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Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?

By THOMAS SCHWEICH

On March 1, 2006, I met [Hamid Karzai](#) for the first time. It was a clear, crisp day in Kabul. The Afghan president joined President and Mrs. Bush, Secretary of State [Condoleezza Rice](#) and Ambassador Ronald Neumann to dedicate the new United States Embassy. He thanked the American people for all they had done for [Afghanistan](#). I was a senior counternarcotics official recently arrived in a country that supplied 90 percent of the world's heroin. I took to heart Karzai's strong statements against the Afghan drug trade. That was my first mistake.

Over the next two years I would discover how deeply the Afghan government was involved in protecting the opium trade — by shielding it from American-designed policies. While it is true that Karzai's [Taliban](#) enemies finance themselves from the drug trade, so do many of his supporters. At the same time, some of our [NATO](#) allies have resisted the anti-opium offensive, as has our own Defense Department, which tends to see counternarcotics as other people's business to be settled once the war-fighting is over. The trouble is that the fighting is unlikely to end as long as the Taliban can finance themselves through drugs — and as long as the Kabul government is dependent on opium to sustain its own hold on power.

It wasn't supposed to be like this. When I attended an Afghanistan briefing for Anne Patterson on Dec. 1, 2005, soon after she became assistant secretary of state for international narcotics and law-enforcement affairs, she turned to me with her characteristic smile and said, "What have we gotten ourselves into?" We had just learned that in the two previous months Afghan farmers had planted almost 60 percent more poppy than the year before, for a total of 165,000 hectares (637 square miles). The 2006 harvest would be the biggest narco-crop in history. That was the challenge we faced. Patterson — already a three-time ambassador — made me her deputy at the law-enforcement bureau, which has anti-crime programs in dozens of countries.

At the beginning of 2006, I went to the high-profile London Conference on Afghanistan. It was a grand event mired in deception, at least with respect to the drug situation. Everyone from the Afghan delegation and most in the international community knew that poppy cultivation and heroin production would increase significantly in 2006. But the delegates to the London Conference instead dwelled on the 2005 harvest, which was lower than that of 2004, principally because of poor weather and market manipulation by drug lords like Sher Muhammad Akhundzada, who had been governor of the heroin capital of the world — Helmand Province — and then a member of Afghanistan's Parliament. So the Afghans congratulated themselves on their tremendous success in fighting drugs even as everyone knew the problem was worse than ever.

About three months later, after meeting with local officials in Helmand — my helicopter touched down in the middle of a poppy field — I went to the White House to brief Vice President Cheney, Secretary Rice, Defense Secretary [Donald Rumsfeld](#) and others on the expanding opium problem. I advocated a policy replicating what had worked in other countries: public education about the evils of heroin and the illegality of cultivating poppies; alternative crops; eradication of poppy fields; interdiction of drug shipments and arrest of traffickers; and improvements to the judicial system.

I emphasized at this and subsequent meetings that crop eradication, although claiming less than a third of the \$500 million budgeted for Afghan counternarcotics, was the most controversial part of the program. But because no other crop came even close to the value of poppies, we needed the threat of eradication to force farmers to accept less-lucrative alternatives. (Eradication was an essential component of successful anti-poppy efforts in Guatemala, Southeast Asia and Pakistan.) The most effective method of eradication was the use of herbicides delivered by crop-dusters. But Karzai had long opposed aerial eradication, saying it would be misunderstood as some sort of poison coming from the sky. He claimed to fear that aerial eradication would result in an uprising that would cause him to lose power. We found this argument perplexing because aerial eradication was used in rural areas of other poor countries without a significant popular backlash. The chemical used, glyphosate, was a weed killer used all over the United States, Europe and even Afghanistan. (Drug lords use it in their gardens

in Kabul.) There were volumes of evidence demonstrating that it was harmless to humans and became inert when it hit the ground. My assistant at the time was a Georgia farmer, and he told me that his father mixed glyphosate with his hands before applying it to their orchards.

Nonetheless, Karzai opposed it, and we at the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs went along. We financed ground-based eradication instead: police using tractors and weed-whackers to destroy the fields of farmers who refused to plant alternative crops. Ground-based eradication was inefficient, costly, dangerous and more subject to corrupt dealings among local officials than aerial eradication. But it was our only option.

Yet I continued to press for aerial eradication and a greater commitment to providing security for eradicators. Rumsfeld was already in political trouble, so when he started to resist my points, Rice quickly and easily shut him down. The briefing at the White House was well received by Rice and the others present. White House staff members also made clear to me that Bush continued to be “a big fan of aerial eradication.”

The vice president made only one comment: “You got a tough job.”

Even before she got to the bureau of international narcotics, Anne Patterson knew that the Pentagon was hostile to the antidrug mission. A couple of weeks into the job, she got the story firsthand from Lt. Gen. Karl Eikenberry, who commanded all U.S. forces in Afghanistan. He made it clear: drugs are bad, but his orders were that drugs were not a priority of the U.S. military in Afghanistan. Patterson explained to Eikenberry that, when she was ambassador to Colombia, she saw the [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia](#) (FARC) finance their insurgency with profits from the cocaine trade, and she warned Eikenberry that the risk of a narco-insurgency in Afghanistan was very high. Eikenberry was familiar with the Colombian situation, but the Pentagon strategy was “sequencing” — defeat the Taliban, then have someone else clean up the drug business.

The [Drug Enforcement Administration](#) worked the heroin trafficking and interdiction effort with the Afghans. They targeted kingpins and disrupted drug-smuggling networks. The D.E.A. had excellent agents in Afghanistan, but there were not enough of them, and they had seemingly unending difficulties getting Mi-17 helicopters and other equipment that the Pentagon promised for the training of the counternarcotics police of Afghanistan. In addition, the Pentagon had reneged on a deal to allow the D.E.A. the use of precious ramp space at the Kabul airport. Consequently, the effort to interdict drug shipments and arrest traffickers had stalled. Less than 1 percent of the opium produced in Afghanistan was being seized there. The effort became even more complicated later in 2006, when Benjamin Freakley, the two-star U.S. general who ran the eastern front, shut down all operations by the D.E.A. and Afghan counternarcotics police in Nangarhar — a key heroin-trafficking province. The general said that antidrug operations were an unnecessary obstacle to his military operations.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAid) was also under fire — particularly from Congress — for not providing better alternative crops for farmers. USAid had distributed seed and fertilizer to most of Afghanistan, but more comprehensive agricultural programs were slow to start in parts of the country. The USAid officers in Kabul were competent and committed, but they had already lost several workers to insurgent attacks, and were understandably reluctant to go into Taliban territory to implement their programs.

The Department of Justice had just completed an effort to open the Afghan anti-narcotics court, so capacity to prosecute was initially low. Justice in Afghanistan was administered unevenly by tribes, religious leaders and poorly paid, highly corruptible judges. In the rare cases in which drug traffickers were convicted, they often walked in the front door of a prison, paid a bribe and walked out the back door. We received dozens of reports to this effect.

And then there was the problem of the Afghan National Police. The Pentagon frequently proclaimed that the Afghan National Army (which the Pentagon trained) was performing wonderfully, but that the police (trained mainly by the Germans and the State Department) were not. A respected American general in Afghanistan, however, confided to me that the army was not doing well, either; that the original plan for training the army was flimsy and underfinanced; and that, consequently, they were using police to fill holes in the army mission. Thrust into a military role, unprepared police lost their lives trying to hold territory in dangerous areas.

There was no coherent strategy to resolve these issues among the U.S. agencies and the Afghan government. When I asked career officers at the State Department for the interagency strategy for Afghan counternarcotics, they produced the same charts

I used to brief the cabinet in Washington months before. “There is no written strategy,” they confessed.

As big as these challenges were, there were even bigger ones. A lot of intelligence — much of it unclassified and possible to discuss here — indicated that senior Afghan officials were deeply involved in the narcotics trade. Narco-traffickers were buying off hundreds of police chiefs, judges and other officials. Narco-corruption went to the top of the Afghan government. The attorney general, Abdul Jabbar Sabit, a fiery Pashtun who had begun a self-described “jihad against corruption,” told me and other American officials that he had a list of more than 20 senior Afghan officials who were deeply corrupt — some tied to the narcotics trade. He added that President Karzai — also a Pashtun — had directed him, for political reasons, not to prosecute any of these people. (On July 16 of this year, Karzai dismissed Sabit after Sabit announced his candidacy for president. Karzai’s office said Sabit’s candidacy violated laws against political activity by officials. Sabit told a press conference that Karzai “has never been able to tolerate rivals.”)

A nearly equal challenge in 2006 was the lack of resolve in the international community. Although Britain’s foreign office strongly backed antinarcotics efforts (with the exception of aerial eradication), the British military were even more hostile to the antidrug mission than the U.S. military. British forces — centered in Helmand — actually issued leaflets and bought radio advertisements telling the local criminals that the British military was not part of the anti-poppy effort. I had to fly to Brussels and show one of these leaflets to the supreme allied commander in Europe, who oversees Afghan operations for NATO, to have this counterproductive information campaign stopped. It was a small victory; the truth was that many of our allies in the International Security Assistance Force were lukewarm on antidrug operations, and most were openly hostile to aerial eradication.

Nonetheless, throughout 2006 and into 2007 there were positive developments (although the Pentagon did not supply the helicopters to the D.E.A. until early 2008). The D.E.A. was training special Afghan narcotics units, while the Pentagon began to train Afghan pilots for drug operations. We put together educational teams that convened effective antidrug meetings in the more stable northern provinces. We used manual eradication to eliminate about 10 percent of the crop. In some provinces with little insurgent activity, the eradication numbers reached the 20 percent threshold — a level that drug experts see as a tipping point in eradication — and poppy cultivation all but disappeared in those areas by 2007. And the Department of Justice got the counternarcotics tribunal to process hundreds of midlevel cases.

By late 2006, however, we had startling new information: despite some successes, poppy cultivation over all would grow by about 17 percent in 2007 and would be increasingly concentrated in the south of the country, where the insurgency was the strongest and the farmers were the wealthiest. The poorest farmers of Afghanistan — those who lived in the north, east and center of the country — were taking advantage of antidrug programs and turning away from poppy cultivation in large numbers. The south was going in the opposite direction, and the Taliban were now financing the insurgency there with drug money — just as Patterson predicted.

In late January 2007, there was an urgent U.S. cabinet meeting to discuss the situation. The attendees agreed that the deputy secretary of state [John Negroponte](#) and John Walters, the drug czar, would oversee the development of the first interagency counternarcotics strategy for Afghanistan. They asked me to coordinate the effort, and, after Patterson’s intervention, I was promoted to ambassadorial rank. We began the effort with a briefing for Negroponte, Walters, Attorney General [Alberto Gonzales](#) and several senior Pentagon officials. We displayed a map showing how poppy cultivation was becoming limited to the south, more associated with the insurgency and disassociated from poverty. The Pentagon chafed at the briefing because it reflected a new reality: narcotics were becoming less a problem of humanitarian assistance and more a problem of insurgency and war.

The [United Nations](#) Office on Drugs and Crime was arriving at the same conclusion. Later that year, they issued a report linking the drug trade to the insurgency and made a controversial statement: “Opium cultivation in Afghanistan is no longer associated with poverty — quite the opposite.” The office convincingly demonstrated that poor farmers were abandoning the crop and that poppy growth was largely confined to some of the wealthiest parts of Afghanistan. The report recommended that eradication efforts be pursued “more honestly and more vigorously,” along with stronger anticorruption measures. Earlier this year, the U.N. published an even more detailed paper titled “Is Poverty Driving the Afghan Opium Boom?” It rejected the idea that farmers would starve without the poppy, concluding that “poverty does not appear to have been the main driving factor in the expansion of opium poppy cultivation in recent years.”

The U.N. reports shattered the myth that poppies are grown by destitute farmers who have no other source of income. They demonstrated that approximately 80 percent of the land under poppy cultivation in the south had been planted with it only in the last two years. It was not a matter of “tradition,” and these farmers did not need an alternative livelihood. They had abandoned their previous livelihoods — mainly vegetables, cotton and wheat (which was in severely short supply) — to take advantage of the security vacuum to grow a more profitable crop: opium.

Around the same time, the United States released photos of industrial-size poppy farms — many owned by pro-government opportunists, others owned by Taliban sympathizers. Most of these narco-farms were near major southern cities. Farmers were digging wells, surveying new land for poppy cultivation, diverting U.S.-built irrigation canals to poppy fields and starting expensive reclamation projects.

Yet Afghan officials continued to say that poppy cultivation was the only choice for its poor farmers. My first indication of the insincerity of this position came at a lunch in Brussels in September 2006 attended by Habibullah Qaderi, who was then Afghanistan’s minister for counternarcotics. He gave a speech in which he said that poor Afghan farmers have no choice but to grow poppies, and asked for more money. A top European diplomat challenged him, holding up a U.N. map showing the recent trend: poppy growth decreasing in the poorest areas and growing in the wealthier areas. The minister, taken aback, simply reiterated his earlier point that Afghanistan needed more money for its destitute farmers. After the lunch, however, Qaderi approached me and whispered: “I know what you say is right. Poverty is not the main reason people are growing poppy. But this is what the president of Afghanistan tells me to tell others.”

In July 2007, I briefed President Karzai on the drive for a new strategy. He was interested in the new incentives that we were developing, but became sullen and unresponsive when I discussed the need to balance those incentives with new disincentives — including arrests of high-level traffickers and eradication of poppy fields in the wealthier areas of the Pashtun south, where Karzai had his roots and power base.

We also tried to let the public know about the changing dynamics of the trade. Unfortunately, most media outlets clung to the myth that the problem was out of control all over the country, that only desperate farmers grew poppies and that any serious law-enforcement effort would drive them into the hands of the Taliban. The “starving farmer” was a convenient myth. It allowed some European governments to avoid involvement with the antidrug effort. Many of these countries had only one- or two-year legislative mandates to be in Afghanistan, so they wanted to avoid any uptick in violence that would most likely result from an aggressive strategy, even if the strategy would result in long-term success. The myth gave military officers a reason to stay out of the drug war, while prominent Democrats used the myth to attack Bush administration policies. And the Taliban loved it because their propaganda campaign consisted of trotting out farmers whose fields had been eradicated and having them say that they were going to starve.

An odd cabal of timorous Europeans, myopic media outlets, corrupt Afghans, blinkered Pentagon officers, politically motivated Democrats and the Taliban were preventing the implementation of an effective counterdrug program. And the rest of us could not turn them around.

Nonetheless, we stayed hopeful as we worked on what became the U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan. The Defense Department was initially cooperative (as I testified to Congress). We agreed to expand the local meetings and education campaign that worked well in the north. Afghan religious leaders would issue anti-poppy statements, focusing on the anti-Islamic nature of drugs and the increasing addiction rate in Afghanistan. In the area of agricultural incentives, since most farmers already had an alternative crop, we agreed to improve access to markets not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan and the wider region. USAid would establish more cold-storage facilities, build roads and establish buying cooperatives that could guarantee prices for legal crops. With the British, we developed an initiative to reward provinces that became poppy-free or reduced their poppy crop by a specified amount. Governors who performed well would get development projects: schools, bridges and hospitals.

But there had to be disincentives too. We agreed to provide security for manual poppy eradication, so that we could show the Afghan people that the more-powerful farmers were vulnerable. We focused on achieving better ground-based eradication, but reintroduced the possibility of aerial eradication. We agreed to increase D.E.A. training of counternarcotics police and establish special investigative units to gather physical and documentary evidence against corrupt Afghan officials. And we developed

policies that would increase the Afghan capacity to prosecute traffickers.

Adding to the wave of optimism was the arrival of William Wood as the new U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan. He had been ambassador in Colombia, so he understood drugs and insurgency well. His view was that poppy cultivation was illegal in Afghanistan, so he didn't really care whether the farmers were poor or rich. "We have a lot of poor people in the drug trade in the U.S.A. — people mixing meth in their trailers in rural areas and people selling crack in the inner cities — and we put them in jail," he said.

At first Wood advocated — in an unclassified e-mail message, surprisingly — a massive aerial-eradication program that would wipe out 80,000 hectares of poppies in Helmand Province, delivering a fatal blow to the root of the narcotics problem. "If there is no poppy, there is nothing to traffic," Wood said. The plan looked good on paper, but we knew it would be impossible to sell to Karzai and the Pentagon. Wood eventually agreed to language advocating, at a minimum, force-protected ground-based eradication with the possibility of limited aerial eradication.

Another ally for a more aggressive approach to the problem was David Kilcullen, a blunt counterterrorism expert. He became increasingly concerned about the drug money flowing to the Taliban. He noted that, while Afghans often shift alliances, what remains constant is their respect for strength and consistency. He recommended mobile courts that had the authority to execute drug kingpins in their own provinces. (You could have heard a pin drop when he first made that suggestion at a large meeting of diplomats.) In support of aerial eradication, Kilcullen pointed out that, with manual eradication you have to "fight your way in and fight your way out" of the poppy fields, making it deadly, inefficient and subject to corrupt bargaining. Aerial eradication, by contrast, is quick, fair and efficient. "If we are already bombing Taliban positions, why won't we spray their fields with a harmless herbicide and cut off their money?" Kilcullen asked.

So it appeared that things were moving nicely. We were going to increase incentives to farmers and politicians while also increasing the disincentives with aggressive eradication and arrest of criminal officials and leading traffickers. The Pentagon seemed on board.

Then it all began to unravel.

In May 2007, Anthony Harriman, the senior director for Afghanistan at the [National Security Council](#), in order to ensure the strategy paper would be executed, decided to take it to the Deputies Committee — a group of cabinet deputy secretaries led by Lt. Gen. [Douglas Lute](#), whom President Bush had appointed his "war czar" — which had the power to make the document official U.S. policy. Harriman asked me to start developing an unclassified version for public release.

Almost immediately, the Pentagon bureaucracy — particularly the South Asia office — made an about-face. First, they resisted bringing the paper to the deputies. When that effort failed (largely because of unexpected support for the plan from new field commanders like Gen. Dan McNeill, who saw the narcotics-insurgency nexus and were willing to buck their Pentagon minders), the Pentagon bureaucrats tried to prevent the release of an unclassified version to the public. Indeed, two senior Pentagon officials threatened me with professional retaliation if we made the unclassified document public. When we went ahead anyway, the Pentagon leaked the contents of the classified version to Peter Gilchrist, a British general posted in Washington. Defense Department officials were thus enlisting a foreign government to help kill U.S. policy — a policy that implicitly recognized that the Pentagon's "sequencing" approach had failed and that the Defense Department would have to get more involved in fighting the narcotics trade.

Gilchrist told me that the plan was unacceptable to Britain. Britain, apparently joined by Sweden (which has fewer than 500 troops in a part of the country where there is no poppy cultivation), sent letters to Karzai urging him to reject key elements of the U.S. plan. By the time Wood and Secretary Rice pressed Karzai for more aggressive action, Karzai told Rice that because some people in the U.S. government did not support the plan, and some allies did not support it, he was not going to support it, either. An operations-center assistant, who summarized the call for me over my car phone just after it occurred, made an uncharacteristic editorial comment: "It was not a good call, ambassador."

Even more startling, it appeared that top Pentagon officials knew nothing about the changing nature of the drug problem or about the new plan. When, through a back channel, I briefed the under secretary of defense for intelligence, James Clapper, on the relationship between drugs and the insurgency, he said he had "never heard any of this." Worse still, Defense Secretary

Robert Gates testified to Congress in December 2007 that we did not have a strategy for fighting drugs in Afghanistan. I received a quick apology from the Pentagon counterdrugs unit, which sent a memo to Gates informing him that we actually did have a strategy.

This dissension was, I believe, music to Karzai's ears. When he convened all 34 Afghan provincial governors in Kabul in September 2007 (I was a "guest of honor"), he made antidrug statements at the beginning of his speech, but then lashed out at the international community for wanting to spray his people's crops and giving him conflicting advice. He got a wild ovation. Not surprising — since so many in the room were closely tied to the narcotics trade. Sure, Karzai had Taliban enemies who profited from drugs, but he had even more supporters who did.

Karzai was playing us like a fiddle: the U.S. would spend billions of dollars on infrastructure improvement; the U.S. and its allies would fight the Taliban; Karzai's friends could get rich off the drug trade; he could blame the West for his problems; and in 2009 he would be elected to a new term.

This is not just speculation, even when you stick with unclassified materials. In September 2007, *The Kabul Weekly*, an independent newspaper, ran a blunt editorial laying out the issue: "It is obvious that the Afghan government is more than kind to poppy growers. . . . [It] opposes the American proposal for political reasons. The administration believes that it will lose popularity in the southern provinces where the majority of opium is cultivated. They're afraid of losing votes. More than 95 percent of the residents of . . . the poppy growing provinces — voted for President Karzai." The editorial recommended aerial eradication. That same week, the first vice president of Afghanistan, Ahmad Zia Massoud, wrote a scathing op-ed article in *The Sunday Telegraph* in London: "Millions of pounds have been committed in provinces including Helmand Province for irrigation projects and road building to help farmers get their produce to market. But for now this has simply made it easier for them to grow and transport opium. . . . Deep-rooted corruption . . . exists in our state institutions." The Afghan vice president concluded, "We must switch from ground-based eradication to aerial spraying."

But Karzai did not care. Back in January 2007, Karzai appointed a convicted heroin dealer, Izzatulla Wasifi, to head his anticorruption commission. Karzai also appointed several corrupt local police chiefs. There were numerous diplomatic reports that his brother Ahmed Wali, who was running half of Kandahar, was involved in the drug trade. (Said T. Jawad, Afghanistan's ambassador to the United States, said Karzai has "taken the step of issuing a decree asking the government to be vigilant of any business dealing involving his family, and requesting that any suspicions be fully investigated.") Some governors of Helmand and other provinces — Pashtuns who had advocated aerial eradication — changed their positions after the "palace" spoke to them. Karzai was lining up his Pashtun allies for re-election, and the drug war was going to have to wait. "Maybe we taught him too much about politics," Rice said to me after I briefed her on these developments.

Karzai then put General Khodaidad (who, like many Afghans, goes by only one name) in charge of the Afghan counternarcotics efforts. Khodaidad — a conscientious man, competent and apparently not corrupt — was a Hazara. The Hazaras had no influence over the southern Pashtuns who were dominating the drug trade. While Khodaidad did well in the north, he got nowhere in Helmand and Kandahar — and told me so. Karzai had to have known this would be the case.

But the real test for the Afghan government and the Pentagon came with the "force protection" issue. At high-level international conferences, the Afghans — finally, under European pressure — agreed to eradicate 50,000 hectares (more than 25 percent of the crop) in the first months of this year; and they agreed that the Afghan National Army would provide force protection.

The plan was simple. The Afghan Poppy Eradication Force would go to Helmand Province with two battalions of the national army and eradicate the fields of the wealthier farmers — including fields owned by local officials. Protecting the eradication force would also enable the arrest of key traffickers. The U.S. military, which trained the Afghan army, would assist in moving the soldiers there and provide outer-perimeter security. The U.S. military would not participate directly in eradication or arrest operations; it would only enable them.

But once again, Karzai and his Pentagon friends thwarted the plan. First, Anthony Harriman was replaced at the National Security Council by a colonel who held the old-school Pentagon view that "we don't do the drug thing." He would not let me see General Lute or [Stephen J. Hadley](#), the national security adviser, when the force-protection plans failed to materialize. We

asked numerous Pentagon officials to lobby the defense minister, Abdul Rahim Wardak, for immediate force protection, but they did little.

Consequently, in late March, the central eradication force set out for Helmand without the promised Afghan National Army. Almost immediately, they came under withering attack for several days — 107-millimeter rockets, rocket-propelled grenades, machine-gun fire and mortars. Three members of the Afghan force were killed and several were seriously wounded. They eradicated just over 1,000 hectares, about 1 percent of the Helmand crop, before withdrawing to Kabul.

This spring, more U.S. troops arrived in Afghanistan. They were effective, experienced warriors — many coming from Iraq — but they knew little about drugs. When they arrived in southern Afghanistan, they announced that they would not interfere with poppy harvesting in the area. “Not our job,” they said. Despite the wheat shortage and the threat of starvation, they gave interviews saying that the farmers had no choice but to grow poppies.

At the same time, the 101st Airborne arrived in eastern Afghanistan. Its commanders promptly informed Ambassador Wood that they would only permit crop eradication if the State Department paid large cash stipends to the farmers for the value of their opium crop. Payment for eradication, however, is disastrous counternarcotics policy: If you pay cash for poppies, farmers keep the cash and grow poppies again next year for more cash. And farmers who grow less-lucrative crops start growing poppies so that they can get the money, too. Drug experts call this type of offer a “perverse incentive,” and it has never worked anywhere in the world. It was not going to work in eastern Afghanistan, either. Farmers were lining up to have their crops eradicated and get the money.

On May 12, at a press conference in Kabul, General Khodaidad declared the 2008 anti-poppy effort in southern Afghanistan to be a failure. Eradication this year would total less than a third of the 20,000 hectares that Afghanistan eradicated in 2007. The north and east — particularly Balkh, Badakhshan and Nangarhar provinces — continued to improve because of strong political will and better civilian-military cooperation. But the base of the Karzai government — Kandahar and Helmand — would have record crops, less eradication and fewer arrests than in years past. And the Taliban would get stronger.

Despite this development, the Afghans were busily putting together an optimistic assessment of their progress for the Paris Conference on Afghanistan — where, on June 12, world leaders, including Karzai, met in an event reminiscent of the London Conference of 2006. In Paris, the Afghan government raised more than \$20 billion in additional development assistance. But the drug problem was a nuisance that could jeopardize the financing effort. So drugs were eliminated from the formal agenda and relegated to a 50-minute closed discussion at a lower-level meeting the week before the conference.

That is where we are today. The solution remains a simple one: execute the policy developed in 2007. It requires the following steps:

1. Inform President Karzai that he must stop protecting drug lords and narco-farmers or he will lose U.S. support. Karzai should issue a new decree of zero tolerance for poppy cultivation during the coming growing season. He should order farmers to plant wheat, and guarantee today's high wheat prices. Karzai must simultaneously authorize aggressive force-protected manual and aerial eradication of poppies in Helmand and Kandahar Provinces for those farmers who do not plant legal crops.
2. Order the Pentagon to support this strategy. Position allied and Afghan troops in places that create security pockets so that Afghan counternarcotics police can arrest powerful drug lords. Enable force-protected eradication with the Afghan-set goal of eradicating 50,000 hectares as the benchmark.
3. Increase the number of D.E.A. agents in Kabul and assist the Afghan attorney general in prosecuting key traffickers and corrupt government officials from all ethnic groups, including southern Pashtuns.
4. Get new development projects quickly to the provinces that become poppy-free or stay poppy free. The north should see significant rewards for its successful anticultivation efforts. Do not, however, provide cash to farmers for eradication.
5. Ask the allies either to help in this effort or stand down and let us do the job.

There are other initiatives that could help as well: better engagement of Afghanistan's neighbors, more drug-treatment centers in Afghanistan, stopping the flow into Afghanistan of precursor chemicals needed to make heroin and increased

demand-reduction programs. But if we — the Afghans and the U.S. — do just the five items listed above, we will bring the rule of law to a lawless country; and we will cut off a key source of financing to the Taliban.

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