COUNTERNARCOTICS STRATEGY IN AFGHANISTAN:
FINDING THE KEYS TO SUCCESS THROUGH PAST LESSONS LEARNED

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ABSTRACT

This paper will discuss interdiction, public education, and eradication programs as they relate to its overall counternarcotics strategies in Colombia, Guatemala, Bolivia, and Afghanistan (1980). The premise for the underlying research is that lessons learned from these efforts can help governments develop successful counternarcotic strategies in countries such as Afghanistan today. Although much has been written about current eradication programs in Afghanistan, very little research has been done on evaluating the potential overall effectiveness of the counternarcotics programs in historical and comparative perspective. Interdiction efforts in particular receive less attention and public information campaigns are rarely discussed. This paper intends to provide a first step in addressing all these gaps.
The research and writing of this thesis
is dedicated to those who work tirelessly
to combat the narcotics trade.

With respect,
ALISON E. LEARY-MILLER
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"Controlling drugs in Afghanistan will not solve all of the country’s problems, but the country’s problems cannot be solved without controlling drugs."

Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)¹

The counternarcotics mission is a difficult fight, and perhaps nowhere more so than in Afghanistan. The lack of security, state-run institutions, economic development, and the ongoing war hamper the focus and effectiveness of counter-drug programs. After many years of effort to combat the cultivation of poppy—the plant from which opium and heroin is derived—connections among the illicit drug economy, insurgency, crime, and terrorist elements persist. The Taliban, a staunch opponent of the United States and allied forces, profits immensely from the sale of opium. In turn, these profits help to drive the insurgent activity that stunts development and peace efforts in Afghanistan.

Crafting a counternarcotics strategy in the midst of an insurgency is a particularly complex challenge. The case of Afghanistan is further complicated by the ties between the opiate industry and terrorist activities.² Former CIA Director George Tenet warned the Senate Intelligence Committee in 1999 that the Taliban’s profits from the opium trade made their way to bin Laden and other insurgents “to support their

campaign of terrorism.” In this way, battling the illicit drug economy in Afghanistan can be considered to be synonymous with fighting terrorism. The complexity of the situation has generated a multifaceted approach, designed to target the opiate industry on several levels. This approach is based on Afghanistan’s “eight pillar” strategy that includes public information campaigns, alternative development, elimination/eradication, interdiction, law enforcement/justice reform, international and regional cooperation, institution building, and reduction in demand.

Yet the very complexity of the problem and its “eight pillar” solution have made the counternarcotics strategy in Afghanistan an easy target for critics. Some experts have argued that eradication of poppy production may be doing more harm than good; others have even suggested legalizing the drug trade. In October 2007, a report by Air Force Lt. Col. John A. Glaze of the U.S. Army’s Strategic Studies Institute. Glaze said that counternarcotics policy would not be successful because of a lack of security in the country and an over-emphasis on eradication programs. Vanda Felbab-Brown of the Brookings Institution, author of Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs, joins Glaze in this view, arguing that eradication programs are a waste of time.

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6 Each of the works referenced in this section are included in the bibliography.
7 Released in November 2009. Felbab-Brown has issued multiple reports with a similar outline to that of Lt. Col. Glaze, including her 2005 work entitled “Afghanistan: When Counternarcotics Undermines
and money, and actually detract from counternarcotics efforts. She mainly discusses eradication and development programs and has not specifically addressed the public information campaigns that are part of the current policy in Afghanistan. Generally speaking, the effectiveness of public information campaigns has received little to no attention from scholars.

Although much has been written about eradication programs in Afghanistan, very little research has been done on evaluating the potential overall effectiveness of the counternarcotics programs in historical and comparative perspective. Interdiction efforts in particular receive less attention and public information campaigns are rarely discussed. This paper intends to provide a first step in addressing all these gaps.

A Framework for Analysis

In this paper I will compare three of the current counter-opiate programs in Afghanistan—interdiction, public information campaigns, and eradication—with case studies of previous counter supply programs for similar agriculturally derived narcotics.

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Counterterrorism; her 2006 work the “Intersection of Terrorism and the Drug Trade;” and the October 2009 report entitled “U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy in Afghanistan.”

8 Much of the data available about the effects of counternarcotics programs is provided by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the State Department. While these sources are helpful to scholars interested in this topic, reports issued by these organizations are not entirely “independent” because they are also implementing the same policies that they are evaluating. As time goes on, these sources will remain important fountains of information, but would also be better balanced with reporting from other organizations and even journalists.

9 Some independent information is starting to become available, albeit with some controversy. The journalist Gretchen Peters published a book in 2009 entitled Seeds of Terror: How Heroin is Bankrolling the Taliban and Al Qaeda, along with a report issued by the United States Institute for Peace entitled “How Opium Profits the Taliban.” Peters conducted polls with Afghani citizens, collecting information across the country on topics such as attitudes towards the Taliban and reasons why farmers grow poppy plants as opposed to licit crops.
such as cocaine, in Guatemala, Bolivia, and Afghanistan (since 1980). This paper will not consider demand reduction programs because there are a lack of historical examples and case studies with enough data to fairly evaluate success, failure, and lessons learned. Alternative development, law enforcement/justice reform, international and regional cooperation, and institution building are also not evaluated in this paper because they are instruments of larger policies—that is, their use is arguably not solely dedicated for the counter-drug mission. Therefore, alternative development, law enforcement/justice reform, cooperation, and institution building may have merit for larger reasons, such as helping to boost the Afghan economy, root out rampant corruption, and establish mechanisms to better prosecute narcotics traffickers. I will therefore treat these four “pillars” as unalterable features of the counterdrug effort for the purposes of this study—if Afghan policy in the future omits these policies, the conclusions of this paper will have to be revisited.

For example, alternative development programs help farmers grow viable alternatives to poppy and provide the infrastructure needed to irrigate, grow, harvest, store, and transport alternative crops. The program also aims to open up credit and lending markets to farmers so that they can acquire equipment or land and expand their business. According to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), “cash-for-work” programs have also provided salaries to Afghans willing to
work on labor intensive projects, such as building irrigation canals, totaling approximately $37 million dollars to 300,000 rural workers between 2002 and 2008.\(^9\)

Similarly, the pillars of law enforcement/justice reform and strengthening state institutions work hand-in-hand to root out rampant corruption in Afghanistan. These two elements of Afghan policy will be vital to bringing drug traffickers to justice and holding them accountable for their actions. Afghan politicians believe that building institutional capacity for the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Education will also yield positive counter-drug effects.\(^11\) Under these programs, a new counternarcotics law went into effect in December 2005 that sought to clarify the “procedures for investigating and prosecuting major drug offenses.”\(^12\) The U.S. has also encouraged Afghan officials to learn how to better collect evidence and build stronger cases in order to bring traffickers to justice. A Criminal Justice Task Force (CJTF) was created for this purpose. The United States Department of Justice (DOJ) helps to provide training and mentoring to CJTF staff. Over time, the State Department is hopeful that the program will contribute to better handling of complex cases.\(^13\)

Likewise, international and regional cooperation will be an important key to success for counter-drug programs in Afghanistan. The country’s drug problem has spilled across the porous borders into Pakistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and

\(^12\) Blanchard, “Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy,” 43.
Turkmenistan—all of these countries now have significant problems with heroin trafficking. This drug trafficking activity further serves to corrupt “bordering countries’ political systems with large amounts of narco-money.” As a result, the countries in the region must work together to combat the drug problem; a failure in this regard may result in a shift of drug trafficking activity to the areas with the least security. In any case, interdiction, public information campaigns, and eradication policies are often controversial and therefore merit more intense investigation than other components of counternarcotic strategies. Proponents of eradication justify these programs by arguing that such policies combat the agricultural inputs before they can be harvested and turned into narcotics—drug traffickers will not be able to obtain the raw goods necessary to make their illicit goods. Others believe that forced eradication programs serve as a powerful deterrent to farmers, who stand to lose their crops and their income. Supporters of eradication programs also believe they are justified because the government is simply enforcing laws which ban narcotics.  

However, eradication programs have also caused unintended consequences. Farmers who feel they have few options can be pushed towards groups like the Taliban, who offer assurances of protection from government or military enforcement. Economic arguments can also be made for why eradication programs do not work. If the government carries out forced eradication in one area, farmers can grow illicit crops in another area. If the supply of the crop decreases, farmers will be able to charge a

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higher price for what they are able to cultivate. Increased profit margins may entice farmers to grow more of the same crop or even pull new farmers into the industry… and the vicious cycle continues. Indeed, the research for this paper will show why interdiction and public information campaigns, which are also controversial, are more likely to be successful than eradication policies.

**Afghanistan- A Case Study in the Extreme**

Before analyzing the effectiveness of counternarcotics tools, it makes sense to explore the conditions in which these tools are being used: the Afghan context. These conditions, many of which will not be replicated in the cases we will use for comparison, limit the extent to which the conclusions of this study can be considered by those shaping practicable recommendations for policy. For example, two factors that can influence the effectiveness of counternarcotics programs are the relative security of a country and the economy. In Afghanistan, both of these elements are a huge hurdle for policymakers to overcome. There is very little security across the country and Afghanistan’s economy is one of the poorest in the world. Afghanistan’s stability in the future may be largely dependent on the drug trade, specifically opium production, because the “growing opium trade is threatening to destabilize the Afghan government and turn the conflict-ridden country back into a safe haven for drug traffickers and terrorists.”

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Indeed, the best counternarcotics policies cannot make up for a lack of security, which is a vital component of the drug equation in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{18} The case studies for this paper will demonstrate that aid and counternarcotics policies had more success when workers were not constrained by security concerns. Once security can be established, counternarcotics policies could be implemented across a wider area and thus be more effective. For example, current counter-drug programs are currently hampered by the Taliban’s violent retaliation against those who agree to accept Western assistance. Farmers have been murdered and their homes raided—a clear disincentive for other Afghans to agree to work with international partners.\textsuperscript{19} The relationship between counternarcotics and security is symbiotic and “in the most conflict prone areas, [the] relationships between narcotics producers, traffickers, insurgents, and corrupt officials can create self-reinforcing cycles of violence and criminality.”\textsuperscript{20} A secure countryside will pave the way for development projects, real alternatives for development, and citizens who may be less afraid to cooperate with Afghan government and allied partners.

With respect to the economic challenge, opium is Afghanistan’s “single most valuable product and its only significant export other than labor, [it constitutes] the backbone of the country’s economy in its current condition.”\textsuperscript{21} During the past two

decades, the “production, refining, and trafficking of opium has funded conflict and insecurity in Afghanistan and the surrounding region…and continues to do so today.”

The trade also contributes to the country’s fragile economy. As of 2007, total revenue from producing, processing, and trafficking opium totaled an estimated $4 billion dollars and accounted for 53% of Afghanistan’s gross domestic product (GDP). A 2006 UNODC study concluded that a mere 24% of the industry proceeds make their way to Afghan farmers, while the remaining “76% of the income goes to traffickers and heroin refiners.” In turn, some of this revenue is diverted to so-called “security providers,” and corrupt government officials who profit from the trade. As a result, the country’s economy is arguably more dependent on the illegal drug trade than any other country in the world, surpassing both that of Myanmar and Colombia.

**Reviewing History: Can Interdiction, Education, and Eradication Work?**

The interdiction, public information campaigns, and eradication programs proposed for Afghanistan are comparable to previous counternarcotics campaigns in Colombia, Guatemala, Bolivia, and Afghanistan. Colombia is an interesting example because it was also fighting an insurgent group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of

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22 Rubin, “Road to Ruin,” 2.
Colombia (FARC) as all three policies were being implemented. All of the countries used for this analysis lack, security, infrastructure, and government institutions. This comparison can help illuminate why some policies have been successful and why others have failed.

**Interdiction**

Interdiction programs in Afghanistan are designed to identify and track high value targets (HVTs), or the main players in the drug trafficking community—particularly in areas that are the most troubled, like Nangarhar Province. Facilitated by agents from the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), the goal is to prohibit mass shipments of drugs and money moving across the northern border of Afghanistan into Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Additionally, those suspected of connections to the Taliban and terrorist activity are given priority. Most of these HVTs are concentrated in the Kandahar, Nimruz, and Helmand provinces.²⁵

DEA has stated that a successful interdiction program must include training and equipment for the Counternarcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNPA). The United States is providing CNPA with training on investigation techniques, operational tradecraft, methods for better prosecuting HVTs, and for publicizing successful operations. DEA has also stressed the importance of providing a security detail so that CNPA forces can carry out interdiction operations in areas that have traditionally been too dangerous to

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work. As Felbab-Brown stated in her testimony to the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, “a well-designed interdiction program will further complement the counternarcotics, counterinsurgency, stabilization, and state-building efforts by helping to establish a rule of law.”

Yet experiences elsewhere suggest that there are other keys to a successful interdiction campaign. In fact, a review of programs in Colombia and Guatemala suggest four additional factors are essential: eliminating dependence on foreign intervention through adequate local funding, the mobility and agility of local counter-drug operatives, regional cooperation, and good intelligence support. These four factors played key roles in the interdiction operations in Plan Colombia from 2001 to 2008 and in Operation Cadence in the 1990’s.

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28 Plan Colombia was implemented on July 13, 2000 and was one of the largest counterdrug and counterinsurgency campaigns in history. Interdiction programs were one of the key components of Plan Colombia’s counternarcotics strategy. From the outset of this comprehensive effort in 2001, a large amount of funds were reserved for interdiction efforts. In the first year of the program, nearly $130 million was allocated to upgrade radar systems, Colombian aircraft, air interdiction initiatives, riverine interdiction, and funds to bolster the “Colombian navy’s counternarcotics intelligence infrastructure.” Data taken from U.S. Department of State, “Fact Sheet: Plan Colombia.” (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State, March 14, 2001). Document can be accessed online at http://merln.ndu.edu/archivepdf/colombia/State/1042.pdf.
29 In an attempt to stop the transit of cocaine into the U.S., policymakers worked with Central American governments in the early 1990’s to establish a strategic interdiction program called Operation Cadence. A 1994 U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) report stated that U.S. Customs and Border Protection estimated that two-thirds of the cocaine consumed in the U.S. entered the country by crossing over the Mexican border. The study was unable to estimate how many tons of cocaine came through Central America, but State Department estimates indicated that nearly 70 tons transited Guatemala. As a result, the country soon became “the focus of U.S. interdiction efforts in the region.” In 1993, $56.5 million was allocated for counternarcotics programs in Central America. Of that amount, $48 million funded interdiction programs. Please see GAO, “DRUG CONTROL: U.S. Counterdrug Activities in Central America.” (Washington, D.C.: General Accounting Office, 1994) 1.
The problem of local funding is often overlooked when external resources are initially plentiful, resulting in an ongoing dependence on other countries for aid. The interdiction programs in both Colombia and Guatemala were highly dependent on the United States for funding, administration, and training due to a severe lack of each country’s own resources. Despite the substantial aid from the United States for Plan Colombia, the Colombian air force, navy, and marines still lacked sufficient resources to thoroughly patrol the country. For example, as of 2008 the Colombian marines were only capable of monitoring “one-third of Colombia’s nearly 8,000 miles of navigable rivers.”30 The Guatemalans faced similar challenges and did not have the resources to carry out interdiction programs without assistance.31

Plan Colombia’s Air Bridge Denial program (ABD)32 was implemented to improve the Colombian government’s ability to “identify, track, and force suspicious aircraft to land in the hopes that law enforcement authorities could take control of the

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31 Although interdiction succeeded in shutting down shipments of cocaine by aircraft in the targeted areas where Colombia and Guatemala forces were able to patrol, in many cases the traffickers were able to circumvent the policy by moving their drugs along different flight paths that government forces were unable to control.
32 The ABD program successfully reduced the number of suspected flights travelling through Colombian airspace from 637 in 2003 to just 84 in 2007, which was seen by U.S. and Colombian officials as a positive development. However, the program’s charter was to track and seize the airplanes, their operators, and the narcotics on board the aircraft—a scenario which rarely occurred. Only three planes were forced to land during 2007 and each time no cocaine was found on board. In response to changing tactics of drug traffickers, in 2007 ABD was expanded to include surveillance of the Colombian coastline. During that same year, the maritime patrol component of ABD only interdicted 11 metric tons of cocaine and led to the arrest of seven people. Data taken from GAO Report “Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved; U.S. Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance” 37.
aircraft, arrest suspects, and seize drugs.”33 In addition to technical assistance with advanced radar systems, the United States provided the Colombians with “seven surveillance aircraft, which monitor Colombian airspace for suspicious traffic, infrastructure support at four ABD bases located across Colombia, contract aviation maintenance support, training, ground and air safety monitors, and funding for spare parts and fuel.” The United States also trained Colombian air force personnel on safety and maintenance procedures in the hope that the program could eventually be taken over by the Colombians, thereby reducing the need for U.S. assistance. However, at the time GAO released a progress report on Plan Colombia in 2008, U.S. policymakers had not yet proposed a plan to turn the program over to their Colombian counterparts.34

The lack of funds also hampered success in Operation Cadence. The presidents of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama came together at a conference in 1993 to pledge a “commitment to develop specific regional counterdrug programs within 6 months,” but still had not taken steps to do so more than one year later. As a result, Operation Cadence was highly dependent upon U.S. personnel and resources for all operations. None of the Central American countries possessed “the technical, financial, or human resources necessary to run an efficient drug interdiction program.”35 For example, Honduras did not have sufficient naval

33 Between 2003 and 2008, the State Department allocated $62 million for this program. GAO “Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved; U.S. Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance” 36.
resources to patrol their 400-mile coastline. At the time a GAO report was issued on Operation Cadence in 1994, the Honduran Counternarcotics police suffered from a lack of funding and all four ships that were allocated for counternarcotics patrols were inoperable due to lack of funds.\textsuperscript{36}

Second, with respect to mobility, the interdiction units that were the most agile experienced the highest level of success. Land-based interdiction operations carried out by the “Junglas”—an elite Colombian Police unit—had more success than the air-based programs in Colombia and Guatemala. The Junglas were comprised of about 500 elite offers and 60 instructors. While small, the unit was well trained, equipped, and effective. A statement from the U.S. Embassy in Bogota hailed the group as “one of the best trained and equipped commando units in Latin America.”\textsuperscript{37} Due to their unique capabilities, the unit was often selected to travel to remote locations to track high value targets and destroy drug laboratories. The United States helped to outfit the unit with advanced equipment that was “typically provided to U.S. Army Special Forces teams” and rigorous training.\textsuperscript{38} The Junglas successfully interdicted 64 tons of cocaine during 2006 and 2007. A State Department report indicated that they also destroyed “half of all the hydrochloric and coca base laboratories destroyed by the National Police” during that same time period. Junglas units that were stationed at Colombia’s main airports

\textsuperscript{36} GAO, “DRUG CONTROL: U.S. Counterdrug Activities in Central America” 5.
\textsuperscript{37} GAO, “Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved; U.S. Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance” 44.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
and maritime ports seized another 35 metric tons of cocaine in that same two year period.\textsuperscript{39}

Third, regional cooperation was also important in Guatemala. Without coordination in Central America, Operation Cadence only succeeded in shifting the movement of cocaine to areas that counternarcotics officers were unable to patrol. For example, drug traffickers changed their route to fly over the jungle area along the Panamanian-Colombian border which was not patrolled. DEA also believed that the traffickers began to use flight paths that were commonly used for legitimate air travel across the region, thus making the illegal flights less noticeable to law enforcement.\textsuperscript{40}

Counter-drug forces in Guatemala were challenged by the scale of the interdiction operations that they had to undertake and the lack of coordination with neighboring governments kept Operation Cadence from establishing an effective blockade.

The lack of regional cooperation was one of the main reasons why Operation Cadence was not effective. Not only were the Central American countries unable to pool their counter-drug resources, but the countries also suffered from a lack of trust that was required to plan or execute joint operations and training programs. For example, Honduras would not allow Guatemalan aircraft to cross over its border for counternarcotics flights. Belize placed similar restrictions on helicopters owned by the State Department because they were equipped with machine guns. In another example, Operation Cadence efforts were stalled for a year after Belize would not permit counter-

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 45.
\textsuperscript{40} GAO, “DRUG CONTROL: U.S. Counterdrug Activities in Central America” 2.
drug officers to cross the border with M-16 rifles.\textsuperscript{41} However, it is also fair to argue that even if there had been some regional cooperation, none of the Central American countries possessed “the technical, financial, or human resources necessary to run an efficient drug interdiction program.”\textsuperscript{42}

Fourth, good intelligence support was essential to conducting successful operations. Given the large areas that they needed to patrol, Colombian and Guatemalan authorities needed this information to make informed decisions about where to send interdiction teams. Improved intelligence helped the Colombian military to operate in virtually any area of the country, which was impossible prior to Plan Colombia operations.\textsuperscript{43} Strong intelligence support aided these units by helping to focus their operations—information led to good operational planning and the timely seizures of drugs.

For example, through Plan Colombia, the State Department provided funding to the Colombian navy to establish an intelligence center that helped to identify and track leads on suspected narcotics traffickers.\textsuperscript{44} Coastal and riverine interdiction operations in Colombia were a major undertaking because 70 percent of cocaine leaving the country did so by transiting the country’s waterways.\textsuperscript{45} Even so, these programs were successful in interdicting “half of all cocaine seized by Colombia in 2007.”\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, 4.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} GAO, “Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved; U.S. Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance” 34.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 38.
\textsuperscript{45} According to Defense Department estimates. Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, 36.
intelligence unit established by the Colombian navy conducted 35 interdiction operations during 2007 that led to the seizure of nine metric tons of cocaine, the arrest of 40 narcotics traffickers, and detainment of 21 maritime vessels. The U.S. Embassy in Bogotá stated that this specialized unit was responsible for “over 95 percent of all Colombian navy seizures in the Caribbean, forcing traffickers to rely more on departure sites along the Pacific Coast and areas near Venezuela and Panama.”

Intelligence support in Operation Cadence helped to increase the amount of cocaine interdicted by the program with each passing year by specifically targeting drug aircraft that landed inside of Guatemalan borders. Between 1991 and 1994, Operation Cadence interdicted 29 metric tons of cocaine. After a string of “six consecutive successful interdiction operations during the June to September 1993 period, traffickers [sic] avoided Guatemala and no suspected trafficking flights [were] detected entering the country between October 1993 and March of [1994].” As a result, the number of seizures declined as the program continued. Eighty-four flights were successfully detected across Central America in 1992, but decreased to only 25 in 1993. As a result, the initial success only proved to be temporary and caused some unintended consequences. Drug traffickers changed their tactics “to different modes of transportation that [were] much more difficult to identify.” In the end, Operation Cadence had little to no impact on the amount of cocaine entering the United States.

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49 Ibid.
Public Information Campaigns

Public information campaigns in Afghanistan are designed to raise awareness of the danger of narcotics and the risks that farmers take by being associated with the industry. The program works in tandem with the Afghan government’s initiative to educate regional “community and religious leaders to support the government’s counternarcotics policies and encourages them to speak out in their communities against drug use and involvement the opium trade.” Techniques include community meetings, and “radio, television, and print media.” The job is difficult because officials must break down cultural and language barriers to deliver messages that will resonate with the population and influence them to change their behavior. The State Department aimed to time the programs with the growing season for poppy, in a way that would convince farmers not to plant poppy, change their mindset, and influence their decision to grow poppy in subsequent years. Officials hope that the programs will decrease poppy yields by 15 percent, but also acknowledge that success would be dependent upon the Afghan government asserting their authority, enforcement by regional leaders, and viable alternatives to farmers to grow other products.

Public information campaigns have been used extensively in U.S. counternarcotics policy. As of 2001, USAID sponsored public information campaigns

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52 Ibid, 32.
in 33 countries across Latin America, Asia, and Eastern European countries.\textsuperscript{53} Despite their wide use, the technique is the least discussed counternarcotics policy examined in this study. This may be due to the fact that educational programs often do not stand alone as a single key policy, but are typically included as one initiative in a larger group of social services. Since Afghanistan marks the first time that policymakers elevated educational programs to a key, stand-alone policy, evaluation of these programs is particularly important.

For this analysis, I drew on examples from Plan Colombia and the Bolivian Coca Lobby, an organization that launched a massive campaign \textit{in support} of coca farmers. The goal in both of the public information campaigns was to provide information to citizens en masse that would eventually mobilize the populace and further the goals of the implementing organization. A review of these cases highlighted three major indicators of success—security and funding, recognition of propaganda’s powerful effects, and preparing for the controversy that education programs may engender.

First, aid workers need ample security to be able to do their jobs well. Public information campaigns are inherently set up for these educators to work directly with the populace that they are trying to influence, making the work labor intensive and potentially dangerous. A 2008 GAO report stated that social programs in Colombia faced “several limitations and challenges” because they were often “limited by security

Workers must be able to safely travel to or live in communities to earn trust and deliver a message that will resonate with the residents.

One of the three main goals of Plan Colombia was to “promote social and economic justice” by targeting “underlying social and economic realities that drive individuals toward the illicit drug trade.” A main strategy of these programs was to send USAID employees to rural areas to work with Colombian farmers directly. The Municipal Level Alternative Development (ADAM) program was developed to provide a mechanism for “training, technical assistance, and financing of community projects. It emphasizes engagement with communities and individual beneficiaries to get their support.”

Interviews of beneficiaries of this program indicated that they believed the overall quality of their lives had improved. Most of the farmers polled indicated that they made less money by growing licit commodities, but that “they faced less intimidation by [the] FARC and had better access to schools and social services.”

If it is safe for aid workers to remain in an area for an extended period of time, they will be more effective—however, doing so will require funding. Moreover, for the program to have widespread effects, governments will have to employ many aid workers to have a wide footprint. Educators and aid workers were not able to freely travel anywhere in the country, and perhaps the areas that had the least security were also the areas that could have benefitted most from assistance. As a result, the 2008

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55 Ibid, 11.
56 Ibid, 49.
57 Ibid.
GAO report concluded that “programs have not demonstrated a clear link to reductions in illicit drug cultivation and production.”58 I would also argue that the policy was not set up for widespread success. Since public information programs were not the focus of a major initiative, funding was limited.

Second, propaganda can be a powerful tool if it resonates with the populace that it is trying to influence. This can be difficult to do. Aid workers have to overcome language and cultural barriers to deliver an effective message. However, messages that can get at the heart of the population’s challenges and offer a solution for a way forward are powerful. The right message can foment change and strengthen the implementing organization’s policies – a point illustrated by the Bolivian coca lobby.

In contrast to the other case studies used for this paper, the Bolivian coca lobby was a group that supported the production of coca plants.59 The Bolivian coca lobby held a general distaste of law enforcement and counter-drug officials. Members of the lobby made a habit of using media outlets to spread their messages and propaganda to wide audiences. Their information campaign had wide reaching effects and was successful with its mass mobilization tactics. The Bolivian government often found itself on the defensive, being forced to respond to the lobby’s propaganda.

58 Ibid, 47.
59 Information from this section derived from a March 24, 2010 class discussion on Rensselaer Lee III’s book White Labyrinth: Cocaine and Political Power (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989). Discussion moderated by Georgetown Professor Marisabel Villagomez in her Illicit Economies and Security class. During the 1980’s, this thriving “coca lobby” was designed to represent the interests of coca growers or “cocaleros.” Cultivation of the coca plant was legal in Bolivia, where it obtained social legitimacy through the use of the plant in different ways than as a base for cocaine—chewing the raw leaves of a coca plant is said to stave off hunger and fatigue, as well as serve medicinal purposes for those suffering from circulatory and intestinal ailments.
One example of the coca lobby’s influence occurred in June 1988 in the village of Villa Tunari, the administrative base for U.S. counternarcotics programs in Bolivia. An unpopular coca bill supporting eradication efforts was about to pass in the Bolivian Congress, and in response an estimated 4,000-5,000 coca growers descended on Villa Tunari in protest and took control of the town. Narcotraffickers told the lobby that the Bolivian government and its U.S. partners intended to start testing new herbicides for aerial eradication programs. The protestors demanded to see evidence that either supported or refuted the claims. Bolivian police sought to diffuse the mob with force and as many as 16 peasants died in the process. After the incident, the coca lobby used Villa Tunari as a “cause célèbre” which triggered a temporary halt in eradication programs and served as a launching point for countless “protests and sympathy strikes throughout the country.”

The coca lobby in Bolivia proved to be successful because it was able to fight against government programs to curtail coca plant production. The lobby’s information campaigns and propaganda helped to make eradication programs in Bolivia a dismal failure. Lobbyists played to the public’s inclinations of social acceptance for the plant, which provided an easy rationalization for its growth. The Bolivian case demonstrated that it is often easier to play to people’s tendencies than it is to get people to modify their behavior. This tendency most likely accounts for much of the success

61 Although the lobby stated that they did not support illicit uses of coca plants, the reality was that Bolivia produced 10 times the amount of coca needed to fulfill legitimate uses. Moreover, during this same time period there was a shortage of coca leaves for legal use—farmers that grew coca plants made more money by selling the leaves to those involved in the narco-trade.
that the coca lobby had in Bolivia. The group helped to legitimize something that was already engrained within the culture—but with their effective use of mass media, the lobby successfully mobilized coca growers in Bolivia.

Third, policymakers should realize that some educational programs will be met with controversy and should take care to evaluate the progress of the initiative. Controversy can stem from a lack of understanding about the implementing organization’s objectives, or having a different world view. In order to support these policies, governments should carefully evaluate the programs for effectiveness as a way to justify their existence.

For example, Plan Colombia’s educational programs for demobilized insurgents angered some Colombians who believed that the government should have prosecuted these former insurgents for their crimes. Instead, the government provided amnesty, basic living expenses, and an opportunity to receive a free education. As of 2008, the Center for Peace and Reconciliation based in Medellin worked with nearly 5,000 young men—80 percent of the men had never finished high school and 10 percent were illiterate. The goal was to open up avenues to jobs that could provide the former soldiers with a fair living, thus providing a disincentive to return to crime or gangs.\(^62\) Statistics are not yet available to determine the success of these programs. True indicators may not be available for several years, until demobilizing members of these units have placed themselves firmly into mainstream society or returned to the ways of

\(^62\) Kenneth Fletcher, “Colombia Dispatch 10: Education for Demobilized Forces.” (Smithsonian.com, October 29, 2008).
their violent past. In the meantime, the controversy surrounding the program will continue, though probably with less intensity than that surrounding eradication programs.

**Eradication**

Eradication programs were considered to be a key, yet controversial part of the Afghan counternarcotics strategy. The majority of eradication efforts have been carried out mostly by hand.\(^{63}\) Aerial eradication methods were also considered, but policymakers were wary to implement them without the expressed approval of the Afghan government and public information campaigns to educate the populace that the sprays would not harm people.\(^{64}\) The United States justified these programs, in part, by the fact that an estimated 75 percent of the poppy that was grown in Helmand province during 2007 was produced by those directly involved with the drug trade. Policymakers stated that the vast majority of the yield from this area was not grown by poor farmers that lacked alternatives—eradication efforts would directly combat the segment of the population that government forces wanted to shut down.\(^{65}\)

Past eradication programs have targeted coca plants, opium, and marijuana across several countries. Eradication efforts have employed a variety of methods,

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\(^{63}\) Forced eradication is the process of removing poppy plants from land without the farmer’s consent or compensation for the lost crops. Negotiated eradication policies—providing farmers compensation in exchange for surrendering his poppy—were tried before, but the pace of operations was slow and policymakers believed that negotiations that provided farmers with some compensation did not effectively deter them from planting the crop in the future.

\(^{64}\) Schweich, “U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan” 52.

\(^{65}\) Ibid, 53.
including the removal of plants by hand, machine, or spraying pesticides from aircraft. To help facilitate aerial eradication programs, the United States provided partner countries that produce plant-derived narcotics “with chemical herbicides, technical assistance and specialized equipment, and spray aircraft” to carry out the eradication mission. The goal of these programs was to reduce the amount of the inputs for agriculturally-derived narcotics at the source, such as opium and cocaine, so that the plants cannot later be harvested and processed into a narcotic.66

Plan Colombia and the Taliban’s eradication decree in Afghanistan represent two different examples of eradication policy. However, both examples demonstrated two common requirements for success: first, that farmers have viable alternatives to provide for their families and second, that farmers be unable to circumvent eradication efforts.

First, with respect to farmers’ alternative livelihoods, Plan Colombia’s eradication program67 was backed with alternative development programs that

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67 Between 2000 and 2008, Plan Colombia dedicated more than $921 million to the Colombian National Police Aerial Eradication Program and the National Police Air Service eradication programs. Eradication did not have the desired effect of reducing cultivation, production, and distribution of cocaine by 50 percent. The Aerial Eradication Program provided U.S.-owned aircraft and helicopters to the Colombians that they used for spraying, reconnaissance, and in the event of mechanical failure, search and rescue missions for downed crewmen. Contractors were responsible for helping to run the program from “forward operating locations throughout Colombia.” The Colombian army’s Counternarcotics Brigade also provided ground security assistance for aerial eradication missions. The National Police Air Service program included both aerial and manual eradication initiatives, “as well as airlift support for the manual eradication teams and associated security personnel” and airlift support for the Colombian National Police Junglas. Other key elements of the Air Service program helped to improve the infrastructure of the service’s air base near Bogotá, “the provision of contract mechanics, training,” and other operating expenses. Data taken from Government Accountability Office, “Plan Colombia: Drug
constituted the majority of non-military spending at nearly $500 million between 2000 and 2008. The goal of these programs was to create “sustainable projects that can function without additional U.S. support after the start-up phase is implemented.” Moreover, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) encouraged “long-term, income-generating activities” and “private sector participation,” particularly in areas like southern Colombia where coca fields were more prevalent.

However, Plan Colombia was criticized for not doing enough to bolster human rights or provide “sustainable economic alternatives for drug crop farmers.” In fact, the policies of the Colombian government may have contributed to this viewpoint. A 2008 GAO report concluded that alternative development projects were challenged by a lack of “alternative development projects in areas where the majority of coca is grown” due to the Colombians’ prohibition of “alternative development assistance projects in communities where any illicit crops are being cultivated.” Critics of this policy would argue that the areas with the highest percentages of coca cultivation were where the eradication and alternative development initiatives were needed most.

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68 Eradication was considered by U.S. policymakers to be the key counternarcotics policy in Plan Colombia. GAO, “Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved; U.S. Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance” 1, 46, and 48.
69 Ibid, 48.
In contrast to the mixed results of Plan Colombia’s eradication policy, counternarcotics experts labeled the Taliban’s eradication campaign as one of the most successful anti-drug campaigns in history—but the decree also caused unintended consequences due to the lack of viable alternative lifestyles.\textsuperscript{72} UNODC official Sandeep Chawla commented that “in drug control terms it was an unprecedented success, but in humanitarian terms a major disaster.”\textsuperscript{73} The Taliban had not made any infrastructure improvements or initiated alternative development projects in the country in tandem with forced eradication, which left Afghan farmers without other viable options once the ban was enforced. As a result, many farmers “defaulted on loans or were unable to make it through the winter months without credit and fled to the Iranian and Pakistani border areas.” Others sold off their possessions and even their daughters in an attempt to settle their debts.\textsuperscript{74} Debt collectors would not hesitate to use “intimidation, threats of violence, and even the kidnapping of family members.” Many farmers were unable to pay, leaving them in a precarious position and very unhappy with the Taliban for enforcing a ban.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{72} However, the Taliban’s stockpiled reserves kept drug traffickers in business and the group continued to earn money by taxing those activities. In fact, the Taliban had already “stored enough heroin to maintain their supply of money without new poppy cultivation for many years.” Some observers also began to note that the Taliban “made no effort to seize drug stocks or arrest traffickers.” Opium traders still had a “brisk business” and the Taliban continued to take in tax revenue from the trade, which increased because the price of opium spiked once the ban went into effect. Vanda Felbab-Brown, “The Intersection of Terrorism and the Drug Trade” in The Making of a Terrorist: Recruitment, Training, and Root Causes, Vol. III by James J. F. Forest ed. (Westport: Praeger, 2006) 176-177.


\textsuperscript{74} Peters, Seeds of Terror: How Heroin is Bankrolling the Taliban and Al Qaeda. 94-95.

Second, farmers were able to easily change their tactics to circumvent eradication efforts. Fields of coca and poppy plants were still cultivated, but became much more difficult to find. As a result, it became harder for government officials to locate the fields—and if officials could locate the drugs, they were often moved to areas where eradication efforts would be difficult or impossible due to lack of security or the field’s proximity to legitimate food sources. Because farmers were able to adapt to the eradication measures, the programs were not as effective.

In response to eradication efforts, Colombian coca farmers developed several effective countermeasures that served to undermine eradication efforts. The farmers understood that growing coca was illegal, but many did not stop because they felt they would make less money with substitutes or did not have viable alternatives. For this segment of the population, circumvention of eradication became a way forward to continue their lifestyle. The countermeasures included removing some of the leaves from the plant after they were sprayed, replanting, making their coca fields smaller, planting coca with legal crops to circumvent detection, moving coca fields to areas of the country that could not be sprayed, such as national parkland, and planting coca in remote areas of the country.

Both eradication cases demonstrated that governments are likely to be most successful when backing eradication policies with alternative development programs that can provide viable alternative ways to make a living. Farmers were forced to stop cultivating coca or opium but were not given clear alternatives where they could also earn a profit and be successful, particularly in Afghanistan. The lack of assistance led
farmers in both nations to continue to grow their illicit products in the areas that the
Colombian government or the Taliban did not have control. As a result, the eradication
measures alienated farmers and made them resentful of the policy. In sum, the
eradication programs did not stop farmers from cultivating the coca plant or the drug
traffickers from finding coca, but did increase the cost of doing business.76

LESSONS LEARNED

Shelving hard decisions is the least ethical course.

Adrian Cadbury77

Counternarcotics strategy is particularly complex because it requires a deep
appreciation of the social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics of the countries in
which growers and traffickers work. Interdiction, public information campaigns, and
eradication programs have produced mixed results at enormous expense. Factors such
as security, regional cooperation, economics, and national resources can affect the
outcome of these policies and push them in the direction of success or failure.
Counternarcotics policies for Afghanistan today are no different. In many ways, the
fight against the sale of opium in the country is the most difficult counternarcotics
campaign to date. The great lack of security, government institutions, and resources

76 GAO, “Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved; U.S.
77 Retrieved from the web site World of Quotes. Can be accessed at
will all challenge and strain counternarcotics policies. Even so, this does not mean that the Afghan government and its international partners should give up the fight and declare that nothing can be done to stem the tide of opium flowing from Afghanistan.

A complete approach to the opium problem in Afghanistan—a mix of carrots and sticks—will provide farmers with viable options and deter them from working with the Taliban and narcotics traffickers. The historical case studies for this paper offered some insight into whether or not policymakers are on the right track in Afghanistan. It will likely take a combination of sound, well funded counternarcotics policies and time to see results. The study of past counternarcotics policies and examining what worked, what didn’t, and any secondary effects offers an opportunity to think about the lessons learned and evaluate the chances for success in the future. Based on the research for this paper, three options are available to the Afghan government.

*Interdiction*

Interdiction is hard. It is time consuming and labor intensive. It is also hard to identify and develop the right sources of intelligence to give fair and accurate warning for shipments. However, it can be effective when well trained units are backed with intelligence and have regional cooperation. When officials are able to interdict processed drugs, it causes more financial harm to traffickers than any other point in the supply chain—traffickers already invested the money for raw inputs, chemicals to
process the drugs, and paid for security, storage, and shipment.\textsuperscript{78} Certainly the absence of these programs would give narcotics traffickers more freedom to move their drugs. In the Operation Cadence and Plan Colombia case studies, both interdiction programs greatly reduced the amount of drugs that transited the areas that were patrolled.

Critics of interdiction programs argue that drugs are able to enter the market if an operation fails or drug shipments are missed. Some people believe it is better to focus on lower points of the supply chain to prevent drugs from ever being processed and getting to the point where they could be shipped to another country and consumed. It is true that interdiction operations put a lot of pressure on intelligence and operators to be effective in their jobs. However, successful operations cause more financial damage to narcotics traffickers than targeting the inputs to make a narcotic. Interdiction efforts are aimed at the key segment of the trafficking equation that needs to be shut down—criminals. Afghan farmers are not the segment of the equation that need to be punished because they do not believe in the drug trade, but rather aim to produce a product that can provide their families with a decent means to live.

While interdiction programs are clearly important, so is managing expectations. Even the most rigorous counterdrug campaigns in history will not be able to stop 100% of the opium leaving Afghanistan. Felbab-Brown has argued that seizures of drugs are unlikely to bankrupt the well-funded Taliban. If operations do stop the flow of money,

the effect may only be temporary. Nonetheless, interdiction is an important step in increasing the cost of business to traffickers, law enforcement, and one way to target the Taliban’s finances.

**Education and public information campaigns**

Public information campaigns have received minimal attention compared to other counternarcotics programs. They aren’t “sexy.” They are difficult to measure, further complicated by the fact that most of the assessments of the program are conducted by the same institutions that carry out the policy. It is hard to deliver a message in a way that will resonate and have an effect. Many times, these education programs are rolled up into social services that extend to initiatives such as justice reform, housing, and healthcare. As a result, it is difficult to evaluate the effects of public information campaigns when they are a small part of these larger social development programs.

Effective public education programs coordinate all educational outreach efforts in the country. Felbab-Brown stated that past programs have mainly concentrated on drug awareness and left agricultural education to alternative development programs. Coordination will help to streamline activities and properly allocate funds. Initiatives

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could include the agricultural assistance as previously mentioned with USDA, funding for schools, health and hygiene, and possibly how to make other goods that can be sold at markets. I think it is reasonable to expect that a broader approach would be more successful than limiting programs to the dangers of drugs.

Public education programs are not, however, inexpensive; they depend for their effectiveness on ample funding for the programs and associated metrics, including assessments on whether the programs are well targeted. Current information campaigns in Afghanistan are mostly directed towards educating the populace about the dangers of drugs and that growing poppy is illegal. According to Felbab-Brown, Afghans already know that it is illegal to grow poppy. Farmers that grow poppy generally understand the implicit risks in having an association with the drug trade. Only a few initiatives have had impact. Felbab-Brown cited the “sticky fingers” campaign that was aimed at children who are employed to harvest the resin from poppy. Farmers scrape bulbs of poppy to extract the sticky liquid that is later used to make opium. Children that were working to harvest the resin were licking their fingers and developing an addiction to opiates. The program helped to sensitize and educate farmers about these risks.\footnote{Interview with Vanda Felbab-Brown, Fellow, Foreign Policy, 21st Century Defense Initiative: Brookings Institution. (Washington, D.C.: October 18, 2010).}

Other development and assistance efforts in Afghanistan have seen some success with public information campaigns. Soiseth stated that although 85% of the Afghan population is part of the farming community and generally knowledgeable about how to grow crops, myths still persist. For example, many Afghan farmers
believe that bees will harm flower-bearing trees such as apples and actually detract from their yield. The truth is the exact opposite—farmers that introduce bees into their growing areas may experience a 40 percent growth in yield during the first year. He gave another example in which Afghans refer to moths as “butterflies” and believe that they are sacred, while the insects are doing untold amounts of damage to their crops.83

Past programs suggest but do not conclusively determine that gathering better data on public information campaigns is an important priority for effective counternarcotics programs. Hard data on the effectiveness of these programs is generally not available because previous initiatives only counted education as a small part of a large social services campaign that extends to initiatives such as justice reform, housing, and healthcare.84 Conclusions about the value of these programs and the critical ingredients for their success depend on the future availability of relevant data.

Eradication programs

Given the lack of security in Afghanistan, eradication programs would be likely to create a dispersal effect as seen in Plan Colombia. The country is vast and Afghan government officials will likely be unable to carry out eradication policies in every corner of the country. Production can easily shift to those areas not under control of the government. Even in the case of the Taliban’s very successful eradication program,

83 Personal comments of USDA Employee Gary Soiseth at Georgetown University’s Mortara Center on October 7, 2010 at proceedings entitled “Agricultural Development in Afghanistan and Conflict Zones.”
farmers that resided outside of the Taliban’s area of control were still able to grow poppy. Colombia experienced a similar result, because farmers were able to shift their operations to remote areas that the government could not patrol.

Even though supporters of this policy have pointed to statistics showing that the majority of growers in Helmand are actually drug traffickers and not poor farmers, eradication policies still pose challenges that could prove crippling. Eradication enforcement in areas like Helmand would need intelligence support to help determine which fields belong to traffickers and any potential operations would have to be carried out under dangerous conditions. Traffickers are likely to have better access to weapons to defend fields than the average farmer. Eradication enforcement could quickly become deadly. Other proponents of eradication would argue that the programs prevent the raw materials from entering the market. Traffickers are likely, however to move their fields to another area that is less patrolled by government workers. Additionally, if traffickers lose a percentage of the opium fields it does not cause significant financial damage. The relative inputs of poppy to opium are inexpensive—the product only becomes expensive after it is moved and processed, which is what interdiction efforts target. In sum, since eradication policies have arguably posed the greatest difficulties and risks for past counternarcotics strategies, the conditions in Afghanistan suggest no better prospects for these policies there.
Conclusion

The Afghan government and international partners will likely find themselves needing to confront the security and infrastructure challenges before any of these programs can gain traction. These two challenges feed directly into the complexity of the narcotics problem. When the security situation improves, government workers will be better able to work directly with the populace that they are trying to influence.

Farmers cannot be expected to change their livelihoods without clear cut and reliable mechanisms to do so. Afghanistan’s lack of infrastructure and access to markets will be major challenges for policymakers to overcome, but development projects are necessary and would provide jobs for local workers during construction. Gary Soiseth, a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) employee who works as an agricultural advisor in Afghanistan, recently commented about his experiences in the country at a Georgetown discussion on his work. Soiseth said that USDA programs are helping to introduce and promote apple and apricots as a specialty crop. The agency is working with regional partners to open up markets in Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, and India for farmers to have a market waiting to accept their goods. Soiseth is also working to provide farmers with access to refrigerated storage and cold cellars for storage of their goods. These initiatives are helping farmers to earn a living. The price for one hectare of apples or apricots is a little less than one hectare of poppy, but
Soiseth said that the farmers do not have to deal with the security risks that come attached to growing poppy.\textsuperscript{85}

If security improves, it will also provide the opportunity for more journalists and independent researchers to travel to Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{86} The lack of security has made it difficult to gather data on the effectiveness of counternarcotics programs by independent institutions. Most of the unclassified data available comes from the State Department or UN, which are also in charge of the programs they evaluate. Studies from the GAO also provide insight, but are not necessarily timely enough to respond to changing conditions. Independent organizations that do not have to fight bureaucratic systems may be better positioned to provide data that is more complete and timely.

Interdiction programs and public information campaigns are complex endeavors. Interdiction requires intelligence, manpower, timing, and is especially dangerous in areas that have little security; likewise, public information campaigns must be carefully crafted to facilitate the transfer of knowledge to a sometimes unwilling population. Even so, the nature of both of these counternarcotics initiatives allows for flexibility, in that program workers can respond to changes in the environment. As demonstrated in the case studies, narcotics traffickers will change their tactics to circumvent counternarcotics policy—their tactics will always change more quickly than the overarching policies of a large bureaucracy. The best way forward for Afghanistan may

\textsuperscript{85} Personal comments of USDA Employee Gary Soiseth at Georgetown University’s Mortara Center on October 7, 2010 at proceedings entitled “Agricultural Development in Afghanistan and Conflict Zones.” Mr. Soiseth’s job is to work with Afghan farmers to increase the yields of the crops they produce and help facilitate ways to expand their markets.

\textsuperscript{86} Gretchen Peters and Vanda Felbab-Brown have travelled throughout the country and important insights have come from their work and observations.
be found in counternarcotics policies that can operate under that changing environment, adapt and respond to the changing threat. Interdiction programs develop their operations based on leads and intelligence and are thus designed to gather information and act quickly. Workers for public information campaigns have direct contact with the people and are at the pulse of what is happening in that community. It is readily apparent if something is going well, not working, or the populace is avoiding the aid workers. Based on this feedback, the aid workers can continue their programs or change their tactics.

The case studies used for this paper demonstrate just how difficult the counternarcotics mission can be. Policymakers consider not only the potential success of a program, but also the potential for unwanted secondary effects, which need to be closely monitored. The counternarcotics battle in Afghanistan is a case study in the extreme—little to no infrastructure, lack of state institutions, or security. No matter what policies Afghanistan and allied partners pursue, the timetable will be long and progress may come very slowly. However, progress can be made if counternarcotics programs heed the lessons of the past.
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