



At the Expense of the Country: Multi-level War Economy in Afghanistan and the Implication for Peace

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Abstract:

The present study systematically examines Afghanistan war economy and its impact on the achievement of peace by using the New Wars theory. Several levels of war commercialization in Afghanistan are identified that are at Governmental, non-Governmental, and global levels, each, contributes to the war commercialization in their own ways based on their interests. These levels are interdependent and that disrupting in one level can lead to disruption of the others. Besides, there are two types of commercialization regarding the security situation identified as Business of Security and Business of Insecurity in which the level is introduced. It turned out that such complexity and entanglement could be a serious obstacle for achieving peace in Afghanistan because all the parties have defined their realization of their interest in maintaining the status quo and spreading lawlessness and unrest in Afghanistan, in a way that even influenced their strategic decisions.

Keywords: Afghanistan, War Economy, Peace, Neo-Taliban, Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK).

1.Introduction

Commercialization of war in general means defining the interests in the continuation of that war. Afghanistan, as a war-torn country, is no exception, but it should be remembered that the ways in which this commercialization is carried out might be different from conventional methods in the world, such as buying and selling weapons. In this country,

there are two main conflicting fronts of Neo-Taliban and Coalition, and Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK) as a major newcomer, each of them or their affiliates somehow benefiting from the continuation of the war. However, that senior leaders may have not clearly announced and publicly supported the practices, rather, the nature of this war and the creation

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of intermediary circles on the battlefield may give rise to such interest definitions, and some local commanders or contractors, and multinational companies may consciously or unconsciously practice this. Here it is necessary to give a brief explanation of the choice of Neo-Taliban rather than Taliban.

Neo-Taliban here is literally the actual Taliban but specifically refers to the phase of re-emergence after 2005 and with the death and replacement of Mullah Omar and the arrest or death of local and high-level commanders and their subsequent replacements. This has created a different strategic and narrative approach that was in line with the overall goal, namely the departure of Coalition and the erection of the Islamic Emirate, and adopted different sub-goals and methods. Antonio Giustozzi (2008) has extensively discussed Neo-Taliban, and was regarded by SIGAR as an ongoing 'reform' that turns the group into 'much bigger... worse' while 'their tactics were changing' (2014A; 2014B). Accordingly, this article seeks to identify the levels of war economy in Afghanistan to determine their implications on the possibility of peace; accordingly, the term of Commercialization throughout the article represents the act of defining the economic interest in related topics.

2.Theoretical Framework

The present study confers about the War Economy with respect to the theory of "New Wars" That requires a specific political, economic and military logic. The theory, in particular, is concerned with the continuation of policies, which result in war or contribute to the continuation of it. According to this theory, new motives have emerged for the aforementioned subjects, all of which differ from "Old Wars" that are identity politics, culture, and economics (Kaldor, 2012, p.

218). The identity politics, as well as the economics motives, are considered as the most common factors for the eruption or continuation of New Wars (Dimitiu, 2018). However, it cannot be clearly distinguished, as in many wars, economic self-motivation is seen as a means of sustaining the war to cover the expenses. The purpose of "victory" is therefore changed and oriented to scoring economic or identical gains, which is known as the Mutual Enterprise in this theory (Kaldor, 2013; Kaldor, 2016). In order to continue their economic gains, the parties to the conflict need each other to remain at the war. Hence, an unending war is favorable for the parties to the conflict and therefore victory loses its values.

The theory of New Wars must be considered within the context of globalization but that doesn't mean it disregard the states and sub-states actors, and is meant to be helpful for foreign policy decision, but to emphasize the increasing importance of the link between the global and national levels of the phenomenon and their interactions like economic and political changes which also involve far-reaching changes in organizational forms. According to Kaldor:

"New Wars are the wars of the era of globalization. Typically, they take place in areas where authoritarian states have been greatly weakened as a consequence of opening up to the rest of the world. In such contexts, the distinction between state and non-state, public and private, external and internal, economic and political, and even war and peace are breaking down. Moreover, the breakdown of these binary distinctions is both a cause and a consequence of violence" (Kaldor, 2013).

One of the most important features of these New Wars is the emergence of new

actors that were not previously taken into consideration and paid due attention to. In such wars, we can witness the combinations of networks of actors from Governmental and no-Governmental entities, armed groups, mercenaries, security companies, Jihadists, warlords, guerrillas and others (Kaldor, 2012: 96). Therefore, this context is very much in line with the current situation in Afghanistan. The economic and identity politics of the war in Afghanistan are very strong. After all, the theory of is very appropriate for countries with a failed state (ibid) and Afghanistan is therefore rendered as a failed state. In this sense, the present paper should be regarded as a contribution to the literature of New Wars as well.

3. Neo-Taliban and the Economy

Taliban had merely paid any attention to the economy before 2001, and been mainly financially supported through donations funded from abroad, with little interest in business except opium trade, which is going to be elaborated later. The policy did not last after the fall of Emirate; although there were still costless forces that looked at the war through the lens of Jihad, the introduction of mercenaries cannot be dismissed. Mercenaries mainly consist of unemployed youths, failed by the Tribal system and the Central Government to be provided with job and the sense of being useful (Azamy, 2016); while for Neo-Taliban, it is the matter of cost-efficiency and information security (Giustoz-

zi, 2008, pp. 22-23). To reword, these troops are being temporarily recruited to relax Neo-Taliban from providing care and responsibility toward troops and their families, although Neo-Taliban pay a good salary in comparison to other occupations in the country; from 2009 to 2011, each of Mercenaries have been paid between US\$ 150 to 500 per month while the average annual income was less than US\$ 500 for regular Afghans; the bill vary by region and very depends to the assigned operations. For example, in 2011 Neo-Taliban offered between US\$ 3.000 to 20.000 for suicide bombings, and besides, they can have their share from the overall money that they collect (Peters, 2009; Ackerman, 2010; UNDC: 2011); this makes the actual salary more fluctuant. Besides, the sensitive information is being limited effectively as these troops rarely know other operators and Talibs, rather than the agent with him they are in touch.

These types of troops are dynamic; they once lost faith in Tribal System and Central Government, and there is the possibility to lose faith in Neo-Taliban and join ISK, or maybe any future possible groups, as an answer to repression and frustration caused economics' condition. This is a very good ground to describe the overall condition of the economy in Afghanistan to understand the sense of the turbulence going on.

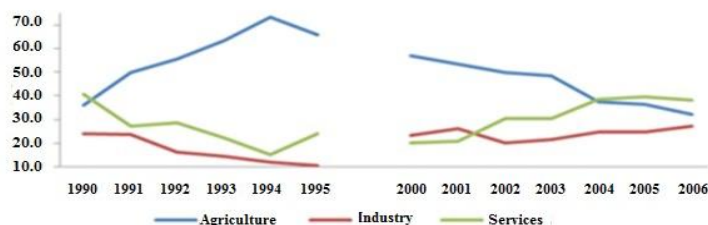


Figure 1. Sector Shares of GDP in Percentage (ICMPD, 2013)

Afghanistan is known as an Agricultural Based Economy. According to Figure1, the country had experienced a developing trend in the economy during 1990-1994. In this period, the Industry had declined severely, neck to neck with Service. To reword, the working forces that used to work in industries and offices had been forced, due to the civil war, to return to farms to make a living. The civil war eventually harmed the farms and the waterways and deteriorated the security needed for a farmer to plan for harvest, which mostly needs a long time to meet. The Agriculture experienced a sharp decline, yet the Service improved due to the prevalence of other unproductive occupations, sometimes

overlaps with the informal economy, like opium trade.

This decline for Agriculture continued to the fall of Emirate. By partial security provided by Taliban, the Industry and Service trends improved to 20% and 30% respectively, until 2001; this period wasn't enough for Agriculture to revive. By the invasion of Coalition, aids poured into the country and improved Service to in 2004, equilibrated with Agriculture. Besides, the already increasing trend of Industry in 2001 boosted to until 2004 and continued to improve. Accordingly, end of 2006, the economy transformed from an Agricultural-Based Economy to Service-Based Economy, thanks to foreign aids.

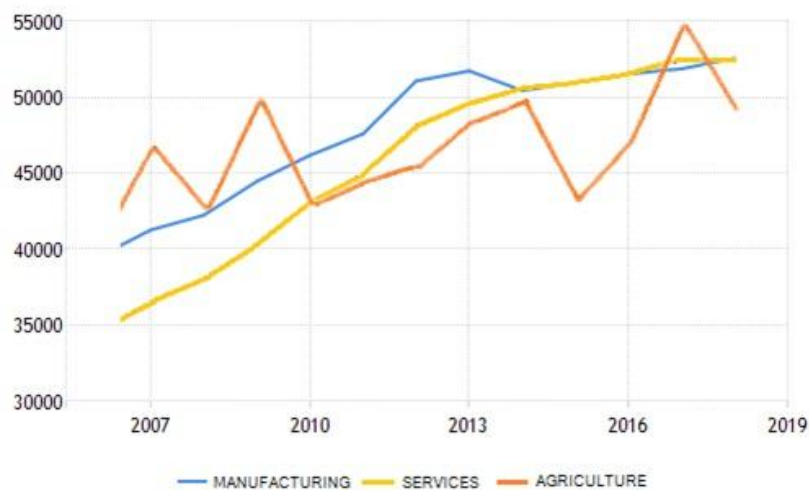


Figure2. Sector Shares of GDP in AFN Million (Trading Economics, 2019)

The same pattern repeats between 2007 to 2019; according to Figure2, whenever the security for Agriculture deteriorates, the Service and Industry experience improvement, but as soon as any improvement in security, agriculture tends to revive. For instance, between 2007 and 2009, traditional Taliban has not yet been revived as Neo-Taliban, or in 2017, there might have been sort of Peace Negotiation or strong performance of Central Government or Coalition in security against Neo-Taliban, by considering the antecedent

event related to the death of Mullah Omar in 2015 and its consequent conflicts over taking Leadership position, resulted in confusion, internal-fraction and undisciplined behavior that loosened the military front of Neo-Taliban until 2017. Not to mention that industries and offices are mostly located in cities yet farms are mostly in villages, and the cities are mostly in the hands of the Central Government and Coalition, but the villages are easily affected or authoritatively disputed by Neo-Taliban.

At the end of the day, Afghanistan is a Service-Based Economy in an unusual way. The country lacks the required preparation to deal with farmers who weren't ready to accept the changes and reskilling for blending in the new market. Although the country experienced economic growth of 11.2% between 2003 to 2011, mostly due to foreign aids (AISA, 2012), literate skilled labor, and the society wasn't ready to abstain from a great deal of the agriculture sector for the good of the Service sector. Therefore, those who live in insecure areas, insecure enough to prevent satisfactory agriculture, may experience deprivation from acquiring suitable occupations, and as a result, may turn into Mercenaries. Not to mention that all of these Mercenaries are not affiliated or under contract by Neo-Taliban, yet there are disperse groups of them using Neo-Taliban name to extort from others (Peters, 2010, p. 32).

4. Opium Trade

Opium is one of the most commonly produced narcotics in Afghanistan (Figure 3).

The origin of the present situation in the country started shortly after the outset of the civil war in Afghanistan. As discussed in the previous section, insecurity caused by war-time induced the collapse of agriculture, and on the side, ranchers have faced termination of the boom due to the destruction of pastures and casualties or confiscation of livestock. At this time, there must have been a strong reason for farmers to take the risk to cultivate anything during the time of insecurity as it is cheap to invest, fast for harvest easy to transport; opium could bring that reason on the table for terrified farmers. Even today the factor remains dominant in the area where poppy cultivation is common (Figure 4). Besides, the lack of sizable local market for covering the costs of cultivating crops rather than opium as well as the on-farm-gate-demands on the product were and still are the strong reasons for preferring opium and in some cases, cannabis, over other crops (Mansfield, 2019).

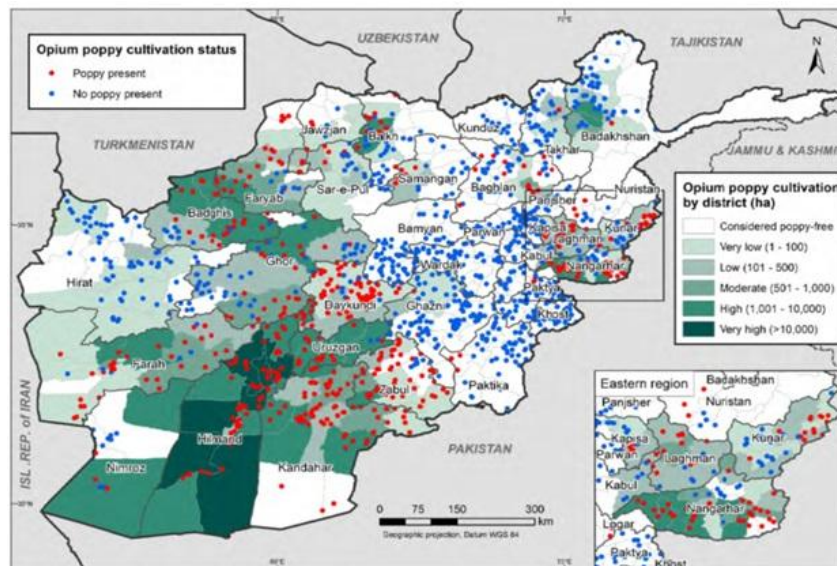


Figure 3. Opium poppy cultivation map of Afghanistan (MCN & UNODC, 2019).

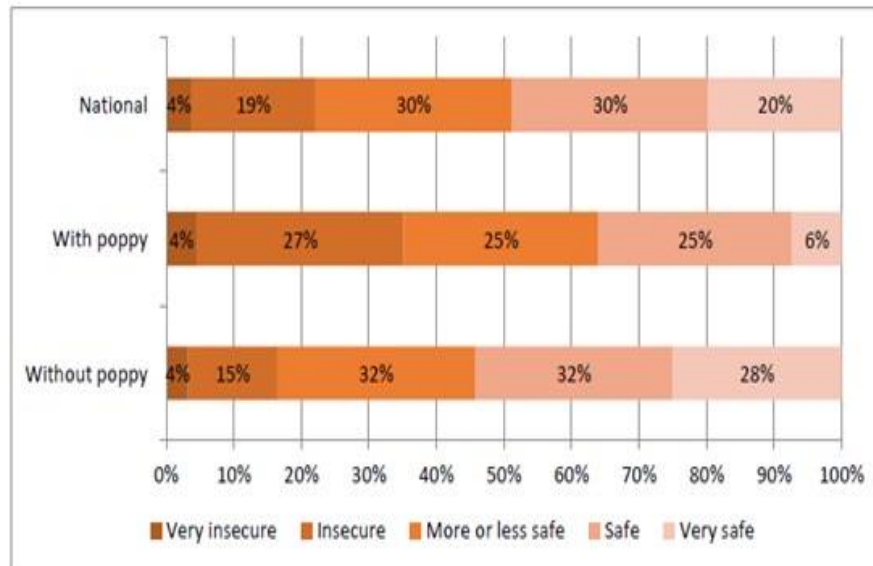


Figure 4. Security assessment of villages and the relation with poppy cultivation; among villages with opium poppy cultivation 31 percent of them considered their village as insecure or very insecure (MCN & UNODC, 2019).

During the civil war, opium was being traded in the country for US\$25 per kilogram, while the price could rise to as high as US\$3000 per kilogram at the borders. According to Graph3, Even today, the cost-efficiency of such drug business is still considerable for all sorts of drugs smuggling from Afghanistan that the farmers, kitchens and cartels can easily pay a good amount of taxes to Neo-Taliban; the total opium market was US\$1.4 billion and the market for the value-added types of opium (such as Heroin base, morphine base, methamphetamine, and heroin hydrochloride) were in the range of US\$ 2.6-4.8 billion for total of 9000 tons opium in 2017 and US\$0.6 billion for total of 6400 tons in 2018; the decline in production was complex, yet as examples can be drought and low price of on-farmgate-demand because of 2017 over-cultivation, which in

creased the price of processed narcotics in mid-term, and consequently the revenue of Neo-Taliban (Sahibzada & et al, 2019). The revenue for Neo-Taliban from this business between 2017-2018 was the tax of US\$0.91 to US\$0.95 per kilogram opium and US\$16.36 to US\$17.6 per kilogram heroin from kitchens in Musa Qala in Helmand province; the tax price may fluctuate for other regions (Mansfield, 2019). According to SIGAR (2018), Neo-Taliban benefits from around 20% share of total value of narcotics in Afghanistan for the group, which consists of the profits indirect ownership, fees for transportation and protection, licensing fee to traffickers and Ushr of cultivation, a religious tax imposed on agriculture; although the share is heavily disputable, this 20% share is different from the 'gift' or 'donations' paid by the industry, albeit coerced (Mansfield, 2019).

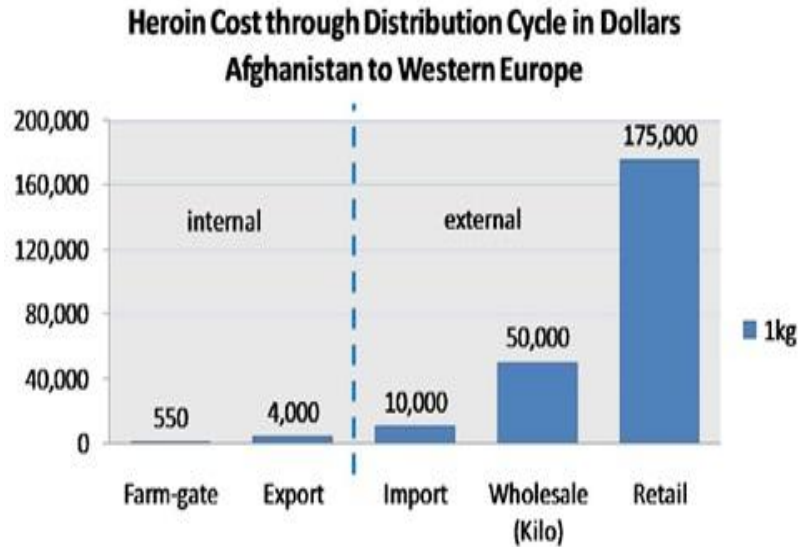


Figure 5. Heroin Cost through Distribution Cycle in Dollar from Afghanistan to Western Europe (Reese, 2009, p. 52). The trend is still applicable as the price of heroin nearly doubles at the borders of the country (MCN & UNODC, 2019). Besides, according to Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs of USA (BINLEA, 2018), the retail price has increased by approximately six-fold since 2008 which is the reflection of higher prices in distribution cycle (look Figure 6).

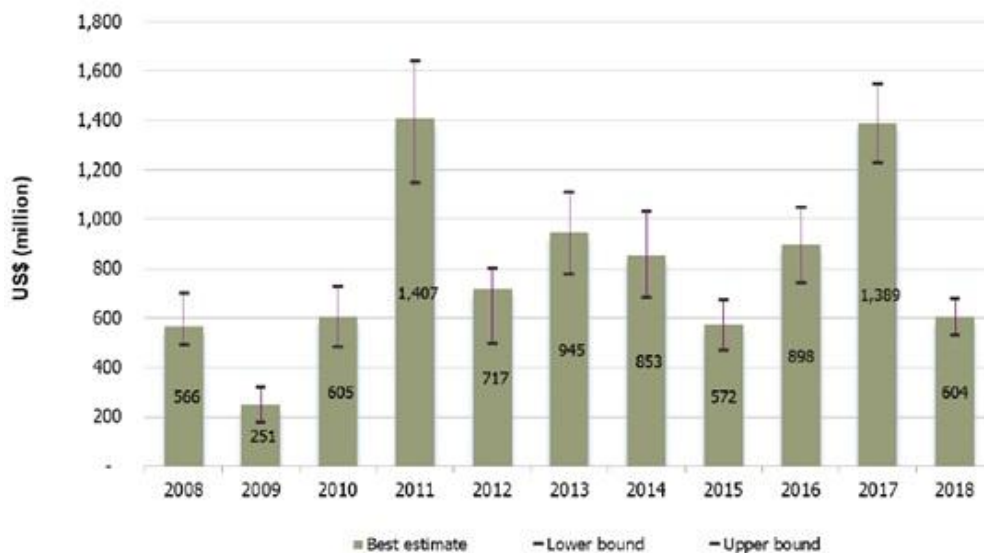


Figure 6. Farm-gate Value of Opium Production in Afghanistan from 2008 -2018 in US\$ million (MCN & UNODC, 2019).

Accordingly, men could transfer the packages to borders to trade-off with basic goods. By this source of income, these traffickers have become known by deprived villagers, especially Pashtuns, as economic 'heroes' who are contributing to the financial wellbeing of their societies since then (Abbas, 2014, p. 174); although this yielded the support of some local rulers and proved to be vital for local economy, that doesn't mean at all that a good deal of money is being paid to the farmers. In fact, the most of their salaries are just

to help them to pay their debts and stand out through rest of the year (Peters, 2009); for instance, according to UNODC (2011), Neo-Taliban, cartels and total population of Afghan farmers had earned US\$115 million, US\$2.2 billion and US\$440 million from the business in 2009, respectively, although the income may become fluctuated considering the sharp fall in the overall opiate economy in 2017-2018 (US\$ 2.2 billion) due to drought (MCN & UNODC, 2019).

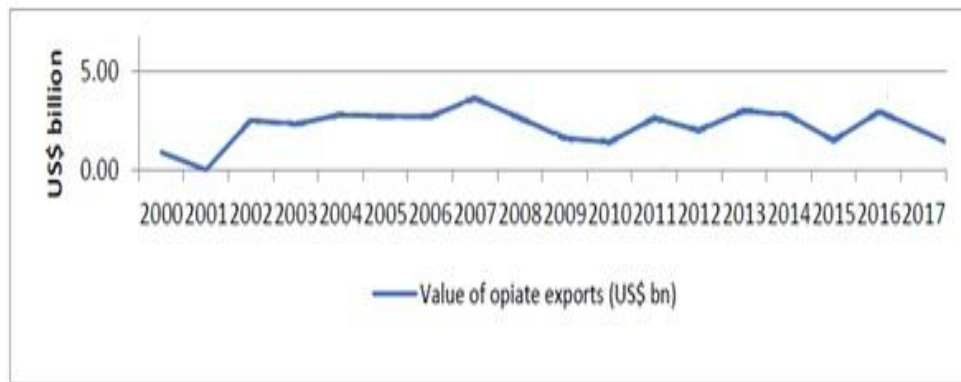


Figure 7. Value of opiate exports from 2000 to 2017-2018 in US\$ billion (MCN & UNODC, 2019).

This had changed life and war since then, during the time, people started to send cash instead of food for Mujahidin and Taliban, which had warmly welcomed by them. Nowadays, these 'heroes' are still important; in 2002, the Central Government destroyed poppy farms with the promise to provide farmers with substitute seeds. The seeds have eventually been sold in the black market by some of the officers and left the farmers empty-handed. Neo-Taliban extended support to these farmers with promise of protection and poppy seeds (Giustozzi, 2008, p. 93). The support resulted in the recruitment of new men, improvement of Neo-Taliban face, increase in Ushr and strengthened ties with cartels. Interestingly, according to UNODC both

the eradication by the Central Government or protection by Neo-Taliban would bear new (Peterson, 2007), although the latter is mainly driven by the need to protect the farms by the farmers than ideological basis (Peters, 2009).

Most of the local societies form an alliance based on the benefits of the tribe or society; this is mostly predominance among Pashtuns (Ahmed, 1980, p. 189) These connections seem to be more important for Neo-Taliban than any financial benefits. The Pashtun majority Neo-Taliban may have a relation with the 'heroes' as a result of marriage or relative ties, though, one cannot easily distinguish them from each other. the muscles of that hero may join Neo-Taliban for mutually beneficial operations, let alone

some may create chaos in name of Neo-Taliban or as mercenaries; According to Giustozzi (2008, pp. 92-94), Neo-Taliban escort the traffickers and instead, receive financial and logistic support; Neo-Taliban benefits from poppy farms and discontentment of farmers regarding the Central Government and the U.S., and cartels benefit from the chaos, enjoying Neo-Taliban services, this is the mutually beneficial business.

The cartels are one of the merchandising side of the conflict who commercialized the war at the local non-Governmental level, in favor of microbusiness; they are in favor of chaos caused by suicide bombing or raids, and consequently distraction of security forces in order to provide the chaotic situation required for transfer of narcotics (Abbas, 2014, p. 171). This, all of all, benefits Neo-Taliban; it is estimated that Neo-Taliban had earned around U.S.\$300 million in 2010 from this economy which constitutes Ushr, taxes on opium traffickers, opium transit vehicles, protection money and operation in territories of Neo-Taliban (Majority Staff, 2010); the value of US\$ 8 to 13 million as Ushr has been collected from the farmers alone in 2018 (MCN & UNODC, 2019).

This mutually beneficial business is not anything but an old cooperation platform, dating back to the years of civil war; Taliban and Mujahidin both were engaged in opium business, yet there was a subtle difference in this regard. Taliban have issued a Fatwa in 1997 by which they banned the consumption of opiates and production of heroin but left the production and trading of opium untouched; this might apparently seem to be religious; there are some reports that in Helmand province, the markets were openly operated even after the Fatwa (Mansfield,

2019). Although another Fatwa issued in 2000 to forbid the total cultivation of poppy, yet again excluded the trading and refineries, this was greatly due growing pressure of the United Nation in this regard and the desperate need of Taliban to be internationally recognized; it was merely a religiously justified act. The 2000 Fatwa resulted in catastrophic consequences on the life of the farmers (Peters, 2009). Unlike the later Fatwa in 2000, the 1997 Fatwa was based on justification that the cultivation may not yield any harm, yet the smoking of opium by westerners would destroy those 'infidels', so they facilitated the trading and even engaged in the business moreover after 2001 when the 'infidels' were so close to being witnessed. Interestingly, the storage made by Taliban helped to fund the group to reorganize and rise as Neo-Taliban later on.

The 1997 Fatwa during the conflict with Mujahidin seems to have a purpose rather than the religious one. Covertly, the main purpose was to disrupt the access of Mujahidin to the financial benefit of the business, by taking the control of cash and opium while the group itself stockpiled opium, besides, Taliban could not deprive itself of the Ushr that the farmers were paying to the group. The shortage abruptly raised the price of opium to as high as US\$ 500 per kilogram (Mansfield, 2019) which was eventually in favor of traffickers and Taliban, as some of Taliban had already stockpiled opium. This had resulted in the birth of cartels that had an interest in the continuation of war; most of these cartels were mostly consist of Pashtun 'heroes', local muscles and rulers who had also helped Taliban to overthrow the Mujahidin Government, for their cause and competition with northern traffickers.

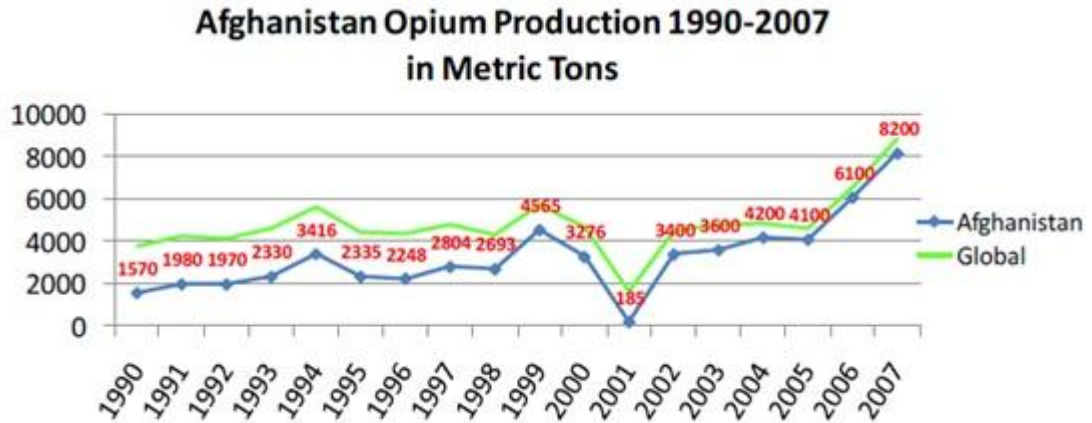


Figure 8. Afghanistan Opium Production 1990-2007 in Metric Tons (Reese, 2009:49). The production sharply decreased in 2001 to curtail Mujahidin income, yet increased since 2005 to provide income for Neo-Taliban beside religious reasoning against Westerners.

The same resolution, with a slight difference, is made by ISK against Neo-Taliban. ISK, unlike Taliban, had banned the ‘cultivation’ of poppy in 2015 with the purpose of depriving Neo-Taliban from the source of income, yet similar to Taliban, with religious reasoning. This has yielded the group nothing but confrontations with local ‘heroes’ and slide them more than ever to Neo-Taliban side. This was under financial support of Islamic State Central Core, yet by the financially deteriorating situation for the Core, ISK has been forced to secure financial independence, besides, ISK could lose more, by fighting cartels. Accordingly, the group cleared the ban in 2017 in order to be financially benefited and balance Neo-Taliban in attracting money and connections. In this regard, ISK and Neo-Taliban have compromised in at least one occasion for opium transit (Giustozzi, 2018, p. 162). This compromise seems to be facilitated by the cartels, as the package might have had to pass through the territories of both groups. Accordingly, financial benefits may provide the possibility of convergence between two groups, by con-

sidering the fact that the local commanders of Neo-Taliban, unlike ISK, are not totally obedient to the Core, and their actions are really dependant to the ideologies they rooted from.

5. The Business of Insecurity

It should be borne in mind that the drug issue is not an illegal simple trade. In this type of business, the cartel must have connections at the macro-political and Governmental levels to facilitate transit. This issue has also been raised by Ryan Crocker, former US ambassador to Afghanistan, which justifies involvement in corruption in wartime situations that require high turnover (Crocker, 2016). Therefore, the boundary between one's political influence on legal and illegal trade will not be clear. This is important as the role and political influence of the United States in Afghanistan and her disorderly policy in counter-narcotics (CN) is documented, especially as its CN policies were sometimes in conflict with other countries' actions, and the results of their work had an unconstructive impact. This, along with UK and US statistics on poppy eradication and pressure on the UNODC to confirm their statistics, further

complicates the issue; UNODC sometimes closed its eyes to the wrong eradication of wheat fields (Whitlock, 2019A; Mansfield, 2018) and participated in counterfeiting. In addition, some US commanders has abstained from cooperation in regard to eradication in their area even after the narcotics order was issued (SIGAR, 2016A, B), and insisted on cooperating with them despite knowledge of corruption by some Afghan authorities (SIGAR, 2015C), or to secure the logistics convoys, they paid protection money to those infected with drug trafficking (Robinson, 2011; Mercille, 2011). According to one US diplomat, this was due to differences in approach between the politicians and the military. In other words, the issue of drugs was a political decision but for the military, it was an operational decision. The military ignored the local drug cultivation in order to prevent confrontation with the locals and did not care about the legitimacy of the central Government (SIGAR, 2016C). This is another kind of commercialization of war that does not necessarily for monetary gain.

The United States has always hidden this in an organized way. For instance, in 2019, The Washington Post released documents containing extensive interviews with 400 key players in Coalition war in Afghanistan, ranging from the US ambassadors to members of NGOs. The SIGAR prevented them from being published, but after a legal dispute for three years, they eventually ended up under severe censorship (Whitlock, 2019B; Whitlock & et al, 2019). Shortly before this media release, The Defense Department and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) requested confidentiality for some of these (Whitlock, 2019C).

The reports indirectly address the relationship between drugs and corruption in Afghanistan and acknowledges that it should

be dealt with and emphasizes the unwillingness of American Generals to address the issue during the Bush office, as many warlords in Afghanistan, who had a friendly relationship with the US, were also active in drug dealing, and the USA did not want to lose their support in the fight against al-Qaeda and Taliban (Whitlock, 2019A; Zia, 2016). In a release, Mohammad Ehsan Zia, former Afghan Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development, cited insufficient US agents' knowledge of Afghanistan in the fight against narcotics and strongly criticized the policies of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The important point is that immediately following the objection that 'for USAID office a reduction in poppy is not a priority spending the money is a priority'; the next two paragraphs are completely censored (Zia, 2016).

In another document, which is apparently not censored, Michael Flynn, retired US Army Lieutenant General, former National Security Advisor and former Director of Defense Intelligence Agency, points to the role of private banks and the Central Bank of Afghanistan in corruption and money laundering, noting that the US Embassy in Kabul is also 'involved to a degree' and, despite its disclosure, no one was held responsible and no accountability was made, despite the fact that the Drug Enforcement Administration and General Petraeus were fully aware of it. Flynn then cites the subtle connection of Neo-Taliban, Currency Exchanges and Afghan banks through the Hawala system, noting that the USA has ignored the issue despite being aware. Additionally, he highlights the role of Central Bank of Kabul in benefiting from this black money (Flynn, 2015). This is due to the situation of Afghanistan economy. Drug money is an important part of the economy (SIGAR, 2016D). Therefore, there once

even has been an intention on the part of Afghanistan to ignore local opiate farmers in the event of money laundering, if it leads to employment and financial cycles within Afghanistan, and this is explicitly stated in one of the unclassified documents of SIGAR (2016E). Such a phenomenon is the commercialization of war at Governmental level.

It is important to point out that the mere existence of narcotics in world trade is not only important but also the access to trade routes for trafficking to various destinations is important. The volume of opiates transit through these routes, as well as the influence these drugs have on the political systems of different countries, all make these paths of geopolitical value so that controlling these routes can be precious for transit, sustainability, and financial volume, and ultimately equally precious to influence the political changes of the transit and target countries. The double importance of this issue is in the blackness of the resulting money and the power of the dominant country to convert it into clean money. This money laundering requires coordination at both the banking and non-bank levels, the former being in the hands of the USA due to American financial control through Dollar system, and the latter lies in spending the money; in the most important money-laundering methods, the core of cleaning is nothing but spending, and the resulting commodity or the purpose of will be clean inherently; thus the track of black money will disappear ultimately.

Such a volume of money will certainly be a powerful tool for influencing the political and economic equations of the countries which are in transit route and the system of Hawala is operational there. Such power isn't gained through the narcotics trade, instead, it is as the result of the control of narcotics transit routes. This is a very destructive and

powerful weapon that can be used against any country, and the point is that it cannot be used against the West itself because they do not have one of the necessary components, the Hawala system. In other words, is often widespread in Islamic countries, and Western countries have criminalized the practice through the Financial Action Task Force FATF under money laundering (FATF, 2013). This issue has been somehow emphasized by DEA, acknowledging that Afghan narcotics do not control the US market despite the control of the European and Asian narcotics markets (Whitlock, 2019A, Boucher, 2015), so that the US, unlike other involved countries in CN in Afghanistan is not that serious and sensitive. This issue has been explicitly stated by John Wood, former National Security Council Director for Afghanistan in 2007-2009 and retired US Army Colonel (Wood, 2015). Countries targeted by these unusual attacks must either endure or join the FATF, which in both cases will hand over the control of their financial system; this is favorable to the United States. This is one of the most important forms of US commercialization of war at Governmental and international level, which is not necessarily for the monetary gain.

The USA and British narcotics policies also affected Taliban. It should be noted that Taliban had banned narcotics, and it is thought to be one of the converging reasons for the group and the farmers were the CN policies of Coalition that practically eradicate the poppy farms and adopted irreparable policies without considering farmer's livelihoods. This is also reaffirmed by a senior British official in an unclassified interview with SIGAR (2016F, G). This, in turn, helped Taliban to transform into Neo-Taliban and give the group a new facet. On the other hand, such a transform was itself an excuse for fi-

nancial follow-up; according to one NATO official, despite al-Qaeda's situation that it was no longer a critical threat to the United States, al-Qaeda name has continued to be reported because the nature of threat was the basic reason for the presence of Coalition in Afghanistan (SIGAR, 2015A). Then the target was gradually blurred and the main focus became on Neo-Taliban (SIGAR, 2015B), probably because of this. This phenomenon was not confined to this level and Coalition. In fact, local warlords and Afghanistan local governors have found that Taliban can become the reason to bring development and money from Coalition in their region. It should be noted that the main goal of Coalition was to counter and limit the group, and wherever traces were found, the financial and infrastructure resources would flow to there; the warlords and the governors understood this well and at times, Neo-Taliban were either tolerated for funds or infrastructure or somehow changed the situation in favor of the emergence of the group (SIGAR, 2015A). This phenomenon can be seen as Governmental level of commercialization of war carried out by Coalition forces and local warlords and governors.

6. The Business of Security

Roads play significant and determining role in destination of every country during peace and conflicts; the control can provide financial advantages and strategic privileges to impose harm on logistics of adversaries, secure its own logistics or provide counterbalance in the battlefields, while On the other side of the coin, the roads can be the arm of prosperity and development. Afghanistan is no exception, has benefited as much as suffered from the act, in such a way that it has to deal with both sides of the coin at the same time.

Coalition, specifically the U.S., envision the development and the security of Afghanistan in the post-Taliban time to be taken place through introducing or reviving of transit roads inter and intra-country (Katzman & Clayton, 2015). This has fueled the probability of compromisation through indirect monetary persuasion, namely purchase of security, with Neo-Taliban to prevent obstructions to fluidity of logistics and trade caravans, like raids by Neo-Taliban, in area A in favor of further security at area B, to preserve the Status quo balance in the area A in order to maintain the continuance of conflict in area B, to prevent military casualties in area A or to prevent loss of expensive or vital equipment at a cost of much less money. According to a report prepared by Majority Staff (2010) for US House of Representatives, the issue is duly evaluated which revealed the tendency of many higher ranks Army to implicitly and deliberately connive in this regard, and in some cases like General David Petraeus, a principal architect of US counterinsurgency strategy, the tendency uttered explicitly, under the name of 'Weapon System' or 'Ammunition' to purchase security by the monetary means (Petraeus, 2008).

6.1. The Monetary Persuasion Strategy

The monetary persuasion strategy probably not directly directed by Coalition to Neo-Taliban. Yet in fact, it is officially directed to the transit companies under contract, to deliver logistics through a specific road during a specific time; a share of the money consequently is distributed between the local warlord and other claimers inside the territory, including Neo-Taliban, in order to purchase temporarily security for the road. There are multiple anecdotes supporting the topic: there are reports that Italy had paid tens of thousands of U.S Dollar until 2009 for purchase

of security to prevent or minimize any conflicts directed by Neo-Taliban with the Italian troops in Herat (Coghlan, 2009). NATO, too, in 2010 had allocated the monthly U.S.\$ 2.5 million under the strategy for duration of one day per week for at least one road and U.S.\$0.5 million for the security of the road connecting Bagram to Kandahar for just one-day period, and indirectly allocated U.S.\$220 million under contract with a transit company for the duration of one year, in line with the strategy, while was aware that a proximate ten percent of the contract value being paid to Neo-Taliban (Lambertus, 2011: 53 &54). Besides, there is the probability of the appliance of the same strategy by the USA to encourage commercial transit through the economic corridors initiated in or crossing the country, at the same time.

The duress imposed on the US Army in this regard cannot be easily comprehended without understanding the actual control of Neo-Taliban over the roads. Nevertheless, the transactions are not guaranteed to render security for all occasions; Neo-Taliban is fractured and decentralized in organization, motivation and ideology. Rationally accordingly, monetary persuasion appliance may not ideologically, motivationally or even organizationally persuade other commanders to abstain any intrusions in upcoming checkpoints, especially by being aware of the rivalry between local commanders of Neo-Taliban as well as the Fatwa on the necessary of intrusion and Confiscation of assets of 'Taqt' and 'infidels' assets. The Fatwa has imposed discriminatory measures on the Taxation treatment or Extortions; Neo-Taliban discriminate for passengers who don't work for the central Government or Coalition, with a more good-tempered manner (Giustozzi, 2008, p. 117). Nevertheless, the revenue from Taxation is worthy of evaluation.

Transit companies tend to pay 'Protection' money through a semi-complex system named 'Hawala' which indirectly and informally connects Neo-Taliban commanders, drivers, Quetta council and the companies through a network of local currency markets. Once the transaction takes place for Quetta council, a code would be allocated for the road in addition to name of drivers and detail of the vehicle; the system is considered secure and reliable for controlling of monetary circulation, limiting the reoccurrence of monetary frauds that happened during the civil war between Mujahidin's' local commanders (Peters, 2010, p. 30). The same system has been reported to be employed by ISK as well (Giustozzi, 2018, p. 162), yet the information on the scope of their beneficiation from the Hawala system is known to be too limited.

6.2. Extortion

Other revenues from roads' protection money are not essentially systematically derived from the companies. Neo-Taliban tends to 'extort' or 'tax' local drivers, who may work individually or under contracts of companies. Contrary to the concept that fetches from 'Extortion' to minds, the drivers tolerate the situation better due to the analogy with other 'extorters', namely Police; Neo-Taliban are considered fairer than Police as the group grants the drivers the right to securely finish their trips by paying tax once. On the other hand, they have to bribe Police for a number of times during their road trips (The Economist, 2019). The analogy has even concluded some of the drivers that the fierce face of Neo-Taliban is due to the abuse of the brand by bandits and criminals, and not the true and dedicated members of the group, remembering the narrations in which the group has also fought the bandits in this regard (Isaqzadeh & Giustozzi, 2013).

There are multiple and extensive reports on the monetary corrupt practice of Police and other Governmental sectors in Afghanistan. The extent of corruption is known to be fueled by foreign powers through their foreign aids. It is estimated that portions of the total monetary aids are eventually finding their ways to the camp of Neo-Taliban through Protection money and ‘sub-contracts’ (Lambertus, 2011, p. 55). To dissect the case of Sub-Contracts, we should consider an economic environment consisting of a chain of quid pro quo bribe payments: a contractor bribes an official to win a contract,

which he predicts for recoupment through the total price of the contract, that essentially being paid from the aids. In the next step, the contractor requires to secure his safety, resources or the deadline of the project, especially in remote areas suffering security pores; here it comes the just and reasonable choice of sharing the income with Neo-Taliban under the name of Protection money, which is a sort of legitimate bribe. To depict a clear picture of the value of the monetary circulation of the bribery chain in Afghanistan, it appears necessary to know that Afghans had bribed US \$ 1.651 billion in just 2018.

Table 1.
Bribes Paid in US Dollar (IWA, 2018, p. 39)

2018	2016	2014	2012	2010
1.651.437.996	2.879.282.761	1.942.037.448	1.254.543.390	1.079.669.660

The value of the total paid bribes is severely critical, considering the economic overall condition and GDP of the country. According to SIGAR (2019), a nearly US \$132.49 billion has been allocated for the country relief and reconstruction since 2002. Besides, the issue induces that the western and other global communities’ allocations for the reconstruction of Afghanistan are being indirectly shared with Neo-Taliban and for financing the group; Neo-Taliban takes the Protection money, which in 2010 was as much as %30 to %40 of the whole contract price (Majority Staff, 2010). It is good to mention that the Protection money is not necessarily in cash; the Protection money could be paid by commodities, including but not limited to vehicles, medics, and communicative equipment by locally powerful patrons or the contractors (Weir & Azamy, 2015).

The problem of Protection money eventually induces reconstruction projects into financial crisis and convinces the contractor to request a budget amendment to the contract with the Central Government. The amendment may provide the ground for substitution of the contractor by Government, which finally repeats the whole procedure by the Protection money and the budget amendments. Accordingly, presence of foreign countries in Afghanistan reinforces the vicious cycle of financing and countering what it has been indirectly financed by these countries. However, the bold problem is commercialization of war at two levels of Governmental and non-Governmental.

In case of Protection money, which bonds the contractors and Neo-Taliban, the whole procedure can be considered as a mutually beneficial business. In fact, the contractors

are subtly satisfied with the damages the group induces to schools, facilities, and projects, or at least benefited from the consequences of the attacks, as the result would be nothing less than a soar in the reconstruction 'market', although yet they are still unhappy with the payment they have to place for Neo-Taliban. Here another secondary vicious cycle forms: the group receives the payment, after completion of the project, they destroy the place, another contractor wins the project again and assigns in a fresh stream of Protection money for Neo-Taliban and the story goes on; that is commercialization of war, at the local non-Governmental level.

One undeniably important notion is the perception of Neo-Taliban from the contractors and Governmental projects; the group addresses the two subjects as monetary resources which functional continuation is vital for revenue of Neo-Taliban. Therefore, there shall not be a much severe approach in extortion that discourages them from continuation. This is exactly the phase that incepts positive aspect of taxation, Protection money, and extortion into the minds of people: Neo-Taliban works to observe a just and negotiable manner in price, which reportedly are absent in Police and Governmental corruption. Aside from this conservative and cautious performance, the group had shown the tendency to actively participate in a more profitable business by introducing a special committee in this regard (Du Pée, 2017): mine exploitation. That is reported as the all-time second most profitable source of income for Neo-Taliban by UNSC (2015), which is as much as US \$ 200 – 300 million (Du Pée, 2017). Today the dominance is strongly contested by ISK due to exploitation intensity, investment, the quality of equipment, types of machinery, expertise and security measures. Besides, wherever the odds were not in

favor of ISK, the tendency to deprive Neo-Taliban of the resources increases (Global Witness, 2018); as similarly seen in the already considered opium case.

6.3. Exploitation

There are several other differences which worth considering here. The exploitations take place through the employment of civilians, rental or ownership of equipment and types of machinery for both groups except in remote areas where the militants directly engage with the mining affairs (Du Pée, 2017), yet the difference lies at the level of management. ISK has shown the tendency to hold the management wheel, yet Neo-Taliban usually prefers a negotiated share of revenue, which does not mean a small amount of money at all. In fact, Neo-Taliban has a monthly revenue of US \$ 1.900 to more than U.S \$ 10.000 per mining site, under the name of Protection money, which add up to the revenue from transit tax per truck, Ushr and Zakat (a religious tax imposed on commodities), that in some cases, is one-third of the total revenue from the mine (Global Witness, 2018). For instance, Neo-Taliban had an annual revenue of more than US \$ 22 million in 2014 from Talc mines in only Nangarhar (Bouissou, 2016), and had a monthly revenue of US \$ 113.000 from this market in 2015 from only one region in Nangarhar, namely Shiraz (Du Pée, 2017).

The significance of the numerical value of the revenue for Neo-Taliban is not bonded to the technology employed but derived from the quantitative assessment to the quantities of mines in the country. In fact, it is estimated that nearly half of the mines in Afghanistan are under the control or influence of militant groups, which is located mostly in isolated rural areas far outside Government's control, although there are also some extorted

mines located close to big cities like Kabul (Du Pée, 2017), but seems to be not frequent. Accordingly, the constant conflicts over mines between militants and the Central Government induce the idea of the significance of remote areas due to their financial advantages over urban areas, which are mostly associated with political postures. Besides, apparently militants like Neo-Taliban, are positioned in villages and remote areas, knowing that these areas can be more profitable for financing their cause, namely to control the strategic resources primarily that can easily be liquidated by the militants. Then, they prioritize the seizure of urban areas, and to be specific, the capital, afterward; this is another instance of commercialization of war, at the local non-Governmental level.

This commercialization of war is not limited to the non-Governmental level. In fact, plenty of foreign states are indirectly active

in this regard through private corporations. According to an extensive report from Global Witness (2018), despite an official ban to the export of talc stones in early 2015 (which didn't last long due to pressures), the massive tonnages of smuggled talc, alongside other stones, found its way to Pakistan, where it could find the opportunity to be exported to all over the world under the brand of Pakistan. Interestingly, US companies are buying the principal portion of cargoes. Not to mention that approximate of %60 of the total talc coming out of Afghanistan is the result of Neo-Taliban exploitation; this is commercialization of war at the global Governmental level where foreign states including the U.S and U. K. pursue their domestic industrial interests, even at the highest diplomatic levels, that at finally indirectly goes Neo-Taliban or other militants like ISK.

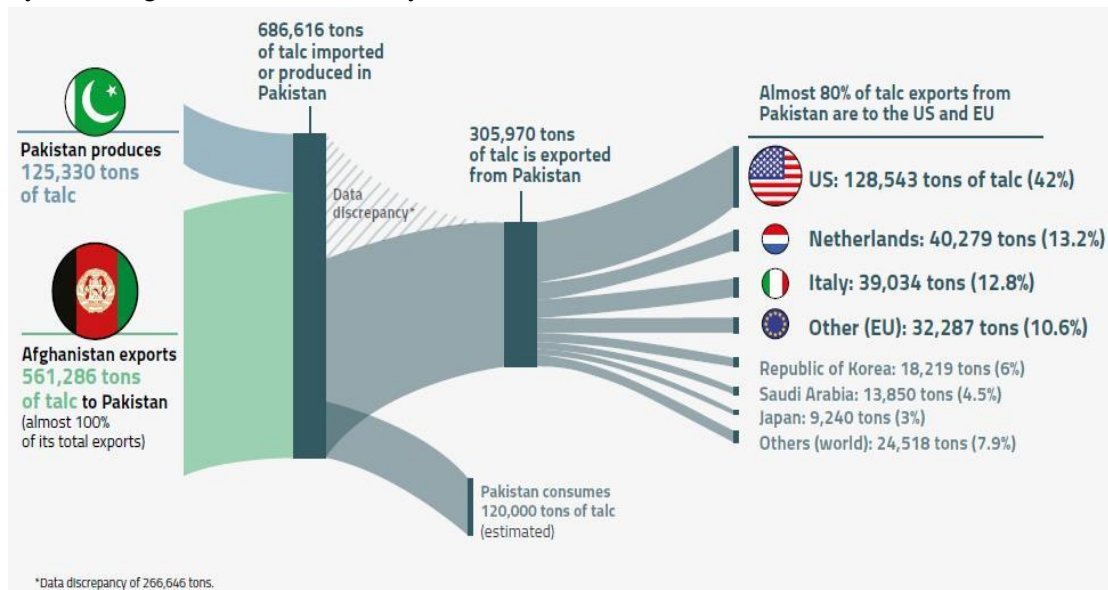


Figure 9. The Talc Trade from Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2016 (Global Witness, 2018)

7. Conclusion

Commercialization of the war in Afghanistan is carried out at three levels: Governmental, non-Governmental and global. At the non-Governmental level, the presence of the

Cartels, Neo-Taliban and ISK, at Governmental level, we see the activities of corruption in Afghanistan Government Coalition and the contractors, and at global level, we see multinational corporations; the commer-

cialization here have led to formation of mutual enterprise for the continuation of war as the continuation means the continuation of their economic benefits. The fluidity at each of these levels is very significant, and has strategic implications on leaders' decisions. For example, Neo-Taliban commanders have a greater tendency to conquer non-urban areas that, despite their low political-strategic value, are of immense material value in terms of resources, or that industrialized and developed countries press Afghanistan Government to access steady flow of resources they need, preferably at low price, despite knowing that Neo-Taliban will benefit, or that Coalition countries will indirectly buy security from Neo-Taliban, which eventually would finance the cycle of corruption in Afghanistan.

The study showed that the economic interests of all parties are tangled up in the commercialization of the war in Afghanistan, in a way that any disruption in one level of commercialization would disrupt the other levels (mutual enterprise). For example, the non-Governmental level commercialization of the war on mines can be directly and indi

rectly linked to the level of Governmental commercialization (Government corruption and Coalition pressure) and the level of global commercialization (multinational corporations). Everybody benefits from this commercialization in their own ways; some like Coalition and the corporations for their economic interests and some like Neo-Taliban for recruitment, reputation and capital; this is the significance of the present study.

According to what has been discussed, such complex commercialization may not be easily remedied due to the involvement of several different levels, actors and interests, which are at the same time, interdependence. Such an issue could lead to the continuation of the war and the spread and escalation of lawlessness in Afghanistan because all these actors have defined their interest in maintaining the status quo and there seems no end to this misery. Therefore, the implications are huge unless a series of orchestrated disruptions at the micro and macro levels take place; Future research needs to investigate how these disruptions could be orchestrated.

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