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Claremont McKenna College

**The Convergence of the War on Terror and  
the War on Drugs: A Counter-  
Narcoterrorism Approach as a Policy  
Response**

submitted to  
Professor Jennifer Taw

by  
Lindsay Burton

for Senior Thesis  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigates how and why U.S. policies and agencies are ill-equipped to respond to narco-terrorism and offers some policy recommendations for remedying that. Narco-terrorism is the merging of terrorism and drug trafficking. Terrorist organizations and narcotics traffickers each have much to offer the other; there is potential for symbiosis in the form of cooperation and even hybridization. Examination of the dynamics between terrorist organizations and drug traffickers, combined with an evaluation of the US responses to narcoterrorism in Colombia and Afghanistan, makes it clear that current US policy responses fail to recognize narcoterrorism as a unique challenge, and instead attempt to deal separately with terrorism and drug trafficking. This approach has the potential to actually worsen both situations. The US needs a narcoterrorism strategy and institutions in place to implement it.

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## Introduction:

In 2017, Politico published a thirty-page exposé about why the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) mission, Project Cassandra, failed to combat Hezbollah's affiliations in the international drug trade.<sup>1</sup> Project Cassandra, in the eight years of its operation from 2008 to 2016, collected evidence that tied Hezbollah to the drug trade stretching from the Middle East to Latin America. The DEA mission ultimately disbanded after its decline as a policy priority, loss of funding, and jurisdiction difficulties. The story broke headlines outside of Politico, and the Department of Justice (DOJ) responded with pledging “to ensure that all Project Cassandra investigations as well as other related investigations” are reviewed by “the Hezbollah Financing and Narcoterrorism Team (HFNT), a group of experienced international narcotics trafficking, terrorism, organized crime, and money laundering prosecutors.”<sup>2</sup>

The DEA's Project Cassandra and the Justice Department's HFNT are efforts to combat a vital funding resource for terrorists: the international production and sale of narcotics. Both activities, the narcotics trade and terrorism, are national security concerns for the U.S. Given that these two security concerns can overlap, such as in the case of Hezbollah, U.S. policymaking institutions must prioritize a mission set to address that

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<sup>1</sup> Josh Meyer, “The Secret Backstory of How Obama Let Hezbollah Off the Hook,” *Politico*, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/interactives/2017/obama-hezbollah-drug-trafficking-investigation/>.

<sup>2</sup> Jeff Sessions, “Attorney-General Sessions Announces Hezbollah Financing and Narcoterrorism Team,” *The United States Department of Justice*, January 11, 2018, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-sessions-announces-hezbollah-financing-and-narcoterrorism-team>.

circumstance. Right now, counternarcotics and counterterrorism each involve different agencies and associated actors, operating with different goals and programs in mind.

This overlap in security concerns predates Project Cassandra and Hezbollah's affiliation with drug trafficking. The linkages between terrorists and the drug trade, narco-terrorism, surfaced in policy agendas as early as forty years ago, as policymakers recognized anti-government paramilitaries and narcotics traffickers operating in a shared space. Narcoterrorism implies that both security concerns, narcotics and terrorism, bring their societal vices to the overlap.<sup>3</sup>

Narco-terrorism is a global phenomenon. From the cocaine trade affiliation of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) in Colombia, to Hezbollah's production of Captagon in the Levant, to the Taliban's networks in the market in Asia, the bonds between terrorism and narcotics markets are widespread. These bonds exist in various forms, depending on the actors involved. Benefits of association go both ways: terrorist organizations can offer protective services to the cultivation of drug crops and institutions that launder drug profits for drug traders; for example, facilitating cross-border transportation, and more, while drug trafficking can be a source of funding for terrorist groups, either through taxation, collaboration, or coercion.

National security policies and strategies face trade-offs when attempting to address these linkages between terrorism and narcotics. The U.S. vests its security interests in the health and protection of its citizens, meaning that it must reduce the flow of illegal drugs and prevent, deter, and defend against terrorism. But while drug traffickers and terrorists may work together, combating each may require different,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

sometimes incompatible, strategies. For example, in the case of terrorists providing protection to crop harvesting, the U.S. might be implementing counternarcotics programs in rural villages without also tackling terrorist control over the locality. But, working to eradicate the local farmers' source of sustenance, the U.S.'s counternarcotics strategy alienates farmers, creates demand for local protection, and thus allows for the spread of a terrorist organization's power and influence. On the other hand, there are circumstances in which prioritizing counterterrorism operations over counternarcotics programs means that terrorists can continue to turn to the trade as a lucrative source of funding.

This thesis will examine the challenge the U.S. faces when terrorism and drug trafficking overlap. First, it will explore the nature of the terrorist-drug trafficker relationship, which has been variously described as symbiotic, competitive, and a hybrid. The thesis will also propose recommendations for future policy to effectively address the threat.



## Literature Review:

In a 1982 speech, Peruvian President Fernando Belaunde Terry coined the term “narco-terrorism... the union of the vice of narcotics with the violence of terrorism.”<sup>4</sup>

The needs of terrorist organizations and drug traffickers create the potential for a symbiotic relationship: terrorists can fund their operations through narcotics sales and gain regional legitimacy, and narcotics traffickers can work with terrorists to undermine state control and take advantage of anarchy.

A variety of potential relationships between narcotics traffickers and terrorists exist. These relationships can be competitive in nature, symbiotic, and even describe a developing hybrid. Relationships in which either narcotics traffickers or terrorists benefit from the existence of the other is a symbiosis. The symbiosis includes instances of cooperation by belligerents when they work together to meet each others’ needs. In some forms of a symbiosis, the two belligerents compete for supremacy and a disproportionate control of profits. Competition can drive the belligerents to coopt each others’ tactics in striving for control of the other. Eventually, the relationship can reflect deeper ties between belligerents as they formulate a hybrid organization. This transition is critical as it is no longer constructed upon the efforts and benefits of different parties, but rather denotes when efforts and benefits become concerned with one hybrid actor. In other words, the two different frameworks for motivations and benefits of the two actors in the

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<sup>4</sup> John E. Thomas, “Narco-terrorism: Could the Legislative and Prosecutorial Responses Threaten Our Civil Liberties?” *Washington and Lee Law Review*, May 2010, <http://law2.wlu.edu/deptimages/Law%20Review/66-4ThomasNote.pdf>.

symbiosis ultimately fuse into one framework in a hybrid threat. This hybridization runs counter to the U.S. conventional wisdom: targeting one threat will sever the symbiosis and cause the other threat to decline.

Either party can begin the symbiosis in a number of ways and a number of motivations can prompt the survival of the symbiosis. Scholars discuss the various avenues of initiation and debate which of the motivations reign supreme.

The relationship begins in a variety of ways. In some cases, a narcotics market already exists in a space where a terrorist organization intends to spread its influence. In these cases, the initiation of the symbiotic relationship can occur through coercion or negotiation. The FARC used a coercive initiation approach with cocaine traffickers in Colombia. The FARC conducted an offensive militant campaign against traffickers to attain dominance over narcotics organizations and their production territories.<sup>5</sup> Negotiated initiations also occur. In Peru, the Shining Path terrorist organization offered protection services to the cocaine farming communities of the Huallaga Valley in exchange for resources and popular support.<sup>6</sup>

In rare cases, terrorist organizations will target a demand for a product and begin producing narcotics in-house, then trafficking around the world. For example, Hezbollah saw a demand for amphetamines in the Middle East and began producing and trafficking Captagon, making tremendous profits.<sup>7</sup> Captagon is a newer, powerful stimulant drug

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Rexton Kan, *Drug Trafficking and International Security* (Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2016), 36.

<sup>6</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War On Drugs* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2010), 41.

<sup>7</sup> Josh Meyer, "The Secret Backstory of How Obama Let Hezbollah Off the Hook," Politico, accessed December 6, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/interactives/2017/obama-hezbollah-drug-trafficking-investigation/>.

used by Syrian fighters and Arab youth in the region.<sup>8</sup> In other cases, the initiation can be a product of circumstance, wherein terrorists or narcotics traffickers benefit from a power vacuum left behind by the other. A power vacuum is an anarchical space left behind when a governing power topples; creating conditions ripe for conflict and the succession of a new power. During Operation Enduring Freedom, for example, the relationship between the Taliban and traffickers morphed. The suppression of the Taliban allowed opium traffickers to gain supremacy and occupy the space relinquished by the Taliban.<sup>9</sup>

Academics debate which motivations breathe life into the narco-terrorist relationship. One school of thought is that the needs of terrorist organizations dictate the behavior of the relationship. Another is that, instead, the interests of narcotic trafficking organizations drive the relationship and the forms it takes. Paul Rexton Kan of the U.S. Army War College falls into the first school of thought. He argues that terrorist organizations respond to the potential of the symbiosis by selecting their resources “based on six criteria: quantity, legitimacy, security, reliability, control, and simplicity.”<sup>10</sup> Illegal drugs meet all of these. Drug supply is not subject to the threat of shortage as it is low cost and simple to produce through cultivation. The profits of the drug trade are made legitimate through laundering. The drug trade is a secure and reliable source of funding due to its steady and massive scale of demand. The U.N. International Drug Control

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher J. Coyne, Abigail R. Hall Blanco, and Scott Burns. "The War on Drugs in Afghanistan: Another Failed Experiment with Interdiction." *The Independent Review* 21, no. 1 (Summer, 2016): 95-119. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1798786156?accountid=10141>.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Rexton Kan, *Drug Trafficking and International Security* (Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2016), 106.

Program estimates the global trade to retail annually around \$300 to \$500 billion, making it dependably lucrative for terrorist organizations.<sup>11</sup>

The research of retired Air Force Colonel Jennifer L. Hesterman also falls into this school of thought. In *The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus*, Hesterman describes how drug profits fit terrorist organizations' needs: "Terrorist organizations need money and resources not only to carry out an operation but perhaps most importantly to recruit, maintain safe havens, train, travel, take care of day-to-day expenses, and in some groups, provide for the families of dead martyrs."<sup>12</sup> Amanda Leu of the *Joint Forces Quarterly* explains that terrorist organizations enter bonds with drug traffickers as "terrorist organizations are increasingly using drug trafficking as a means to fund operations... These groups operate under different leadership and usually their end goals are not the same; however, they do carry out many of the same functions through organized crime" to protect product and create profit.<sup>13</sup>

However, another strain of thought reverses the relationship, contending that the interests of narcotics traffickers drive the behavior of the symbiosis. In her book, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs*, Vanda Felbab-Brown regards protection from government intervention as a main requirement of drug traffickers: "Crucially, governments frequently feel obliged to destroy the illicit economy, thus

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<sup>11</sup> The U.N. International Drug Control Program, *The Social and Economic Impact of Drug Abuse and Control* (Vienna: UNDCP, 1994): 29

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer Hesterman, *The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus* (Boca Raton: CRC Press: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 167.

<sup>13</sup> Amanda Leu, "Fighting Narcoterrorism," *Joint Forces Quarterly*, January 2008, <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ccl.idm.oclc.org/ehost/detail/detail?vid=9&sid=a6706ebe-dc76-4d8b-99bb-5db11c3a2e12%40sessionmgr4008&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#db=aph&AN=31391038>

allowing belligerents to offer themselves as its protectors and obtain the support of the local population that depends on the illicit economy.”<sup>14</sup> Felbab-Brown claims that because narcotics traffickers require protection before the initiation of a symbiosis, narcotics traffickers and their needs are the precursor threat.

Michael Durnan and Mark Peceny of the University of New Mexico agree, and identify drug traffickers’ need for protection from the police threat: “The coercive military and police activities... often determine which set of private actors in which countries benefit the most from the drug trade;” compelling narcotics traffickers to maintain their position in the market through acquiring protective services.<sup>15</sup> Also recognizing the police threat drug traffickers face, Kelly Hanen of the University of Texas discusses how “cartels frequently use explosives, firearms, and other dangerous weapons [they acquired from terrorist organizations]... this control allows cartels to achieve monetary gains.”<sup>16</sup> The narcotics traffickers use the weaponry to defend their crop from local police forces and other competitors. Alex Schmid of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime describes how narcotics traffickers “use tactics of terror...to disrupt investigations; to deter...vigorous government policies; to eliminate effective law enforcement officials... [and] create an environment more conducive to criminal

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<sup>14</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War On Drugs* (Washington D.C.: The Brooking Institution, 2010), 3.

<sup>15</sup> Peceny, Mark and Michael Durnan. "The FARC's Best Friend: U.S. Antidrug Policies and the Deepening of Colombia's Civil War in the 1990s." *Latin American Politics and Society* 48, no. 2 (Summer, 2006): 95-IV.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly Hanen. "Doubling Down: Why Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations Should Be Designated As Foreign Terrorist Organizations and As Significant Narcotics Traffickers." *American Journal of Criminal Law* 43, no. 2 (2016)

activity.”<sup>17</sup> Narcotics traffickers gain these skill sets in terror and intimidation tactics from the example of respective regional terrorist organizations.

There is a third school of thought: symbiosis leads to hybridization, whether through collaboration or cooperation. Terrorists who cultivate and transport drugs and launder profits, are essentially drug traffickers. Concurrently, drug traders sharing profits with terrorist organizations support terrorism. Senior Policy Analyst for the Library of Congress Raphael Francis Perl references the blurring lines between narcotics traffickers and terrorists: “The links between drug trafficking and terrorist organizations are well documented... beyond the rule of law, the criminal world, the drug-trafficking world, and the terrorist world merge. The line between them is becoming increasingly difficult to draw.”<sup>18</sup> Colin Clarke of Carnegie Mellon University views the blurred lines as the seeds to a more grim threat: “In these cases, criminality (and the violence that often accompanies criminality) helps fund the insurgency and groups can morph over time into criminal-insurgent hybrids.”<sup>19</sup> Matthew Levitt and Michael Jacobson of the Washington Institute quantify this: “up to 60 percent of terror organizations are suspected of being connected in some fashion with the illegal narcotics trade. As FTOs [Foreign Terrorist Organizations] become more heavily involved in the drug trade, the DEA and others have begun to identify such terrorist groups as ‘hybrid organizations’.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Alex P. Schmid. "Links between terrorism and drug trafficking: a case of narco-terrorism?." *International Summit on Democracy, Terrorism and Security*, January 27 (2005).

<sup>18</sup> Raphael Francis Perl, “Target America: Traffickers, Terrorists” (lecture, DEA Headquarters, Arlington, Virginia, December 4, 2001), <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=3250>

<sup>19</sup> Colin Clarke, “Drugs,” *Journal of Strategic Study* 9, no. 3 (2016), <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1536&context=jss>.

<sup>20</sup> Michael Braun, “Drug Trafficking and Middle Eastern Terrorist Groups: A Growing Nexus?” (lecture presented at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Washington, D.C., July 18, 2008). <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus92.pdf>,

Svante Cornell of Johns Hopkins University explains the significance of such merging. She says that “the most dangerous impact of the link between narcotics and conflict is the potential for changing motivational structures within” the partnering terrorist organizations and drug traffickers.<sup>21</sup> The shift in motivational structures increases overlap in motivations. As a step in the hybridization process, this increases bonds between terrorists and narcotics traffickers. Christina Liang of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy regards this proliferation of linkages as reason that “terrorism and transnational organized crime can no longer be studied in isolation... groups are transforming into new crime-terror groups displaying the characteristics of both.”<sup>22</sup> Liang explains that hybrid groups share recruitment methods, fear tactics, and training styles. She and her peers assert that, in some scenarios, this “symbiosis of crime and terror is making them both more powerful: terrorists are benefitting from the revenue of criminal activities and organized criminals are using terrorist tactics to gain political power.”<sup>23</sup> The transition from a symbiotic relationship to a hybridization is of immense concern as it essentially thwarts the current efforts of U.S. counternarcotic and counterterrorism policies.

The existence of the nexus and the threat of hybridization negates the logic of U.S. counternarcotic and counterterrorism policy. James Piazza of Penn State University gives three hypotheses that exemplify the conventional logic of U.S. policy: “Higher

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<sup>21</sup> Svante E. Cornell. "The Interaction of Narcotics and Conflict." *Journal of Peace Research* 42, no. 6 (11, 2005): 751-760. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1177/0022343305057895>.

<http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/213129737?accountid=10141>.

<sup>22</sup> Christina Liang, “Shadow Networks: The Growing Nexus of Terrorism and Organised Crime,” *Geneva Centre for Security Policy*, September

2011, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/133082/Policy%20Paper%2020.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

illicit drug prices yield higher rates of terrorism... Higher rates of illicit drugs crop production/cultivation will yield higher rates of terrorism... Higher rates of drug crop eradication and drug product interdiction will yield lower rates of terrorism.”<sup>24</sup> Through application of his three hypotheses, Piazza asserts that the success of “drug eradication and interdiction strategies are significant predictors of domestic and international terrorism” declining.<sup>25</sup> This logic, that combatting one threat will eliminate the other, runs counter to the reality of the symbiotic relationship and subsequent threat of hybridization. As demonstrated by past policy responses, the U.S. conventional wisdom fails because the U.S. cannot effectively address either threat while the threat exists in relation to the other.

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<sup>24</sup> James A. Piazza, “The Illicit Drug Trade, Counternarcotics Strategies and Terrorism,” *Public Choice: JSTOR*, December 2011, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/41483738?seq=1#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/41483738?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*



## U.S. Policy Responses:

The U.S.'s declarations of the War on Drugs and the War on Terrorism inherently delineate our enemies as mutually exclusive. In 2001, the Bush Administration affirmed that the War on Terror would not end “until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.”<sup>26</sup> Bush both designated the enemy, and failed to designate explicitly the name and specific members comprising the enemy. This made it impossible to implement a coherent strategy and coordinate agencies to target the influence of terrorist organizations since the full breadth of terrorist activities and tactics was not recognize. In order to combat narco-terrorists effectively, the U.S. policy- making process must harmonize U.S. agencies.

Two aspects of the U.S.'s decision-making and prioritizing processes drive national security policy: “an uncertain threat environment and the timing of policy.”<sup>27</sup> The perceived size of given threats warrant different approaches in the policy-making processes. However, the U.S. approaches definitive and uncertain threats with the same policy-making process. The U.S.'s policy-making process evolved out of the Cold War, when the threat was large, viewed as existential, but both stable and well-defined. This Cold War-era policy-making process was built to focus on countering the influence and expansion of communism. Because the U.S. focused its defense efforts on countering the

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<sup>26</sup> George W. Bush, “Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People” (Capitol Hill, Washington D.C., September 20, 2001), <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>.

<sup>27</sup> William Newmann, *Managing National Security Policy: The President and the Process* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 207.

rise of the Soviet Union, the U.S. designed the current policy-making process to combat a large existential threat in the form of a peer force defined by borders. Because of this, the national security policy-making process is inherently neo-realist. The U.S. continues to use this narrow frame of reference and apply the same policy-making process in a world with more nuanced and numerous threats by non-state actors.<sup>28</sup>

The timing of policy refers to the window of time when a policy interest makes the top of the national security agenda, and the time it takes to implement a policy targeting that interest.

The duration of interagency processes extends this window in the timing of policy. This window could outlive the relevance of a certain policy as it passes through the channels of the interagency process. This suggests “that the policy needs of the moment could not be satisfied by the standard interagency process.”<sup>29</sup> The standard interagency process includes the struggles to push interests to the top of the agenda. Bureaus within departments and departments within the government alike fight for the chance to act on their own interests and “if difficulty creating consensus among different factions within a department exists, the pressures on the executive of that department to modify the process should be present.”<sup>30</sup> Matching the intended U.S. policy response with the speed of our enemies requires formulating a standard interagency process that addresses the window of policy timing.

Matching the timing of policy with the window of policy relevancy, and understanding an uncertain threat ought to be priorities of the policy-making process that

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 211.

coordinates counternarcotics and counterterrorism agencies and addresses the threat of the narco-terrorist symbiosis.

Although cases emerge in which a narco-terrorist symbiosis creates a hybrid threat, the U.S. organizes its policy to address them as independent and separate threats with two discrete missions: counterterrorism and counternarcotics. According to Jonathan Caulkins, Mark Kleiman, and Peter Reuter of the Belfer Center at Harvard University, counterterrorism and counternarcotics operations differ in “the scale of activity to be suppressed; the structure of the organizations whose schemes we must try to foil; the motivations of their participants; the scale, structure, and direction of the related financial transactions; and the tolerance for failure.”<sup>31</sup>

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), in Joint Publication 3-26, designates counterterrorism operations as activities “to neutralize terrorists, their organizations, and networks... countering root causes and [achieving] desired regional end states from the definition.”<sup>32</sup> The main U.S. government bodies that perform counterterrorism operations are the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Justice Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Department of State (DOS) Bureau of Counterterrorism, National Counterterrorism Center, the Armed Forces, and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).<sup>33</sup> The CIA Counterterrorism Center (CTC) functions as both an operational and analytic mission within the agency as it “targets terrorist leaders and cells, disrupts their

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<sup>31</sup> Jonathan P. Caulkins, Mark A. R. Kleiman, and Peter Reuter, “Lessons of The,” *The Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, June 2002, [https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/lessons\\_of\\_the\\_war\\_on\\_drugs\\_for\\_the\\_war\\_on\\_terrorism.pdf](https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/lessons_of_the_war_on_drugs_for_the_war_on_terrorism.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Department of Defense, “Joint Publication 3-26: Counterterrorism,” *Joint Chiefs of Staff*, November 13, 2009, [http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3\\_26.pdf](http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_26.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> “Terrorism,” Penn State University Libraries, October 9, 2018, <http://guides.libraries.psu.edu/c.php?g=582994&p=4025429#s-lg-box-12491607>.

plots, [and] severs their financial and logistical links.”<sup>34</sup> The Justice Department’s Counterterrorism Section (CTS), outside of the FBI, focuses on “investigating and prosecuting domestic and international terrorism cases, . . . terrorist financing matters, including material support cases; participating in the systematic collection and analysis of data and information relating to the investigation and prosecution of terrorism cases, . . . formulating legislative initiatives and DOJ policies and guidelines relating to terrorism” and more.<sup>35</sup> The FBI holds jurisdiction over “specific terrorism-related offenses, such as violence at airports, money laundering, [and] attacks on U.S. officials.”<sup>36</sup> The DOS Bureau of Counterterrorism “designs, manages, and oversees foreign assistance to build the civilian capabilities of foreign government partners” to carry out their own counterterrorism missions.<sup>37</sup> The National Counterterrorism Center under the Director of National Intelligence manages “a Joint Operations Center” to “provide an interagency forum and supporting process to link national-level counterterrorism policy to strategic operational objectives and tasks.”<sup>38</sup> The US Armed Forces, both conventional and Special Operations, “use CT capabilities in a wide variety of combat and noncombat situations to build a cohesive CT operation” and to assist host nations “to build indigenous capabilities that deter terrorist acts.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Spotlight On CIA's Centers, *Central Intelligence Agency*, July 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/news-information/featured-story-archive/2014-featured-story-archive/spotlight-on-cias-centers.html>.

<sup>35</sup> “Counterterrorism Section,” The United States Department of Justice, July 23, 2014, <https://www.justice.gov/nsd/counterterrorism-section>.

<sup>36</sup> “What Is the FBI's Role in Combating Terrorism?,” Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed November 29, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/about/faqs/what-is-the-fbis-role-in-combating-terrorism>.

<sup>37</sup> “Programs and Initiatives,” U.S. Department of State, accessed November 29, 2018, <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/programs/index.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> “What We Do,” The National Counterterrorism Center, accessed November 29, 2018, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/nctc-what-we-do>.

<sup>39</sup> “Joint Publication: Counterterrorism,” *Joint Chiefs of Staff* 3, no. 26 (October 24, 2014), [http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3\\_26.pdf](http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_26.pdf).

The variety of agencies involved in the counterterrorism mission set arises from the U.S.'s need to adapt its functions to the threat of terrorism. Over time, counterterrorist actors proliferated as the U.S. legislature passed new measures and programs. As the nature of terrorist threats morph and evolve both domestically and abroad, the U.S. responds with updated programs and new entities to implement those updates. "Although as many as 30 or more Federal agencies" may be involved with counterterrorism, each serves a specific function in a specific mission. However, these missions sometimes conflict with one another. In these instances, the U.S. will employ interagency organizations in an attempt "to assure that the various operational programs [deal] with terrorist attempts, including intelligence and incident management, are effective."<sup>40</sup> These interagency working groups pursue streamlining agency jurisdictions, but also add to the proliferation of entities.

Meanwhile, the DoD defines counternarcotics as a mission set that addresses "illicit drug trafficking, but [can] also include countering illicit financial flows and the illicit trafficking of people, wildlife, natural resources, and weapons."<sup>41</sup> In 1988, Congress enacted the National Drug Control Policy to "enhance national drug control planning and coordination" efforts within the departments and agencies of the Executive.<sup>42</sup> The National Drug Control Policy programs are implanted within "the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Education, Health and Human Services, Homeland

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<sup>40</sup> Counterterrorism Coordination, *The Inman Report: Report of the Secretary of State's Advisory Panel on Overseas Security*, <https://fas.org/irp/threat/inman/part08.htm>. <https://fas.org/irp/threat/inman/part08.htm>

<sup>41</sup> "Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats," Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, accessed November 29, 2018, <https://policy.defense.gov/OUSDP-Offices/ASD-for-Special-Operations-Low-Intensity-Conflict/Counternarcotics-and-Global-Threats/>.

<sup>42</sup> Diana Maurer, "Drug Control Policy: Information On Status of Federal Efforts and Key Issues for Preventing Illicit Drug Use," *United States Government Accountability Office*, July 26, 2017, <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Maurer-GAO-Statement-ONDCP-7-26.pdf>.

Security, Housing and Urban Development, the Interior, Justice, Labor, State, Transportation, Treasury, and Veterans Affairs.”<sup>43</sup> These programs include domestic and international counternarcotics operations spread throughout the Executive. In the Justice Department specifically, the Drug Enforcement Administration, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and teams of special prosecutors conduct counternarcotics. The DEA’s mission, specifically, is “to enforce the controlled substances laws and regulations of the United States... [and reduce] the availability of and demand for illicit controlled substances on the domestic and international markets.”<sup>44</sup> The CIA Crime and Narcotics Center and the Armed Forces also carry out counternarcotics operations in conjunction with the programs outlined in the National Drug Control Policy.<sup>45</sup>

This vast distribution of resources across over thirty federal agencies proves to be counterproductive due to its lack of responsiveness in a bureaucratic structure.<sup>46</sup> This is because the rigidity of bureaucratic hierarchies impedes counternarcotics agencies’ ability to react to the narcotics traffickers’ pace of activities. Also, the resources exist in this hierarchical structure that includes precinct jurisdictions. Precinct jurisdictions impose physical borders on law enforcement entities both domestically and internationally. These precinct jurisdictions are problematic to counternarcotics operations as narcotics traffickers “exploit borders to their advantage” and do not

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> “Organizational Chart,” The United States Department of Justice, February 5, 2018, <https://www.justice.gov/agencies/chart>.

<sup>45</sup> Diana Maurer, “Drug Control Policy: Information On Status of Federal Efforts and Key Issues for Preventing Illicit Drug Use,” *United States Government Accountability Office*, July 26, 2017, <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Maurer-GAO-Statement-ONDCP-7-26.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> Jerome Bjelopera and Kristin Finkela, “Domestic Federal Law Enforcement Coordination: Through the Lens of the Southwest Border,” *Congressional Research Service* (June 3, 2014), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesecc/R43583.pdf>.

constrain their illicit activities to political boundaries.<sup>47</sup> Precinct jurisdictions require another layer of cooperation: coherence of action between multiple groups who possess authority over the enforcement of law in restricted spaces. Authorities must continuously sync and work together to target a fluid and moving threat. However, few mechanisms exist to promote precinct jurisdiction cooperation; making the process slow and difficult to arrange.

The nature of the narco-terrorist symbiosis involving non-state actors allows narco-terrorists to defy national sovereignty, achieve their goals, and avoid the comparably slow reaction of U.S. bureaucracy. Traditionally, the FBI, DEA, and other domestically focused agencies and their missions must yield to the CIA, and military operations. For example, as the FBI and the DEA may seek to prosecute a narcotics trafficking organization, this narcotics trafficking organization may participate in terrorist activity; rendering this case now to the concern of the Armed Forces and the CIA. While the U.S. bureaucracy contains agencies that function to contend with components of the symbiosis, the agencies are not coordinated within or across missions effectively. Counternarcotics entities and counterterrorism entities thus approach the symbiosis from different angles with different intents rather than responding in a coordinated effort. The following case studies in Colombia and Afghanistan will demonstrate these discrepancies in U.S. approaches to counternarcotics and counterterrorism and the elimination of both threats.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

## Case Studies:

### The FARC, Cocaine, and Colombia

Colombia experienced extreme violence and political unrest in the 1940s and 1950s in the period known as La Violencia.<sup>48</sup> This instability spawned guerilla insurgent groups that, over time, organized themselves into the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). The FARC began as an insurgency aspiring to institute communism in place of the Colombian government.<sup>49</sup> For the next twenty years, the FARC continued to grow and spread its influence.

By the 1970s, a lack of resources and weaponry began to stunt the FARC's growth. As a result, the FARC turned to a lucrative trade within its controlled districts: marijuana.<sup>50</sup> The FARC began to tax the marijuana trade in its controlled districts; a gateway action to the growth of its dependency on the drug trade. Simultaneously, the 1970s also witnessed the beginning of the cocaine industry as small businesses initiated small exporting operations.<sup>51</sup> Looking to make a dependable living while in a conflict zone, Colombian peasant economies centered around "the first two phases of illicit

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<sup>48</sup> Paul R. Cooper "Greed and Grievance? Why did FARC-EP Leadership Become Involved in the Illicit Trades of Coca-Cocaine and Money Laundering?" Order No. 1556484, The University of Texas at San Antonio, 2014. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1541532599?accountid=10141>.

<sup>49</sup> Jennifer Hesterman, *The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus* (Boca Raton: CRC Press: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 86.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Hilary Higgins, "Counternarcotics to Counterinsurgency: Assessing Us Intervention in Colombia, 1998-2002" (thesis, Harvard College, 2015), [https://gov.harvard.edu/files/gov/files/ir\\_6.pdf](https://gov.harvard.edu/files/gov/files/ir_6.pdf).



production- the cultivation of coca leaf and its subsequent transformation into coca base.”<sup>52</sup>

Over the course of the 1970s, the growing American demand for cocaine breathed life into Colombian drug cartels, such as Pablo Escobar’s Medellín drug cartel.<sup>53</sup> When the U.S. urged Colombia to issue a warrant for Escobar’s arrest, the cartel declared war on the state. This gave rise to cartel paramilitaries that adopted tactics of political violence modeled on those used by the FARC. This rise of cartel paramilitaries wielding FARC tactics translated into the rise narcoterrorism in Colombia.

In the following decade, the FARC experienced unprecedented expansion as it involved itself in “kidnapping, extortion, coca-cocaine taxation, production, cattle theft, [and] narcotics transportation along with money laundering.”<sup>54</sup> To facilitate this expansion, the FARC “would conduct military operations in order to gain access to key pieces of drug trafficking networks” and create safe conditions for the production of narcotics, particularly cocaine.<sup>55</sup> While the FARC launched these guerilla campaigns, larger and more organized narcotics trafficking organizations emerged in the 1980s.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Susan Virginia Norman, “Narcotization as Security Dilemma: The Farc and Drug Trade in Colombia,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, June 28 2017, <https://www-tandfonline-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2017.1338052>

<sup>53</sup> Leech, Garry M. *The FARC : The Longest Insurgency*. Rebels. London: Zed Books, 2011. <http://search.ebscohost.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=369603&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>54</sup> Paul R. Cooper "Greed and Grievance? Why did FARC-EP Leadership Become Involved in the Illicit Trades of Coca-Cocaine and Money Laundering?" Order No. 1556484, The University of Texas at San Antonio, 2014. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1541532599?accountid=10141>.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Rexton Kan, *Drug Trafficking and International Security* (Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2016), 36.

<sup>56</sup> Hilary Higgins, “Counternarcotics to Counterinsurgency: Assessing Us Intervention in Colombia, 1998-2002” (thesis, Harvard College, 2015), [https://gov.harvard.edu/files/gov/files/ir\\_6.pdf](https://gov.harvard.edu/files/gov/files/ir_6.pdf).

Recognizing some correlation between the activities of the FARC and cocaine traffickers, the former United States ambassador to Colombia, Lewis Tambs, popularized the “Narcoguerrilla Theory” in the 1980s.<sup>57</sup> The Colombian Narcoguerrilla Theory posits that 1) the FARC dominates the Colombian drug trade; 2) the Colombian government is fractured, lacks a coherent defense, and is incapable of combatting this threat; and, 3) U.S. intervention is imperative to ending this threat.<sup>58</sup> Through the Narcoguerrilla Theory, the U.S. recognized the existence of the narco-terrorist symbiosis and attempted to coordinate its agencies and executive departments to address shortcomings. From this development in the 1980s and on, the Colombian Narcoguerrilla Theory justified and drove U.S. intervention measures in Colombia thereafter.<sup>59</sup> However, the premises of the Colombian Narcoguerrilla Theory and the lack of Congressional support for counterterrorism in Colombia drove the U.S. to predominantly rely on counternarcotics operations; believing that defeating the narcotics threat would also eradicate the terrorist threat.

In the mid-1990s, successful US counternarcotics operations in Colombia broke down regional cocaine cartels and allowed the FARC to assume dominance in the Colombian drug trade activities, including: “Coca leave harvesting, transportation to cocaine facilities, and finally transport of the final product to the narcotics cartels

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<sup>57</sup> Arlene B. Tickner "Colombia and the United States: From Counternarcotics to Counterterrorism." *Current History* 102, no. 661 (02, 2003): 77-85.  
<http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/200771130?accountid=10141>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

operating out of Mexico.”<sup>60</sup> The U.S. Department of the Treasury estimated the FARC’s cocaine trade profits in the billions; allowing them to not only supply and arm their troops, but gain legitimacy as a power in the country.<sup>61</sup> The U.S.’s efforts simply pushed coca supply into the regions protected and taxed by the FARC. In this way, U.S. counternarcotics efforts “provided the FARC with unprecedented opportunities to extract resources from the cocaine industry to deepen its long insurgency against the Colombian state.”<sup>62</sup>

The few U.S. counterterrorism operations in Colombia also empowered narcotics traffickers and production participants. The U.S.’s counterterrorism mission “declared interest in promoting democracy, the protection of human rights, and economic development.”<sup>63</sup> However, as counterterrorism operations cut lifelines for the FARC, “they soon realized not only how important coca cultivation was to their peasant base, but also that it could be cultivated as a new revenue source for their guerilla activities.”<sup>64</sup> The terrorist organization consequently turned to narcotics trafficking and sales as a new source of cash flow.

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<sup>60</sup> Paul R. Cooper "Greed and Grievance? Why did FARC-EP Leadership Become Involved in the Illicit Trades of Coca-Cocaine and Money Laundering?" Order No. 1556484, The University of Texas at San Antonio, 2014. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1541532599?accountid=10141>.

<sup>61</sup> Paul R. Cooper "Greed and Grievance? Why did FARC-EP Leadership Become Involved in the Illicit Trades of Coca-Cocaine and Money Laundering?" Order No. 1556484, The University of Texas at San Antonio, 2014. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1541532599?accountid=10141>.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> David Schwam-Baird. "Frankenstein in Colombia: America's Policy Missteps and the Paramilitaries." *Journal of Third World Studies* 32, no. 2 (Fall, 2015): 123-151, <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1789006416?accountid=10141> (accessed October 10, 2018).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

The U.S.'s counternarcotics missions in Colombia gave rise to friction points between the DoD and DOJ over jurisdiction. The main point of friction derived from DOJ's ambition to have narcotics traffickers extradited to the U.S. to stand trial.<sup>65</sup> DOJ's extradition trials launched it into controversy as policymakers argued whether the trials were an encroachment of Colombia's sovereignty. This controversy led to a series of activations, deactivations, and reactivations of the bilateral extradition treaty between the U.S. and Colombia in the 80s. However, the Medellín Cartel began to threaten the Colombian election process, and the Colombian government reinstated extradition in an effort to bring traffickers to justice.<sup>66</sup>

Infusing the Colombian Army with monetary aid was the DoD's first impulse.<sup>67</sup> After some reluctance, Colombia and the DoD formed a specialized counternarcotics battalion, consisting of 950 troops and 33 Huey helicopters, in the Colombian Army.<sup>68</sup> The U.S. tasked this counternarcotics battalion with providing security for aerial eradication operations over coca farms and consequently FARC strongholds.<sup>69</sup> The U.S. turned to a variety of counternarcotics operations, like aerial eradication, in the rationale that wiping out coca crop would choke off narcotic profits and thus, substantially weaken the FARC. However, the efforts backfired.

The "tactical successes in U.S. antidrug policies" fragmented cocaine giants into small diversified paramilitary actors. Due to their small size and limited resources, these

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<sup>65</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War On Drugs* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2010), 75.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

paramilitary actors lacked access to large imports of coca leaves and ability to export.

The FARC took advantage of the small-scale industry and aggressively taxed the cocaine trade.<sup>70</sup> While taxing drug traffickers, the FARC would provide protection to the taxed in order to protect this source of income.

The adverse effects of the U.S.'s counternarcotics operations led the U.S. to shift to a new hardline approach to counter the rise of the FARC. In July of 2000, DOS and DoD launched Plan Colombia, a counterterrorism operation, to the Colombian government. Plan Colombia granted aid to the Colombian government "to train and equip Colombian military and police forces to combat drug cartels and guerillas, with a smaller portion going to social programs."<sup>71</sup> Plan Colombia broke away from the trend of separate and exclusive counternarcotics programs, and outlined a course of action for cooperation between agencies and the integration of program mission sets. On the surface, DoD communicated Plan Colombia to the American public as an effort in the War on Drugs. However, the communication of Plan Colombia and its counternarcotics operations were a proxy to counterterrorism efforts as Congress failed to support outright counterinsurgency in Latin America. Plan Colombia, in reality, was a refocusing of counterterrorism operations against the FARC.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Mark Peceny and Michael Durnan. "The FARC's Best Friend: U.S. Antidrug Policies and the Deepening of Colombia's Civil War in the 1990s." *Latin American Politics and Society* 48, no. 2 (Summer, 2006): 95-IV. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2006.tb00348.x>.

<http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/200314886?accountid=10141>.

<sup>71</sup> Paul R. Cooper "Greed and Grievance? Why did FARC-EP Leadership Become Involved in the Illicit Trades of Coca-Cocaine and Money Laundering?" Order No. 1556484, The University of Texas at San Antonio, 2014. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1541532599?accountid=10141>.

<sup>72</sup> Knoester, Matthew. "War in Colombia." *Social Justice* 25, no. 2 (72) (1998): 85-109. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29767072>.

To employ a greater breadth of tools to counter the FARC, the Bush Administration renamed Plan Colombia to the Andean Counterdrug Initiative (ACI) in 2001.<sup>73</sup> This allowed Bush to cancel DoD restrictions on U.S. counternarcotics funds and use these funds in both counternarcotics and counterterrorism operations. In application, the funds increased the deployment of military advisors and U.S. defense contractors to Colombia.<sup>74</sup> This translated into a stark disproportionality of military assets to focus on aerial crop eradication, and resources for socioeconomic and human rights programs.

The U.S.'s Plan Colombia succeeded in ending the reign of Pablo Escobar and dismantling the Medellín Cartel. However, the Colombian cocaine trade survived and the FARC fought to assert its dominance over the profits that Escobar and the Medellín left behind. Through the successes of Plan Colombia, the U.S. "provided the FARC with an important opportunity to expand its power, because it removed one of its principal political-military competitors in the Colombian countryside."<sup>75</sup> Protecting coca farmers and regulating the trafficking activities of cocaine granted the FARC grass roots legitimacy across the country.

In the wake of the failing Plan Colombia, food security programs by NGOs and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) attempted to persuade rural farmers away from coca production as part of counternarcotics.<sup>76</sup> USAID and all foreign

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<sup>73</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War On Drugs* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2010), 101.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Mark Peceny and Michael Durman. "The FARC's Best Friend: U.S. Antidrug Policies and the Deepening of Colombia's Civil War in the 1990s." *Latin American Politics and Society* 48, no. 2 (Summer, 2006): 95-IV. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2006.tb00348.x>.

<http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/200314886?accountid=10141>.

<sup>76</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War On Drugs* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2010), 103.

aid was subject to the Colombian government's "zero-coca" policy; requiring each community seeking aid to first exterminate all coca crop.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, the farming communities that were the least dependent on coca and the safest from the FARC could gain aid, instead of the most affected communities.

However, USAID programs lacked great enough assistance for farming communities to leave coca production in the long term. USAID could rarely offer enough for the communities to meet their basic needs. This often caused the farming communities to surrender any assistance and return to coca production.

In terms of overall outcomes of U.S. operations in Colombia, the division of counternarcotics and counterterrorism operations hamstrung the U.S. in accomplishing its goal of eliminating the threat of narcoterrorism. The lack of interagency structure and cooperation led the U.S. to lose coherence in its strategy and ultimately depend on the DoD. However, these results meant the increased strength of the FARC and growth of cocaine trafficking in Colombia; the exact opposite of the desired end state.

Plan Colombia ultimately resulted in some territorial loss for the FARC, but did nothing to eliminate the terrorist threat or eradicate the cocaine market. The FARC continues to control approximately 60% of the country's drug trade.<sup>78</sup> In the past decade, the FARC entered peace negotiations with the Colombian government, but a "new FARC" movement threatens to rise and pick up where the original FARC left off.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Paul R. Cooper "Greed and Grievance? Why did FARC-EP Leadership Become Involved in the Illicit Trades of Coca-Cocaine and Money Laundering?" Order No. 1556484, The University of Texas at San Antonio, 2014. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1541532599?accountid=10141>.

<sup>79</sup> Nicholas Casey and Federico Escobar, "Colombia Struck a Peace Deal with Guerrillas, but Many Return to Arms," *New York Times*, September, 18, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/18/world/americas/colombia-farc-peace.html>.

However, this new FARC “now wear the insignia of the Virgilio Peralta Arenas Bloc,” a drug trafficking organization. The establishment of the new FARC, donning a uniform shared with a drug trafficking organization, signals a key development of the narco-terrorist symbiosis in Colombia: the threat is hybridizing.

## **The Taliban, Opium, and Afghanistan:**

In the 1970s, the governments of Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan instituted bans on opium.<sup>80</sup> To address the demand after the imposition of the bans, poppy cultivation sprang up in more than half of the provinces in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the conflicts with the Soviet Union and the internal struggle for communist or nationalist control of the nation displaced Afghans and caused an economic fallout. With few options for livelihood, farming communities turned to opium cultivation.<sup>81</sup>

By 1980, the growth of opium production in Afghanistan posed a predicament to the Mujahideen leadership.<sup>82</sup> Because the Mujahideen considered opium consumption counter to their interpreted Islamic values, they could not contradict themselves and support the market that sustained a vast portion of Afghan livelihoods. Instead of making a definitive decision on their stance, the Mujahideen overlooked opium production and

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<sup>80</sup> Christopher J. Coyne, Abigail R. Hall Blanco, and Scott Burns. "The War on Drugs in Afghanistan: Another Failed Experiment with Interdiction." *The Independent Review* 21, no. 1 (Summer, 2016): 95-119. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1798786156?accountid=10141>.

<sup>81</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War On Drugs* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2010), 115.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*



quietly accepted any profits.<sup>83</sup> The first form of the narco-terrorist symbiosis in Afghanistan came from this silent compliance. The profits made allowed the Mujahideen and narcotics trafficking groups to invest in the improvement of their armament: such as “replacing single-shot rifles with automatic weapons and light artillery.”<sup>84</sup>

Soon after, several prominent leaders began to embrace the cultivation of opium, and taxed the production and refinement of heroine. In 1981, Nasim Akhunzada, the head of the Helmand Province, issued a fatwa calling for the spread of opium cultivation as part of a holy war against unbelievers.<sup>85</sup> Instead of cooperating with narcotics traffickers that traditionally controlled opium producing communities, Akhunzada set a precedence and fought trafficking organizations to attain complete control of the trade. This competition for sole control of the market would lead to the morphing of the symbiosis in the de facto: the terrorists and narcotics traffickers benefit when the other leaves behind a power vacuum.

During this critical period of the spread of opium cultivation, the Taliban assumed control of Afghanistan. Precursor to their future transnational prowess, the Taliban extended past Afghan borders into Pakistan in 1994. Like the Mujahideen of the 80s, the Taliban control of the mid 1990s remained complicit towards the opium market. This laissez faire approach on drug crop harvesting gave way to the Taliban’s need for additional funding and political legitimacy. Seeing the profitability of the opium trade, the Taliban began to require warlords controlling opium lands to pledge allegiance to the Taliban and pay tax for the cultivation of opium. Simultaneous to the 10% tax on opium

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 116.

cultivators, the Taliban levied another 10% tax on opium traffickers.<sup>86</sup> The Taliban eventually rose these taxes to 20% and added taxation on heroin labs.

To the drug cultivators and traffickers, the high taxes presented themselves as a blessing in disguise. Under Taliban control, drug traffickers enjoyed low transaction costs, industry stability, and freedom from the unpredictable nature of drug lord control.<sup>87</sup>

However, the Taliban's view on opium taxation took a turn in 2000 when the leadership issued a fatwa declaring opium cultivation as "un-Islamic."<sup>88</sup> The fatwa seemed counterproductive to the Taliban's own domestic policy because it directly targeted the livelihood of their base of support: the rural opium farming communities. Although seemingly counterproductive, the Taliban issued the fatwa in an effort to drum up international recognition for its sovereignty outside of its three supporters; Pakistan, United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>89</sup> The Taliban, notorious for its human rights abuses and systemic support for the opium trade, lacked the international legitimacy it so craved to strengthen their grip on Afghanistan. However, the fatwa failed to gain any international acknowledgment for the Taliban as a legitimate power.

A year later, the U.S. launched Operation Enduring Freedom to remove the Taliban from control in Afghanistan. Understanding the opium traffickers' relationship to the Taliban, the U.S. government chose to formulate alliances that would counter the Taliban's influence. In this case, the U.S. weaponized the narco-terrorist symbiosis in

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Christopher J. Coyne, Abigail R. Hall Blanco, and Scott Burns. "The War on Drugs in Afghanistan: Another Failed Experiment with Interdiction." *The Independent Review* 21, no. 1 (Summer, 2016): 95-119. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1798786156?accountid=10141>.

<sup>89</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War On Drugs* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2010), 131.

order to counter the spread of Taliban control in Afghanistan. The U.S. cooperated with narcotics traffickers to gain intelligence and target a common enemy.

The U.S., right out of the gate, resorted to use of force through the DoD to accomplish its task. The U.S., along with NATO coalition forces, aspired “to establish military alliances with regional warlords to help defeat the Taliban.”<sup>90</sup> In exchange for their alliance, the DoD overlooked opium cultivation and trafficking. The U.S. invested millions into these alliances to provide assistance to fight the Taliban. The U.S. justified this laissez-faire approach to opium cultivation by “arguing that that strategy would facilitate information gathering, military operations, and the effort to win local hearts and minds.”<sup>91</sup> Namely, this strategy prioritized counterterrorism in the logic that countering the Taliban control would also eventually root out the opium market.

The reliance on DoD counterterrorism action in Afghanistan placed government agencies and Congressional action on standby for a later date in which the eradication of the Taliban could also translate into the eradication of opium. Toppling the Taliban regime also ended their fatwa ban of opium production. Because the U.S. effectively removed the Taliban from leadership, there was a power vacuum ripe for the subsequent occupation of narcotics traffickers.

Within a year of the U.S. invasion in 2002, Afghanistan produced the majority of the world’s opium.<sup>92</sup> Reassessing the weaponization of the narco-terrorist symbiosis,

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<sup>90</sup> Christopher J. Coyne, Abigail R. Hall Blanco, and Scott Burns. "The War on Drugs in Afghanistan: Another Failed Experiment with Interdiction." *The Independent Review* 21, no. 1 (Summer, 2016): 95-119. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1798786156?accountid=10141>.

<sup>91</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War On Drugs* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2010), 161.

<sup>92</sup> Christopher J. Coyne, Abigail R. Hall Blanco, and Scott Burns. "The War on Drugs in Afghanistan: Another Failed Experiment with Interdiction." *The Independent Review* 21, no. 1 (Summer, 2016): 95-119.

Lieutenant General David Barno, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, affirmed winning “the War on Drugs was... necessary in winning the War on Terror.”<sup>93</sup> The return of mainstream poppy cultivation forced the U.S. to change its lax position to a hardline zero-tolerance policy. This shifted the American counterterrorism focus to a counternarcotics focus. However, instead of allowing the involvement of other agencies in a coordinated effort, the U.S. redirected the DoD and its deployed Armed Forces in U.S.- led crop eradication campaign in 2002.<sup>94</sup> The Bush Administration primarily utilized the Armed Forces in order to employ military equipment and personnel and partner with Afghan counternarcotics teams.

Continued failures of crop eradication by U.S. Armed Forces led to a shift in the U.S. policy actors involved in the counternarcotics mission. In 2005, the U.S. unveiled the 5 pillar counternarcotics strategy; allowing agencies outside of the DoD to participate. The State Department formed the Central Poppy Eradication Force, a task force of specialized eradicators. The State Department and DOJ established the Counternarcotics Justice Center, an Afghan-based court system specifically for all drug related cases.<sup>95</sup> The U.S. employed the Drug Enforcement Agency within DOJ to lead efforts advising regional and local counternarcotics entities and special forces.

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<http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1798786156?accountid=10141>.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

Along with increased agency participation on the issue, the DoD tripled its counternarcotics budget and updated its rules of engagement to allow U.S. troops to support operations combatting traffickers in 2005.<sup>96</sup>

However, U.S. counternarcotics ultimately failed due to the extreme reliance on crop eradication methods, even as the U.S. eventually made an effort to coordinate its agencies. Afghanistan continues to produce more than 80% of the world's opium.<sup>97</sup>

Both the narco-terrorist symbiosis and the U.S.'s counter missions took a multitude of forms in Afghanistan; highlighting the dynamic nature of the symbiosis, and the U.S.'s mismatching of effective efforts to combat the symbiosis. The narco-terrorist symbiosis was first mutually beneficial to the Mujahideen and opium traffickers. Then, the Mujahideen and later the Taliban sought complete control over the opium trade; making the symbiosis about competition for supremacy. To counter the rise of the Taliban, the U.S. first selected a counterterrorism approach in Afghanistan. With the decline of the Taliban regime, narcotics traffickers inherited the power vacuum left by the U.S.'s counterterrorism efforts in a manifestation of the symbiosis in the de facto. The growth of narcotics traffickers prompted the U.S. to redirect its focus to counternarcotics operations. However, these operations failed to root out narcotics traffickers as the U.S. first consolidated all efforts within DoD, and then diversified missions among other agencies.

Ultimately, the U.S.'s separation of counterterrorism and counternarcotics operations, and its overreliance on the DoD caused it to fail in combatting the narco-

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

terrorist symbiosis in Afghanistan. Today, the Taliban are involved in every step of the production, refinement, and trafficking of opium.<sup>98</sup> As the Taliban continues to vertically integrate and gain a monopoly of the opium market in Afghanistan, the Taliban ebbs closer to enveloping the opium trade within its organizational structure and thus evolving into a hybrid threat. This is because, soon, the motivations and actions of drug trafficking entities in Afghanistan will be inseparable from those of the Taliban. These drug trafficking entities will exist in-house, so the Taliban's greater motivations and actions will include the behaviors of those drug-traffickers; hybridizing the two threats.

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<sup>98</sup> Christopher Woody, "Heroin Is Driving a Sinister Trend in Afghanistan," *Business Insider*, October 30, 2017, <https://www.businessinsider.com/taliban-control-of-heroin-drug-production-trafficking-in-afghanistan-2017-10>.

## **Key Findings:**

Common trends in U.S. policy-making behaviors arise from examination of the case studies. In both cases, the U.S. resorted to and deployed the Armed Forces when a threat presented itself. In Colombia, the U.S. turned to DoD to carry out aerial eradication efforts, contribute arms and equipment to the Colombian government, and support Colombian forces against first narcotics traffickers, and then the FARC. In Afghanistan, the U.S. responded to 9/11 and the rise of the Taliban by deploying forces in Operation Enduring Freedom and allying with narcotics traffickers to eliminate the Taliban threat. Once narcotics traffickers gained prominence over the Taliban, the U.S. adjusted fire and tasked the Armed Forces with leading eradication operations.

When the results from the use of force are less than successful, the U.S. then turns to soft power nodes such as DOS or USAID. In Colombia, these soft power nodes were USAID and NGOs focused on food security programs and alternative livelihoods to undercut the FARC and detract from the dependency on cocaine. In Afghanistan, the U.S. employed DOS and DOJ as soft power alternatives to work with the Afghan government as it instituted its own eradication programs and court systems to counter narcotics traffickers, in the hopes that the Taliban would fizzle out.

The case studies also demonstrated the U.S.'s tendency to act without understanding the policies of host nations. In the Colombia case study, the Colombian government imposed the Zero-Coca policy, which required communities seeking aid to eradicate all coca crop from its premises. Consequently, the communities most reliant on

coca harvest under FARC control could not receive needed aid. U.S. efforts through USAID and other NGOs failed to detract coca farmers from production. The U.S. did not match its aid assistance with the policy requirements of the Colombian government, rendering the effort ineffective. Afghanistan presented a unique opportunity that the U.S. neglected to recognize. When the Taliban issued the fatwa against the opium market, the Taliban turned on their support base of opium farmers and traffickers. This breakdown of bonds between the opium market and the Taliban afforded a cleavage for the U.S. to potentially manipulate. The U.S. could have played on the fissure to pit the opium traffickers against the Taliban in order to allow for mutual destruction. This sort of action would target the narco-terrorist symbiosis directly. However, the U.S. missed this opportunity all together through its negligence to understand host nation dynamics.

Multiple threats to national security presented themselves in both cases; prompting the U.S. to prioritize which threat was more dangerous than the other. Given a time frame in each case, the U.S. chose to render its complete focus to one mission set instead of finding a means to integrate the two mission sets. In Colombia, the U.S. first centered its attention on counternarcotics to eradicate cocaine cartels in Colombia, and then shifted its efforts to counterterrorism operations once the FARC gained prominence. Meanwhile, in the Afghanistan case study, the U.S. took the opposite approach and first relied on the counterterrorism mission set to topple the Taliban, and then turned to counternarcotics to combat the opium trade. However, no matter which mission the U.S. focused on first, the division of counternarcotics and counterterrorism efforts resulted in failure of both mission sets as the U.S. could not effectively combat one threat while neglecting the other. The U.S. failed to match its responses with an integration of



counternarcotics and counterterrorism mission sets with the integrated threat of the narco-terrorist symbiosis. Thus, the logic of siloing the mission sets with the assumption that the elimination of one threat will lead to the elimination of the other is problematic and indicates a flawed application of the national security strategy.

The first step in our policy-making process in the national security strategy is identifying the variable we wish to manipulate: namely the threat we seek to eliminate. When confronted with the threats of illegal narcotics trafficking and the spread of terrorism, the U.S. prioritized what it perceived as the greater threat to its existence given the political climate of the time. In the case of the FARC and cocaine in Colombia, the U.S. Congress turned away from concerns of the FARC's rise and perceived narcotics trafficking as the bigger existential threat. By consequence, the U.S. responded by prioritizing counternarcotics operations in Colombia. Also, this choice to focus efforts on eliminating the threat of narcotics traffickers occurred simultaneous to the public and widely supported manhunt of Pablo Escobar. The U.S. relied on extensive crop eradication in the hopes of exterminating cocaine in Colombia, and consequently the supremacy of the FARC. In the case of the Taliban and opium in Afghanistan, the U.S. chose to prioritize the threat of the Taliban's spreading influence, and reacted by prioritizing counterterrorism operations. The choice to implement aggressive counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan came in the aftermath of 9/11. The U.S. mobilized armed forces and counterterrorism efforts to combat the Taliban and their influence. The U.S. hoped that opium would die along with the Taliban in a future economic upturn from the emergence of a democracy in Afghanistan.

These trends in how we perceive threats and choose to prioritize one mission set over the other drive the conventional logic of the U.S. in the policy-making process. In the case studies, the U.S. understands the threats of narcotics traffickers and terrorists, but also recognizes their reliance on each other in the form of the narco-terrorist symbiosis. The U.S. operates on the conventional wisdom that efforts to combat one threat will result in the elimination of the other threat. This logic suggests that the U.S. actively recognizes the symbiosis that exists between narcotics traffickers and terrorists. This logic fails because even in the scenario that the U.S. successfully weakens one threat, the other threat strengthens as a result of a power vacuum in a de facto symbiosis.

Given this symbiotic relationship of terrorists and narcotics traffickers, the conventional logic must be left behind to engineer an effective relationship between counternarcotics and counterterrorism operations. However, U.S. defense policy finds itself in a paradox of the differing mission sets of counterterrorism and counternarcotics. Since both diverge in scope, actors, and desired end states, the application of counternarcotics and counterterrorism presently translates into failure in both missions. By prioritizing one mission set over the other, the U.S. fails to succeed in either. U.S. policy must depart from the failed conventional logic of the past that assumes one threat will decline if the other is eliminated. The U.S. must find a way to blend counterterrorism and counternarcotics operations through understanding the threats and intricacies of narco-terrorism.

This new approach would have to foster interagency cooperation through fusing the efforts of the Armed Forces, intelligence community, the Justice Department, executive agencies, and ally nations. The fused efforts of these entities must focus on not allowing

successful hybridization of narco-terrorists. This means that the entities will have to specifically target existing linkages and stop any new ones from forming that hold together the narco-terrorist symbiosis. The blended interagency effort must find means to compel terrorists and narcotics traffickers to compete against each other.<sup>99</sup> The agencies will have to find the divergence in identities and interests that create roadblocks to hybridization. By formulating policy that plays on these differences in identities and interests, the U.S. can break the bonds of the narco-terrorist symbiosis.

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<sup>99</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War On Drugs* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2010), 181.

## Alternative Approaches:

Interestingly, proposed policies targeting narcoterrorism are hard to find. Instead, there are many proposals for improving counterterrorism or counternarcotics efforts. Those most likely to yield counternarcoterrorism (CNT) results focus on combatting drug trafficking, and include: legalization of narcotics, the Eradication and Repression Method, and Demand Reduction.

Academics, like Kan, entertain the idea of full legalization of narcotics as a means to divert power away from the symbiosis; allowing government entities to regulate the sale and distribution.<sup>100</sup> Legalization as an alternative to the status quo comes from three assumptions: 1) “global drug trade is not going to disappear in the immediate or even foreseeable future” 2) “Curbing global demand for drugs to an extent that would significantly diminish the drug trade would mean an unlikely change in the nature of human beings who routinely seek out some form of intoxication” 3) “reforming the current global drug prohibition regime will reduce, if not eliminate, many... international security challenges.”<sup>101</sup> The argument asserts that “universal legalization of all drugs would attack the illicit drug market head-on, destroying the profit incentive for drug traffickers and placing control of the industry in the hands of national governments.”<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Paul Rexton Kan, *Drug Trafficking and International Security* (Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2016), 185-186.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Matthew S. Jenner "International Drug Trafficking: A Global Problem with a Domestic Solution." *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 18, no. 2 (Summer, 2011): 901-927. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.2979/indjglolegstu.18.2.901>. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/906065074?accountid=10141>.

The logic dictates that, through the acceptance of the American demand for narcotics, the American government could regulate the supply, sale, and distribution of narcotics entering the borders. In theory, bringing this illicit economy into the fold would shrink the black market for narcotics and curtail the profitability of narcotics trafficking. By legalizing narcotics at home, the U.S. would reduce demand and consequently undercut the resources of terrorists and narcotics traffickers. However, full legalization of narcotics in the U.S. is both politically impossible, and will still result in the same harms of the current symbiosis.

There is no political traction currently present to legalize drugs in the United States because of “the drawbacks and unknowns related to drug legalization.”<sup>103</sup> In addition to its unattainable nature, full legalization is an approach that only involves the counternarcotics mission set. The guiding assumption for this counternarcotics approach is: “If drug trafficking fosters narco-states... [and] emboldens insurgents and terrorists... then relaxing the existing drug laws and conventions would appear to be a natural first step.”<sup>104</sup> However, the Full Legalization Approach misses the goal of targeting narcoterrorism. As demonstrated in the case studies, the logic of targeting one threat to end both is utterly flawed.. In this case, for example, we might expect narco-terrorism to grow stronger in the black market space to fill demand for cheaper narcotics.

The Eradication and Repression Method is also an alternative approach. This approach calls for a harsher cognate of crop eradication coupled with the instituting of a

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<sup>103</sup> Paul Rexton Kan, *Drug Trafficking and International Security* (Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2016), 189.

<sup>104</sup> Paul Rexton Kan, *Drug Trafficking and International Security* (Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield, 2016), 185.

repressive regime that will hold strong to eradication measures at all costs. To employ the Eradication and Repression Method, “the government must have control over the entire area where eradication is to take place”, “to detect and eliminate new areas of production”, and “ maintain a presence on the ground” to prevent uprisings and insurgencies.<sup>105</sup> To apply the Eradication and Repression Method, either the U.S. itself or an entity it chooses to support will have to force a repressive regime over a finite and bordered space in an attempt to root out narcotics cultivation and the subsequent trafficking out of the space.

The economic calculus involved in the narco-terrorist symbiosis would render this policy ineffective. Given a particular space enclosed by a repressive regime, true repression requires inelasticity.<sup>106</sup> However, when this repression is directed at the narcotics trade, “the effort fails because there are no limits to either supply or demand—both are in effect, elastic.”<sup>107</sup> This mismatch of elasticity would simply lead to drug trade activities simply reconfiguring in a different space. Even if the Eradication and Repression Method was possible, the U.S. would meet substantial roadblocks to implementation: lack of support from the electorate and a deficiency of funds and manpower to institute a repressive regime. The Eradication and Repression Method does not get at the roots of narcoterrorism. This policy would likely lead to bolster support for insurgency groups to protect and control the space where narcotics exist.

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<sup>105</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War On Drugs* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2010), 174.

<sup>106</sup> Alfred W. McCoy, "Coercion and its Unintended Consequences: A Study of Heroin Trafficking in Southeast and South West Asia." *Crime, Law and Social Change* 33, no. 3 (Apr 01, 2000): 191. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1308104878?accountid=10141>.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

Another alternative approach is Demand Reduction. Demand Reduction involves a domestic policy focused on implementing and supporting drug treatment and rehabilitation programs at home. Through these programs, Demand Reduction aims to eliminate demand for narcotics through rooting out the addiction of users. While attacking addiction is the center piece of Demand Reduction, public education against drugs in community centers and schools also serve as a preventative measure. Demand Reduction strategies “cost only a tiny fraction of what the United States now spends on drug control,” but the results are disheartening.

Demand Reduction focuses on countering addiction in individuals who regularly abuse drugs. According to the RAND Corporation, there are approximately three times as many “light users” compared to “heavy users” of cocaine.<sup>108</sup> Of those heavy users who receive treatment in the U.S., only “13 percent of heavy users treated do not return to heavy use.”<sup>109</sup> Preventing drug use and addressing addiction involves a multitude of resources and improvements to the current model of drug abuse treatment. Demand Reduction is ill-equipped to expel the narco-terrorist symbiosis because it is purely a counternarcotics effort instead of a counter-narcoterrorist response.

These alternative approaches intend to address the threat of narcotics trafficking, not narcoterrorism. This is because these approaches emanate from the logic that targeting one threat will lead to the undermining of the other. These approaches exclusively target the supply and demand of narcotics in the hopes that they will also undercut the threat of

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<sup>108</sup> C. Peter Rydell and Susan S. Sohler Everingham, *Controlling Cocaine: Supply Versus Demand Programs*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1994.  
[https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR331.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR331.html).

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

narco-terrorism. This discussion of counternarcotics approaches in the academic and policy-making worlds signal a propensity for reliance of counternarcotics as a means to combat narcoterrorism. However, this propensity, as part of the conventional wisdom, continues to fail in addressing narco-terrorism. The U.S. requires a new approach to specifically target the narco-terrorist symbiosis.



## New Approach:

In 2009, the Obama Administration championed a new approach diverging from ineffective past measures and the alternative approaches mentioned before. Obama, with Afghanistan in mind, sought to promote the “development of alternative livelihoods that focuses on rebuilding Afghanistan’s agriculture while eradication is greatly scaled back.”<sup>110</sup> The hope was that Obama’s counternarcotics strategy would tackle the linkages between terrorists and narcotics traffickers by providing farmers with an alternative option for crop. Once supply slowed and halted, the Obama Administration anticipated “intelligence flows ... enhancing the counterinsurgency effort.”<sup>111</sup> Therefore, the Administration supported using a counternarcotics strategy under the assumption that attacking the narcotics trade would result in the weakening of terrorism.

The Alternative Livelihood approach focuses on the de-escalation of crop eradication efforts and emphasizes education and assistance to farming villages to cultivate a non-illicit crop.<sup>112</sup> The latter process is referred to as crop substitution. Through crop substitution and economic aid, the U.S. aimed “to win the hearts and minds of” narcotics farming communities.<sup>113</sup> The hearts and minds motivation also translated into the easing

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<sup>110</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up: Counterinsurgency and the War On Drugs* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2010), 163.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Rachel Donadio, “New Course for Antidrug Efforts in Afghanistan,” *New York Times*, June 27, 2009, <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/28/world/asia/28holbrooke.html>.

<sup>113</sup> Christopher J. Coyne, Abigail R. Hall Blanco, and Scott Burns. "The War on Drugs in Afghanistan: Another Failed Experiment with Interdiction." *The Independent Review* 21, no. 1 (Summer, 2016): 95-119. <http://ecl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1798786156?accountid=10141>.

of U.S. military presence in affected areas. This counternarcotics strategy became the cornerstone of Obama's counterterrorism strategy against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The Alternative Livelihood Approach requires long-term strategy and patience. This approach is not a quick fix to break the bonds of the narco-terrorist symbiosis.

Essentially, this approach initiates efforts towards rural development. Rural development calls for "broad-based social and economic development" with an emphasis on the progression of human capital.<sup>114</sup> Crop substitution will potentially lead the U.S. into a long term pursuit to develop rural communities that rely on drug crop for their livelihood. When it comes to rural development through crop substitution, "shortcuts do not lead to sustainable policies that also mitigate conflict and enhance state-building."<sup>115</sup> In this approach, the U.S. cannot shorthand efforts to campaign for alternative livelihoods. Crop substitution and rural development are long term projects that require dynamic policies and political momentum to succeed. If U.S. policymakers at all lose interest in this venture, then the approach fails.

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<sup>114</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, "The Obama Administration's New Counternarcotics Strategy in Afghanistan: Its Promises and Potential Pitfalls," *The Brookings Institution*, no. 171 (September 2009), <https://www-ciaonet-org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/record/17717?search=1>.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

## Consequences of the New Approach:

Members of the Obama administration used the example that “the poppy farmer is not our enemy... the Taliban are” to describe the Alternative Livelihood Approach. This metaphor affirmed the need to target the livelihood of poppy farmers to combat the Taliban. However, Obama’s Alternative Livelihood Approach is strictly a counternarcotics approach to the narco-terrorist symbiosis. This is problematic as stove-piping efforts to combat the symbiosis results in a failure to address the threat directly. This logic is rooted in the original framework for past failed U.S. policy responses: If one threat is combatted, then the other threat will also suffer and be defeated. However, as previously discussed, this logic is fallacious. Organizing counternarcotics and counterterrorism exclusively of each other results in failure of both mission sets.

In application today, the U.S. and Colombian government popularly utilize black peppercorn as a crop substitute for coca.<sup>116</sup> In Afghanistan, the U.S. and Afghan government distribute wheat seed to substitute for opium crop.<sup>117</sup> However, the efforts are failing.

In Colombia, issues with the agriculture industry as a whole plague success rates of the Alternative Livelihood Approach. Because “Colombia doesn’t have a guaranteed

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<sup>116</sup> John Otis, “Colombia Tries to Get Farmers Away from the Cocaine biz. How's That Going?” *NPR*, November 24, 2018, [https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/11/24/669221868/colombia-tries-to-get-farmers-out-of-the-cocaine-biz-hows-that-going?utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=npr&utm\\_term=nprnews&utm\\_content=2053&fbclid=...](https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/11/24/669221868/colombia-tries-to-get-farmers-out-of-the-cocaine-biz-hows-that-going?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&utm_term=nprnews&utm_content=2053&fbclid=...)

<sup>117</sup> Ismail Sameem, “Afghan Farmers Stick to Growing Opium in the Face of Less Lucrative Options,” *U.S. News and World Report*, April 29, 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2018-04-29/afghan-farmers-stick-to-growing-opium-in-the-face-of-less-lucrative-options>.

minimum price for products” in agriculture, Colombian farmers fall victim to the volatility of commodity prices.<sup>118</sup> Without price floor policies and subsidies, farmers are not provided any protections and must resort to the determined most lucrative crop option to provide for their livelihoods. Black peppercorns are not the only option for farmers; the U.S. and Colombia “promised money, seeds, and technology to help the farmers raise everything from pineapple to pigs.”<sup>119</sup> However, all of these substitutions are subject to the poor conditions for the agricultural market in Colombia, and the power of the FARC and cocaine traffickers. Regardless of the options, farmers are receiving significantly less profit than when they cultivated coca.

Profitability of wheat in Afghanistan also hinders the success of the Alternative Livelihood Approach. A typical Afghan opium farmer collects an income of more than \$3,000 annually.<sup>120</sup> However, if this Afghan opium farmer complies with the Alternative Livelihood Approach and cultivates wheat instead, he will receive an annual income of less than \$1,000.<sup>121</sup> This margin of income loss drives Afghan farmers to continue harvesting opium.

The Alternative Livelihood Approach fails its immediate goals of persuading drug farming communities to substitute their crop for a non-illicit crop, and also fails in its main aspiration to end the narco-terrorist symbiosis. The approach fails in its ultimate

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<sup>118</sup> John Otis, “Colombia Tries to Get Farmers Away from the Cocaine biz. How’s That Going?” *NPR*, November 24, 2018, [https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/11/24/669221868/colombia-tries-to-get-farmers-out-of-the-cocaine-biz-hows-that-going?utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=npr&utm\\_term=nprnews&utm\\_content=2053&fbclid=...](https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2018/11/24/669221868/colombia-tries-to-get-farmers-out-of-the-cocaine-biz-hows-that-going?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=npr&utm_term=nprnews&utm_content=2053&fbclid=...)

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Ismail Sameem, “Afghan Farmers Stick to Growing Opium in the Face of Less Lucrative Options,” *U.S. News and World Report*, April 29, 2018, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2018-04-29/afghan-farmers-stick-to-growing-opium-in-the-face-of-less-lucrative-options>.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

goal against the narco-terrorist symbiosis because its framework is rooted solely in a counternarcotics approach, instead of an approach that integrates the counternarcotics and counterterrorism approaches.

The failure of this approach warrants new policy options that set sights on targeting the threat of narco-terrorism.

## **Key Policy Recommendations:**

In order for the U.S. to effectively eliminate narcoterrorism, the U.S. must present a hybrid response to contend with a hybrid threat. However, the current U.S. policy-making framework is not conducive to a hybrid response. The current framework is a product of our need to combat our greatest adversary to date: the Soviet Union. The Cold War compelled the U.S. to hone every offensive and defensive capability to counter the existential threat of the USSR; a unitary rational actor with peer force capabilities. The U.S. can only conceive a unitary rational actor as a capable opponent. For this reason, the framework is inherently neo-realist.

Neo-realism relies on the international state system as the independent variable to change and policy-making. Whereas states are the actors recognized to consume a space, states rationally act in their own interests to maximize utility. Through this assumption that states are rational, the behavior of any given actor can be predicted. This neo-realist policy-making framework focuses its scope exclusively to rational, sovereign states and values behavioral predictions; missing non-state actors and the intricacies of decision-making.

The U.S.'s inability to understand the behavior of non-state actors hampers its ability to authorize comprehensive policy. The U.S. fails to conceptualize the ways in which non-state actors can operate outside of the constraints of institutions and confound the state system. This leads the U.S. to "routinely underestimate the sophistication of

adversaries”, fail to predict their actions, and misunderstand how to combat them.<sup>122</sup> The U.S. conventional wisdom is “based on extremely generalized data” and “the level of detail does not even come close to approximating the complex reality of the problem.”<sup>123</sup> This perspective blinds the U.S. from fully recognizing the need to address the narco-terrorist symbiosis, and the impending threat of hybridization.

A counter-narcoterrorism approach would not only deliver this hybrid response, but also cause a paradigm shift in the framework of our national security policy-making. A counter- narcoterrorism approach would address the complexities of targeting a non-state actor that acts against the conventional perception of rationality. By departing from neo-realism, the national security policy-making process can accept the legitimacy of non-state actors as their own independent variables within the state system. The strategy can therefore evaluate the goals of terrorist organizations and narcotics traffickers as actors threatening the U.S. and the international state system.

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<sup>122</sup> Jennifer Hesterman, *The Terrorist-Criminal Nexus* (Boca Raton: CRC Press: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 296.

<sup>123</sup> Sean M. Maloney "On a Pale Horse? Conceptualizing Narcotics Production in Southern Afghanistan and its Relationship to the Narcoterror Nexus." *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 20, no. 1 (03, 2009): 203-214. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ccl.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/09592310802573640>. <http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/docview/60010832?accountid=10141>.

- The U.S. Congress will establish a bi-partisan investigative commission tasked with identifying when and where the Narco-Terrorist Symbiosis emerges, and the level of risk for hybridization.
- The U.S. Congress will organize a series of hearings to assess which agencies and entities are best capable to coordinate and combat Narcoterrorism.
- The U.S. Congress will pass legislation to require that the Executive recognizes and responds to the threat of Narcoterrorism. ??
- The Executive will develop a Counter-Narcoterrorism Strategy that recognizes the convergence of the terrorist and narcotics trafficking threats; creating a new mission and departing from the past logic of siloing efforts into the Counterterrorism Strategy and the Counternarcotics Strategy.
- The Executive will create an interagency working group that will serve as a joint interface for preexisting counterterrorism and counternarcotics agencies to collaborate with strategies and assets to fight Narcoterrorism.



## **Conclusion:**

This research concludes that, under unique circumstances where terrorists and narcotics traffickers occupy the same space, a new threat to the U.S. national security surfaces and warrants a new kind of policy response.

The set of interactions between international narcotics traffickers and terrorists reflect the potential symbiosis between terrorists and drug traffickers. These interactions can become bonds that make narcotics traffickers and terrorists indistinguishable. The U.S. does not currently possess capabilities to combat narco-terrorism, leaving the hybrid threat unmatched within the U.S. defense mechanism. In order for the U.S. to effectively eliminate narco-terrorism, the national security strategy must add a counter-narcoterrorism focus to its toolbox in addition to the current stove-piped counternarcotics and counterterrorism missions.

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