
Taliban: Switch from Heroin to Methamphetamine

Introduction

Illicit drug production, the cultivation and processing of crops and synthetic elements for drugs and the trade thereof have, foremost, been widely successful within Afghanistan. The long history of drug trade in Afghanistan, its triggers for this far-ranging illicit and unregulated economy, and the consequences of increased drug smuggling, as explored in the [EFSAS paper](#) in November 2017, display various dimensions of illicit drug trafficking. Exploring the historical roots for the continuance of involvement in the illicit sector, the underlying enablers and the framework of little regulation and informal work, support and enhancement by insurgent groups, and simply the natural resources within the borders of Afghanistan, assist in forming an understanding of the workings in the illicit economy of Afghanistan. The utilisation of drug trafficking for the Taliban, a UN-designated terrorist group as per UNSC Resolution 1267 (1999), focuses primarily on establishing a secure stream of income to provide for their undertakings. Post poppy cultivation ban in 2000, Peters argues, the main rationale behind the continuing success of illicit drug trade and revenue stream for the Taliban was the lack of external forces' interventions and little regulation. For the external forces in Afghanistan, the illicit drug trade was only one segment on the list of weakening the standing of the Taliban, and there was a focus set on "more pressing" matters (Peters 2009, 13). As a result, a lack of attention to illicit drug trade was visible, which only exacerbated the situation and provided for a stable informal structure and constant revenue stream for the Taliban over the span of the last two decades.

This article elaborates on the internal drivers in Afghanistan that result in engagement with illicit drugs and the increasing shift from involvement in the process of heroin drug production towards the methamphetamine industry, and the rationale behind this. Foremost, this article explores the nexus between the illicit drugs discussed and the Taliban and attempts to assess its role in the shift from heroin to methamphetamine as a stream of revenue. It further aims to provide an answer as to why the methamphetamine industry is increasing in Afghanistan, and how this is connected to the Taliban, both looking at profit and engagement. It gives an account of the situation with quantitative and qualitative data predominantly from 2009 - 2020, and due to the volatile situation and uncertainties surrounding the Taliban in Afghanistan, is subject to fluctuation in its assessment.

The interwovenness of drug trade within Afghanistan shows its deep anchoring in society and in the lives of civilians. While illicit, engagement in the sector offers employment opportunities for the civil population which lacks alternatives. In the illicit economy, offering employment opportunities and financial security for the population is the predominant reason for civilians to engage in drug crop cultivation (Bhatia 2020). According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), synthetic drugs are

estimated to contribute as much as EUR 46.8 million to local wages per year (EU4MD 2020, 22). Approximately one out of ten Afghans is engaged in the drugs business (Latifi 2021). What is presented as opportunism, often results in dependency and debt traps for persons, particularly in rural communities, to the traffickers of the drugs (A more detailed description of possible dependency due to payments is visible in **Figure 2**), and thus an obligation of continued engagement with the illicit economy becomes necessary (Colhoun 2021). Particularly in the presence of volatile economic stability, the production and engagement with the process of production increases, because it enables a more secure income stream for those who otherwise would become victims of the fluctuations and insecurities flowing from insecurity and instability in Afghanistan (Parenti 2015). The current political instability in Afghanistan leads to more vulnerability of local communities to engage in the manufacturing and production of heroin and methamphetamine (UNODC 2021, 40). Overall, the illicit drugs economy is Afghanistan's single largest economic sector, and it employs more people than any other economic sector in Afghanistan (Mansfield 2019b). Mansfield estimates a 500,000 people full-time workforce in the illicit sector for opiate production alone in 2018, which as will become apparent through this article, is not all.

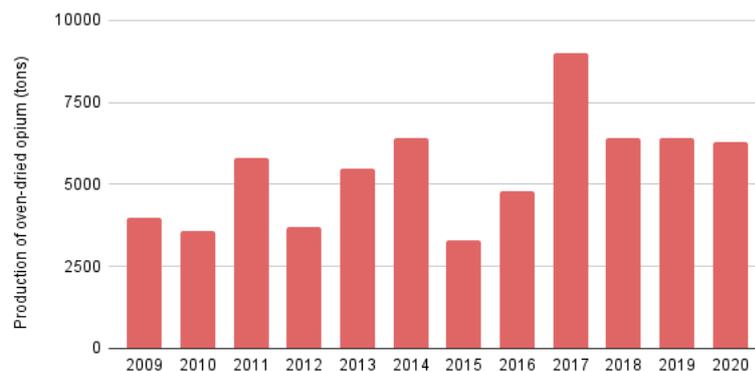
Opportunism for the Taliban, however, is a dominant underlying driver for their engagement with illicit drug trade, where much is to gain. Though profitability estimates diverge, Taliban's engagement with the illicit drug economy is widely present and is a viable revenue stream. Latifi, for instance, estimates drug trade to amount to a revenue of \$420 million a year for the Taliban (and other drug gangs), which allows for substantial financing (Latifi 2021). Among others, the Taliban's tactical campaign banning poppy cultivation and destruction of crops in 2000 to gain legitimacy, and then particularly with the reintroduction of cultivation after that strategic undertaking failed, displayed its involvement and substantial interest in the sector (Mansfield 2019b). Because poppy cultivation and heroin has become a staple for Afghanistan, it has gained large prominence beyond Afghanistan's borders in the sense of research and estimations of production by the industry, mainly because of the effects of the drugs in the peripheries of Afghanistan, i.e., higher addiction levels. This resulted in increased attention, and considering the current events, masking a disengagement with opiates assists the Taliban in its search for legitimacy from a broad range of States once again in 2021. The nexus between Taliban engagement in the illicit drug economy, and the increasing methamphetamine industry in Afghanistan, provides for an intriguing angle and analysis into the Taliban's role in the drug trade and allows for an assessment of future ventures and priority-setting by the Taliban in the drug economy in Afghanistan.

From Heroin to Methamphetamine

Heroin, produced by the means of poppy cultivation and subsequent drug labs for processing, has been at the centre of attention of Afghan illicit drug trade for decades. As displayed in **Figure 1**, the production of oven-dried opium, which at a later stage of the processing is referred to as heroin, balances somewhere around 6,000 tons produced per year (WDR 2021). A shift from 263,000 ha of net opium poppy cultivation in 2018 to 163,000 ha in 2019, which is a 38% decrease, and a 37% increase of poppy cultivation from 2019 to 2020 (UNODC 2021), with steady production of oven-dried opium, suggests a large stock and storage of opium poppy (Zeiler 2021), which shows potential for steady sales in the event of a poppy cultivation ban. Currently, the prices of opiates have surged due to an uncertain upcoming season because of indicated bans on cultivation. Prices have almost tripled from \$70 to \$200 for raw opium (WSJ 2021).

Figure 1: Production of oven-dried opium

Source: WDR 2021



While the illicit drug economy of heroin has not seen a large decline in the past years, the methamphetamine industry increased significantly. In recent years, also expert scholars and international organizations like UNODC have put limited but increasing attention to the methamphetamine industry in Afghanistan. In 2014, the first account by the UNODC of methamphetamine processing and trade in Afghanistan was made (S/2020/415). Estimating the amounts of methamphetamine produced in Afghanistan is difficult and most estimates come from field research and inquiries with locals working in the industry, however mapping of methamphetamine processing locations is not easy to achieve because of the production format. State-wide approximations are subject to inaccuracy because of the regional differences and foci points of field research. Looking at, for instance, Bakwa estimations and analyses according to cooks in laboratories, an approximate of 65.5 tons per month (786 tons per year) of crystal methamphetamine could be produced if the scale of production is similar in other locations compared to Bakwa (EU4MD 2020). While by far not exceeding the long-standing numbers of heroin production in Afghanistan, the increasing methamphetamine industry gives way for new profit margins for the Taliban due to the low ingredient costs as well as little necessity for large laboratories, and large scales of production and a competitive pricing (S/2020/415), and lacking international attention.

Ephedra, a plant naturally grown in the region, plays a major role. The ephedra plant first originated in Western Afghanistan (Bhatia 2020) and found its original use in firewood or healing kidney diseases (Al Jazeera 2021b). Ephedra has been a legitimate crop for several years (Mansfield 2021a), and is not internationally controlled, contrasting the more known substance P-2-P (Phenyl-2-Propanone), and its increasing regulation (UNODC 2021). Because of the natural occurrence of ephedra plants, and the easy processing to ephedrine within household settings, an enhanced opportunism is visible in the trade of methamphetamine. Natural-grown ephedra has various advantages over the extraction of ephedrine through chemical processes, as well as poppy cultivation for the processing of heroin. Foremost, ephedra grown naturally does not require cultivation, and as such with both attention by persons employed, as well as possible strikes and mapping of cultivated land for illicit drug use become increasingly difficult. Furthermore, since it does not require cultivation, it is an affordable material to process ephedrine and make use of this to produce methamphetamine. To illustrate, while in Myanmar, the price for a kilogram of methamphetamine surpasses \$3,000, utilising primarily P-2-P substances, in Afghanistan this price is estimated merely around \$280 per kilogram (EMCDDA 2020), because it is no longer based on purely synthetically extracted methamphetamine components.

Analysing the scale of production for methamphetamine in Afghanistan is difficult. While mapping covers large areas for heroin laboratories and poppy fields, the methamphetamine industry is rather under-researched. Mansfield states that many heroin labs now focus more on methamphetamine production due to the lowered cost of production (Mansfield 2021a). These interviews conducted in Afghan drug laboratories indicate growing awareness of the profitability, and a shift towards the methamphetamine industry and an ephedra-based production over heroin. His observations in the drug labs of “buckets of green gae”, being ephedra, which is soaked in water to be processed to ephedrine which then is used for the processing of methamphetamine, contrast the old-sketched picture of cough mixture bottles that would originally be used to attain methamphetamine. Mansfield describes the astonishment he faced when some cooks said that it was far too expensive to extract methamphetamine from cough mixtures, and the possibility to halve the costs of production through ephedra-based production. While these accounts help illuminate the situation, reports on potential methamphetamine production numbers in Afghanistan are rare, and if present, merely mapping a small area within a limited scope. On an international level of research and monitoring, the UNODC, in its 2021 world drug report, notes that there is an increasing methamphetamine production and a growing ATS (Amphetamine-type Stimulants, which includes methamphetamine, ecstasy, and crystal methamphetamine) market in South and Southeast Asia (UNODC 2021). In its 2021 report, the analysis of the growing methamphetamine industry in Afghanistan projects the increasing Afghan-based production due to seizures in bordering countries, particularly the accounts of 90% Afghan-origin seized methamphetamine in Iran in 2019, which in 2015 was at merely 10% mark, and a 700% increase from 2018 to 2019 of methamphetamine seizures within Afghanistan (UNODC 2021, 40).

The methamphetamine industry offers employment to some 20,000 persons, of which approximately 5,000 people are employed in methamphetamine labs, and the contribution

for those in the methamphetamine industry to the local wages is an estimated \$55 million per year, which makes it appealing to local communities (Billing 2021). Moreover, little land and professional equipment is necessary for civilians to make a living from engaging in the industry, which enhances willingness to partake. Of course, civilian involvement and labour forces are the underlying requirement for an industry to function, be it licit or illicit. Where it is easy to make money, greedy fingers will not hesitate to roam. This linkage leads to an analysis of the Taliban's role in illicit drugs and their insurgency.

Nexus between illicit drugs and the Taliban

In an illicit drug economy of this scale, it requires some sort of structural oversight. The Taliban has taken on this role, and profit largely from it. Taliban's involvement in drug trade for decades has resulted in a deep dependency on the illicit economy, with the ultimate objective of involvement being the security of having financial inflow, otherwise volatile and subject to fluctuations, because of the groups' status over the years. After the Taliban's rapid takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021, and its revised working structure with press conferences to project a less violent group, it seems the Taliban has reconsidered its appearance and reactions to it. As in 2000, where the Taliban attempted to re-establish dialogue with the international community through their ambiguous diplomatic efforts, receiving international recognition appears as a priority once again, where banning drug production aids its cause. On 17 August, Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesperson, stated the following in response to a question about illicit drug trade in Afghanistan:

"[Afghanistan] will not have [sic] produce any narcotics. [...] From now on, nobody's going to get involved, nobody can be involved in drug smuggling. [...] From now on, Afghanistan will be a narcotics-free country, but it needs international assistance. The international community should help us so that we can have alternative crops. We can provide alternative crops. Then, of course, very soon, we can bring it to an end" (Al Jazeera 2021b).

Unsurprisingly, and strategically a tactical move, the Taliban attempts to gain legitimacy, and masks its lacking genuineness by, though with all likelihood temporarily, stopping, or seemingly doing so, the production of narcotics in Afghanistan. While it appeases for the time being, how long this camouflage will last, similarly, to promises made regarding non-violent behaviour and women rights, though already stated these will be within the framework of Sharia law, is yet to be established. With a historical understanding of the dynamics between the Taliban and drug trafficking, it would be obscure to move away from the profitable, unregulated business and infrastructure network, and harbor it provides to the Taliban and its undertakings. Simply, it would create trouble to do so in the eyes of civilians whose livelihood depends on this economy, and in component prices that would soar and reshuffle the importance of Afghanistan's drug trade on a global scale, which would only hurt the Taliban in declining revenues in the long run. How the situation will unfold will become clearer

in the coming months. Notably, there have been accounts that the Taliban has specified an opium production ban (WSJ 2021). What is of vital importance in this context, is to note and be aware of the biases of news reaching from Afghanistan, and the twisting of rumours into facts and thereout resulting inconsistencies and false information. This article follows the perception that Taliban 2.0, as widely referred to, is masking its actual aims, and therefore increasing its chances of legitimation from a broader range of States. Factually, there have been news outlets and spokespersons speaking about a ban, however there is no account of actual discussions about a ban on a local and regional level. Mansfield explains, the soaring of prices currently originates from insecurities about what the next months will bring, particularly the cultivation season for opium poppies in the south from mid-November to the end of December (Mansfield 2021b). Keeping in mind the volatile situation and uncertainties for the coming months, these reactions are normal and likely not connected to a superficial account of Mujahid, the Taliban spokesperson, in response to a question at a press conference.

Underlying, both for heroin and methamphetamine production, for the past decades, researchers and reports have described various ways how the Taliban generate profit through drug trafficking. Accounts diverge largely, not the least in their exaggeration of figures and accuracy (Mansfield 2019a), mainly because of the opaqueness of the illicit drug economy and informalities connected to it. Therefore, the data presented should be interpreted with a critical eye. Frequently, data provided by research springs from small-scale field research in a specific region and is then projected nation-wide. The local governance, Taliban-controlled areas, natural resources and landscape, and tribal workings of communities in Afghanistan, however, are intractable within the country, and therefore large-scale projections are likely to diverge in their accuracy. Moreover, the methods are generalised for various illicit drugs. On an important note, the figure below displays potential methods for the Taliban to generate revenue through the drug trade. According to Mansfield, often figures are widely exaggerated and have gained legitimacy because of their continuous use in research, for instance, his field research has indicated that fixed taxations such as (1), are not reported in all provinces (Mansfield 2021a). According to his research, he sees little possibility for an annual tax revenue for the Taliban of \$40 million, more likely being \$20 million of revenue through opiate taxation for the Taliban (Mansfield 2019b), contrasting the description of Latifi who estimates a \$420 million sum of revenue for the Taliban and other drug gangs (Latifi 2021). **Figure 2** thus distinguishes potential methods that could result in a financial and structural benefit for the Taliban.

Figure 2: Methods for the Taliban to generate revenue through the illicit drug economy

Explanation	Amount	Details
Ushr		
Ushr is an Islamic 10% tax on the harvests of irrigated land. It is said to be used particularly for land necessary for opium poppy cultivation. Reports indicate that Ushr is widely exaggerated and continuously used as the main source for Taliban revenue from drugs, whilst field research indicates otherwise (Smith et. al 2021, Mansfield 2021b).	~10% tax	Accounts of headmen indicate that Ushr is paid by farmers in the poppy cultivation business. The beneficiaries of Ushr are ‘the poor’, but accounts have indicated that around one out of five of the beneficiaries in 2019 were Taliban (Zeiler 2021). It is most frequently directed towards village-level sub commanders or district level commanders (Peters 2009).
Tax per volume		
Various researchers who conduct field work in Afghanistan believe that, rather than (1), the taxation of drugs is based on volume and fixed price based on weight or the quantity (Smith et. al 2021).	based on volume and fixed pricings	According to Smith et. al, the taxation on this, comparably to the descriptions of Ushr, are merely around 1% of the price of the drug, and therewith result in drastically lower revenues for the Taliban.
Shopkeepers and Business owners Tax		
The shopkeepers and Business owners’ tax is a 10% tax that can be imposed by the Taliban on shopkeepers and small business owners, as well as passing through trucks (Peters 2009). Additionally, an equal of \$8 per month was collected in mosques per family in Musa Qala (Peters 2009).	10% tax	This account stems from research by Peters, who conducted an interview with a shopkeeper in Helmand (Peters 2009). Other studies have indicated that this is only present in certain regions and districts.
Transportation costs		
Payments during the transport and trafficking of drugs are frequently noted as another source of revenue for the Taliban. What is described is a tax when a crop is loaded to the transportation vehicle, of \$0.07 per kg for opium poppies, which seems dismissible, however on a larger scale, when loaded into a truck, “it can earn the insurgency as much [as] \$1000 per truck” (Mansfield & Soderholm 2019).	\$0.07 per kg (Taywara) ; taxes in Dak worth up to \$750,000 per year	Trucks that travel from production locations, such as Ziranj to Dak, can levy the Taliban up to \$750,000 of taxation costs on transport per year (Smith et. al 2021).
Protection money		
The Taliban also make use of protection money. The Taliban provide security for drug trade, of fees which could range up to 20% (Peters 2009,	20% tax, donations	Protection money is paid for armed protection of transported opiates (Peters 2009). Especially

20). Also included here are large-scale donations made by the traffickers to the Taliban, to ensure this very protection (Sharma 2021).		for trafficking across borders, attacks on the trucks are common, and require protection.
Gifts and charities		
Frequently, taxes and payments made in the framework of (1) - (4), are paid on a more irregular basis and in the form of gifts or charities, although in the same framework and through pressurization (Mansfield 2019).	Payments of up to the equivalent of \$400, single donations at higher amounts	Gifts and charities are directly paid to the local commander and are undeclared and on a seasonal basis (Mansfield 2019). Sattar, an Afghan drug trafficker, for instance, made a single donation of \$330,000 to the Taliban commanders to ensure protection (Sharma 2021).
Taliban-run drug labs		
Some Taliban commanders also took responsibility for running a drug lab themselves as an overseeing force. Direct involvement in the process in recent years has been visible more frequently.	unclear	Peters describes those local commanders of the Taliban shifted from collecting protection fees to running the drug labs themselves and engaging with the drugs business themselves (Peters 2009).
Aerial control		
Control over the areas where the poppies are grown (Labrousse 2005), and control over areas where illicit drugs are processed and trafficked leads to a direct possibility of receiving payments and a share of the drug trade.	unclear	Given the current circumstances, it is a given that aerial control has increased significantly. Potentially, the Taliban would be able to make an immense profit from drug trafficking, albeit its statements of aiming at eradicating the illicit economy.

Sources: Peters (2009), Mansfield (2019a, 2019b), Soderholm & Mansfield (2019), Smith et al (2021), Sharma (2021), Labrousse (2005), Zeiler (2021)

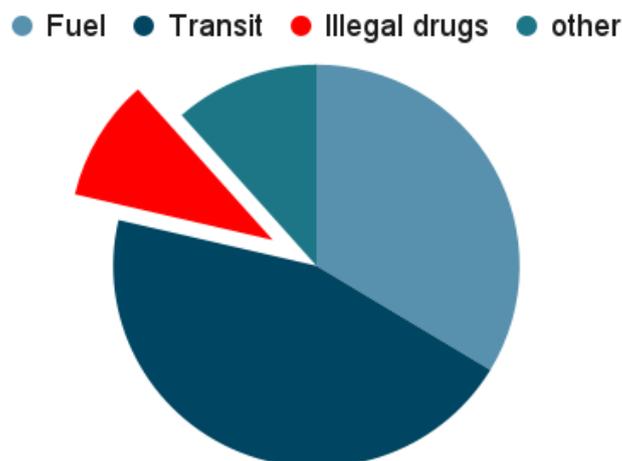
As visible, Figure 2 displays a general involvement of the Taliban in the illicit drug economy, and its various ties in the revenue stream from it. This generalization can be divided into the various segments of illicit drug trade. Most importantly, the Taliban's role in the illicit drug trade in Afghanistan in connection with an increasing methamphetamine market needs more attention and necessitate the prerequisite of understanding the methods of receiving financial streams from the economy to implicate its presence in the illicit drug economy.

Confronting the Taliban’s role in the Methamphetamine industry

In line with this article's focus, analysing both the heroin and methamphetamine industry and an estimated revenue for the Taliban from each of the streams creates an understanding of the shift from the two industries. In their 2021 report, Smith and Mansfield discuss the Taliban revenue in Nimroz province, in the South-west of Afghanistan, on elements such as fuel and transit, which makes up for 79% of the revenue stream (\$17,5 million for fuel, and \$23.4 million for transit), and illegal drugs, which, following their research, amounts to an approximate of \$5.1 million. The province, being one of the regions particularly significant for drug trade in Afghanistan, does not stand for the entirety of Afghanistan’s illicit drug economy, however it allows for a glimpse on data and the importance of the illicit drug industry in the Taliban's revenue stream, especially in contrast to frequent data analysis being widely inflated. This snapshot attempts to introduce a more accurate picture of the illicit drug economy in Afghanistan and subparts of it. Smith and Mansfield in their field work and collection of data come to these conclusions, which are based on the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, rather than reproduction of statements from public media outlets. The illegal drugs part as per Smith et. al, as displayed in **Figure 3**, is then again divided into various types and methods of illegal trade and the revenue for the Taliban springing from these. In Nimroz province the primary revenue sources are methamphetamine smuggling, production, ephedrine production, and opiate smuggling and poppy cultivation.

Figure 3: Taliban revenue stream in 2020

Source: Smith & Mansfield 2021



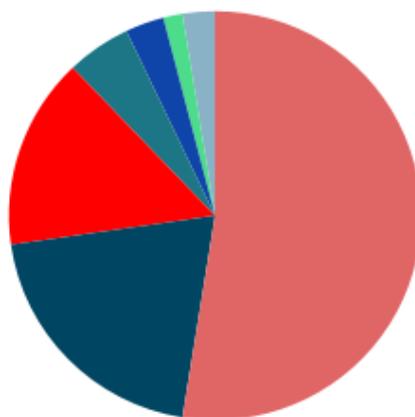
The methamphetamine industry is booming in the province because of various factors. The methamphetamine industry has two access points of taxation, as divided up in **Figure 4**, namely the ephedrine production and the methamphetamine laboratories and smuggling (Smith et. al 2021). The methamphetamine industry in Nimroz almost amounts to 75% of the illicit drug economy in the area, which is reasoned by the division of the production process, as well as its popularity because of the ease of production as discussed previously in the article, particularly because of the sourcing of ephedrine from the ephedra plant rather than

P-2-P. Smith et al. name the ephedrine taxation as per kilogram up to \$1.25, whereas the methamphetamine taxes can reach per kilogram up to \$3.75. Given this, the discussion of a shift from Heroin to Methamphetamine finds even more ground in the discussion on the illicit drug economy in Afghanistan, as well as the benefits it carries for the Taliban.

Figure 4: Taliban revenue in the illicit drug economy in 2020

Source: Alcis, Mansfield and Smith 2021

● Meth smuggling ● Opiate smuggling ● Meth production
● Ephedrine production ● Poppy cultivation ● Heroin production ● Other



Assessment and forecast

The illicit drug economy in Afghanistan, and within this, particularly the methamphetamine industry, coffers the Taliban's pockets with an enormous influx of revenue. The methamphetamine industry is booming in Afghanistan particularly due to the previously discussed reasoning:

- Natural occurrence of the Ephedra plant, which means little production costs and requires no cultivation
- Easy processing to ephedrine through household processing methods
- Low input prices comparing Ephedrine from Ephedra to P-2-P based-production, which leads to greater competitiveness on the market
- Little attention from the international periphery to the industry and the unregulated nature of the sector
- The element of public attention to poppy cultivation and heroin, which allows for the methamphetamine industry to go largely unnoticed and unmapped

The Taliban, over the last decades, has played a large role in Afghanistan's drug trafficking. The main rationale behind engagement with the illicit sector is a stable revenue stream. There are various angles that allow for the methods of instream of financial means for the Taliban:

- Taxation and protection payments (Figure 2) are of importance for the revenue stream for the Taliban and have enabled a continuous inflow of financial means over the last two decades, which not the least has contributed to the ability of the Taliban uprising in August 2021.
- An increasing methamphetamine industry with little international attention and lower prices compared to other markets, provides for a new niche of illicit drug production in Afghanistan, a competitive advantage on the market, and easy household engagement in the production process.

Forecasting the viability and importance of the illicit heroin and methamphetamine industry in current times is a delicate matter. The factors that play into this, the supposed stop of opiate production as discussed by statements of Mujahid, the search for international recognition of a so-called mellowed down Taliban 2.0 which, though likely temporarily, is attempting a masked appearance, and foremost the inability of accurate measurement of the actual capacity of the illicit economy of the methamphetamine industry, and to what extent it is benefiting and could potentially benefit the Taliban's undertakings, leads to more questions instead of answers. Trajectories project a continued involvement of the Taliban in the illicit economy, albeit rumours of a stop, by virtue of the substantial benefit it brings for the Taliban, not only in the context of financial influx, but furthermore the control and infrastructure it has created. Apparent through research is the increasing scale of the methamphetamine industry toppling the knowledge of the actualities of the Afghan drug industry.

To provide a forecast regarding the future of the illicit drug trade in Afghanistan, there are currently two predominant scenarios. In both scenarios, the illicit economy would remain largely in control of the Taliban. First is the scenario where the Taliban Government does not receive large-scale recognition internationally. Without recognition, the pariah State could face isolation and sanctions, as well as external forces countering the standing of the regime. Isolation and sanctions would result in the illicit economy expanding largely because of its profitability and the structural advantage for an oversight power and involvement in rural communities for the Taliban. The illicit economy would flourish through the Taliban's involvement in it and would provide for the Government's workings. The counteractions of the international community could lead to air strikes and further counteractions against drug facilities, which, as earlier elaborated on, hardly hurts the Taliban, but leads to increasing problematics for the civil society sliding into poverty without many options other than further engaging with the Taliban. Second is a scenario where the Taliban Government does, in fact, receive large-scale recognition. An international recognition could lead to various outcomes. For one, a reduction or elimination, possibly temporarily, of the illicit economy to display cooperation and engagement with values and norms of those recognizing the Taliban could be the case to enhance the reputation of the Taliban. Likewise, incentivizing by the international community could require the Taliban to implement a stop to illicit drug trade and cultivation in Afghanistan, which could result in financial assistance and humanitarian aid on a larger scale in response to the lacking income for civilians, which would at the same time benefit the Taliban in its position of power. Thus, the future of drug trade then is subject to

change, depending on the international community's approach, as well as willingness of collaboration of the Taliban, and how long a facade of this cooperation would last, and further how effective it would be to combat drug trade in Afghanistan, until the illicit drug economy would be reestablished. In both cases, it seems that the methamphetamine industry would have an advantage over the heroin industry because of the low input costs, little international attention, and the unmapped nature of the line of process to methamphetamine, and with this, little opportunities for outside forces to counteract.

Overall, what is necessary to note, is the large-scale inflation of profit numbers for the illicit industry. Though funds might not be as large as anticipated by public media outlets, the primary focus should be the obtainment and usage by the Taliban of generated funds (Mansfield 2019b, 20). As discussed, the illicit sector's structural drivers for employment of civilians are a substantial area of livelihood security. Thus, the main prioritization that needs to be taken to avoid future revenue flows towards the Taliban through the illicit drug sector is to establish a criminalisation for those exploiting and preying on the weak links of society (Colhoun 2021), which is, for obvious reasons, difficult to achieve currently with the Taliban being at the forefront of decision-making in Afghanistan. Most importantly, what needs to be taken into consideration, is who obtains those illegal funds and what they are then in turn used for (Mansfield 2021). It does not aid its cause if the Afghan population is harmed in the process of diminishing the scale of the illicit drug economy by conducting air strikes, or condemning the production of drugs.

What needs to be prioritised is how the drug involvement of the Taliban aids its cause, and how this can be curtailed.

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