors that propel drug cultivation and trafficking, which most frequently lie at their center.

Treatment and rehabilitation are also on the rise, particularly in nations which view addiction as a public health problem. Rather than punishment, diversion programs are increasingly being brought into some criminal justice systems that offer treatment and reintegration programs for non-violent offenders. This is just one aspect of a broader push towards a humane and effective addressing of drug problems.

As trafficking has increasingly gone online, cyber enforcement has become an essential component. End-to-end encrypted messaging apps and dark web marketplaces have created new avenues for the sale of illicit drugs. Consequently, most nations have created cybercrime units that have pledged to monitor and investigate online trafficking operations, often in cooperation with foreign partners.

## 9. Questions to be Addressed

1. How can drug usage and abuse be prevented and what can be done to reduce its existing effect on people and societies?
2. What measures can be taken in order to detect and prevent illicit drug trafficking in Middle East?
3. Which location and border based solutions can be implemented to prevent drug trafficking?
4. What can be done against drug trafficking organisations in the Middle East in order to reduce their effect on drug trafficking and prevent them from regaining that effect?
5. How can governments collaborate with each other, relevant non-governmental organisations (NGO's) and UN bodies in order to prevent drug trafficking?
6. How can drug utilisation for human trafficking be detected and prevented?

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