**Drug trafficking**

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The writer is a lawyer and human rights activist based in Istanbul According to a report published by the Asia-Pacific Center, threats that are non-military in nature and go beyond borders while threatening the socio-political integrity of a country or those which pose a risk to the health of the people can be termed as transnational security issues, examples of the most important transnational security issues in today’s world include terrorism, infectious diseases, drug trafficking, and human trafficking, among others. Drug trafficking is one of the most complicated transnational organized crimes to exist to date. It has a direct affect on increased local and global crime rate, violence and even has a long standing relationship with terror financing. According to the World Drug Report 2019, there has been a spike in people abusing opioids and over 35 million people around the world are a victim to this use and abuse, which has also led to an increase in deaths caused by drug abuse.

Pakistan is suffering from this epidemic on a much larger scale due to a rapidly growing population, increasing poverty, astronomical illiteracy levels, and lack of infrastructure for prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of drug users.

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The growing drug production in Afghanistan continues to impact the population in Pakistan, due to which Pakistan has begun to face a new wave of heroin addiction among the youth, especially because of the high levels of addictiveness, ease of access, and low prices of the said drug. The failure of national and global efforts to curb the trafficking of opioids has resulted in increased levels of HIV and hepatitis C cases most of which prove to be fatal. The need of the hour is enhanced cooperation and effective communication amongst all the countries especially those facing a serious drug problem. New challenges have appeared due to the introduction of newer and stronger drugs in the market, globalization is a blessing for many but has had adverse effects on drug trafficking since it has not only made it easier for drugs to be sold across borders but the introduction of crypto currency such as bitcoin has made it easier to finance this business. The availability of all sorts of drugs on the dark web has made it easier for customers to buy any illegal drugs from one part of the world and get it delivered to another part without being traced. There has been a surge in worldwide users of injectable drugs, 1.4 million of which suffer from HIV &amp; AIDS, and 5.6 million are currently suffering from Hepatitis C. Criminal opportunities thrive in vulnerable situations and patients that have already been infected with any such disease because of drugs, are more likely to die at the hands of either an overdose or lack of medical facilities.

The trafficking of drugs brings along another major issue i.e. terror financing as witnessed in Afghanistan during the Taliban era, the UNSC recognizes this link but many states are facing immense challenges in trying to establish the involvement of terrorist organizations in this illicit business. Drug trafficking is a multi-billion business and even a small portion of drug money has the potential to fund major terrorist attacks and therefore has a direct relationship with the rise in terrorism, the Madrid bombing is a prime example wherein  drugs were  used as a currency in exchange for the dynamite used to carry out the bombing. Therefore, bilateral cooperation and strengthening INTERPOL’s infrastructure is imperative to fight this war. Stricter measures on a local and global level are required to stop local drug producers from the cultivation of drug crops, demolish local labs involved in manufacturing synthetic drugs and accountability of government and LEA officers protecting drug cartels.

Even though the Anti-Narcotics Force in Pakistan has been tirelessly working to eradicate the presence, import, and export of illegal drugs in Pakistan, the country has proven to be one of the hotbeds of illegal substance abuse, production, and supply, especially as a transit destination, which continues to be a major obstacle for the authorities in terms of border management under the umbrella of national security and development. The fact that the amount seized which was on its way to destinations such as UK, UAE &amp; various European countries has drastically increased from 4 tons in 2009 to 32 tons in 2017, definitely speaks out about the effectiveness of ANF and other authorities trying to stop the supply of drugs through and from Pakistan, and is alarming because it may be seen as an arrow pointing towards an increase in the production of drugs.

Due to the advent of globalization it is quite difficult to separate terrorist &amp; criminal elements because of their relationship which seems to be getting stronger, allowing them to export not just drugs but launder money and carry out elaborate terrorist attacks to destabilize targeted regions. However, if criminals can use globalization to their advantage, governments and law enforcement agencies can do the same and strengthen their links with intelligence agencies of other countries, to track and ultimately foil terror attacks fuelled by drug trafficking. The internet itself is a two-edged sword and if the dark web can be used for trafficking, it can also be used to our advantage by increasing surveillance of their activities and strengthening transnational communication and sharing of data and resources to curb this looming threat. A big part of this operation clean up would be the training of law enforcement agency and border management officials not just on a state level but also on an international level, digitizing the sharing of information and data beyond borders through regional cooperation and providing a legal means of earning money to people in areas that are vulnerable to be targeted by non-state elements for the production or supply of drugs, followed by increased awareness amongst the general public not just to report suspicious activity but also about the personal and professional implications of substance abuse.