

Drug trafficking and the case study in narco-terrorism

"If you quit drugs, you join the fight against terrorism."

President George W. Bush, 2001

Introduction

Drug trafficking has a long history as a world-wide security threat. It is obvious that transnational criminal organizations now play a key role in providing funding for terrorist groups. Importantly, the link between drug trafficking and terrorism has impacted directly and indirectly on violence and instability at all levels from an individual to international level. To clarify these relationships is vital to approach the current threats in global security. Until 1983, the term "narcoterrorism" was introduced by Peruvian President Belaunde Terry, and it became very popular in a very short time. (Schmid, 2005:1) This essay will argue that The US attempt to put pressure on the international community by combining the terms drugs and terrorism. This essay will deal with the definition of narcoterrorism, and then clarify drug trafficking is linked with terrorism. It is, however, argued that term of narcoterrorism is pursued from the US to fight against its threat. Finally, the way to fight narcoterrorism will be considered.

Drug trafficking and Security

Drug trafficking has become a cause of grave problems that threaten global security, not only because of the huge profits, but also because this illegal activity almost always results in significant collateral violence and destroys of human health. Drug abuse endangers public health by spreading HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases. In the USA, drug trafficking is linked to the growth of youth gangs and still more crime and violence. (Robert B. Charles, 2004:2) Many environmental experts claim that the process of heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamines poses an environmental risk by using of toxic chemicals that are released on the land and into streams and rivers. It harm directly and indirectly to human security. Drug use has had multiple impacts, such as increased family problems, increased crime rates and reduced productivity in society for many decades.

In addition, the financial profits from illegal drugs have enabled terrorists and guerrilla forces to purchase the arms, munitions, and other military equipment and supplies necessary to carry out insurgencies and terrorist operations. This narcotic relationship with such organizations eventually became known as "narcoterrorism" or "narco-terrorism".

Definition

Accordingly, “narcoterrorism” is a term introduced by former President Belaunde Terry of Peru in 1983 when describing terrorist-type attacks against his nation's anti-narcotics police. (Ehrenfeld, 1990:1) Colombian government is probably the best known and best documented example of narcoterrorism. The term has become a subject of controversy, largely due to its frequent and inconsistent use in the advertising campaigns of the US Government's War on Drugs.(DEA's report, 2005) Recently, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) defines narco-terrorism as a subset of terrorism, in which terrorist groups, or associated individuals, participate directly or indirectly in the cultivation, manufacture, transportation, or distribution of controlled substances and the monies derived from these activities.

The link between drug trafficking and Terrorism

It is well-known that transnational criminal activity is associated with terrorism and some are overlapped. According to the US Secretary of State, the most significant terrorist organizations are known the connection to drug-trafficking as follows: in Latin America- Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), National Liberation Army (ELN), United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC); in South Asia - Al-Qaeda, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (Sri Lanka) and Hezbollah; in Europe-Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Irish Terrorists Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA). Therefore, there is little doubt that the illegal drug trade provides the funding of some terrorist operations.

Many terrorist organizations engage in drug trafficking in order to raise funds for their organizations because drug trafficking is a profit business. This is also a way to launder the funds of the terrorist group and to be as a means of financing their activities. (<http://www.uni.edu/ihs mun/resources/narcoterrorism.htm>) Links between terrorist organizations and drug traffickers take many forms: facilitation, protection, transportation, and taxation. (Beers, 2002:10)

Typical sources of funding for terrorist groups include: criminal activities such as smuggling and drug trafficking, donations form local and/or foreign supporters, charitable organizations, assistance form sympathetic foreign states, cash infusions from wealthy individuals and organizations, and revenue from legitimate business operations. (The UN's report, 2004)

One of the major sources of funding for terrorist and organized criminal networks is narcotic trafficking. The terrorist-criminal connection in Latin America and Asia has extended this network. Terrorist groups provide the criminal groups with access to modern weapons. Some insurgent groups, for example, Shining Path, in Peru and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), has profited from offering protection to criminal groups that cultivated, refined and trafficked drugs. (Jane's defence, 2004) Accordingly, many terrorist and guerrilla groups in Asia control regions where narcotics are cultivated. In the past ,The Osama Bin Laden network controlled the parts of Afghanistan where heroin is produced. In addition, in Myanmar, the armed ethnic groups control the flow of narcotics from that country. (Jane's defence, 2004)

Today, some 30 million people, or 0.5% of the global population, consume new drugs such as methamphetamine. Armed ethnic groups and criminal groups in Myanmar and on the Myanmar-Thai border are involved in the high-level production of these new drugs. These groups used a lot of money from drugs to establish a new city, Yongkha, and to support its infrastructure. (Intelligence report-Royal Thai Army, 2001)

Is narcoterrorism terms being pursued from the US?

It can be seen that the link between drug trafficking and terrorists groups in context of narcoterrorism is found mostly in South America particularly Columbia and Peru. Also many articles are focused this issue on Afghanistan. It is well known that more than 80% of drugs production is imported to the US from those areas. It can be argued that term of narcoterrorism may pursued international community to be part of the US plans to reduce drugs trafficking into the US by combining the world's dangerous threats –drugs and terrorism called- narcoterrorism.

Thomas (2003:5) states that the term narcoterrorism was used to be politically explosive by the Reagan administration. They claimed a link between leftist groups and drug trafficking in Nicaragua, Colombia, and Peru. Thomas also criticizes the US by arguing that this claim was means to create greater support for the U.S. war against drugs and an excuse for the United States to engage in various military interventions in Latin America and now in Afghanistan.

Schmid (2005:2) states that narcoterrorism has appeared as a powerful weapon in the propaganda war launched by governments against terrorists, insurgents, organized crime, drug traffickers, and even other sovereign states. It seems that narcoterrorism does

not exist in the context of terrorism only, but to broaden on the connection between drug trafficking and other threats.

It is important to consider whether the link between terrorists and drug trafficking are useful or vulnerable. In terms of the nature and characteristics, Schmid (2005:3) has argued that transnational organized crime groups and terrorist groups will not cooperate with each other to take aims and interests, and both of them prefer to use their “in-house” capabilities to make criminal profit and achieve political goals. He also claims organized crime has no value in sacrifice and have no approaching sense of ‘victory’ or ‘defeat’, but they operate a set of benefits to be realized with maximum profit and minimum risk.

According to Schmid (2005:5-6), there are both differences and similarities between terrorist and drug trafficking groups. To begin with the differences, terrorist groups are usually ideologically or politically motivated, usually seek media attention and often wish to oppose governments for legitimacy. Meanwhile, drug trafficking groups are profit-oriented and do not have the same goals. Also Laqueur (2004:226) points out that those terrorists want to change in society and politics and seek political power; narcotic dealers, on the other hand, need only a vested interest, which guarantees their income.

To some extent, drug trafficking is unlikely to be a main financing source of terrorists. In fact, it is very clear that drug traffickers and terrorists have different long-term goals. Moreover, there are some great differences between members of terrorists group and drug trafficking organization. The first one is quality of members. Drug trafficking organizations mainly consists of criminals who may not have high discipline, whereas terrorists’ members are needed more reliable and high discipline people. Secondly, the recruitment process is very serious for terrorists groups. There are many cases showing those government drug enforcement agents are able to be members of drug trafficking networks, and report that movement, which led to having arrest drug traffickers. This is because drug traffickers may not have good selection methods, but to be a member of a terrorist group may be more difficult than drug traffickers. Therefore, terrorist leaders may know this fact, and may conduct operations with drug traffickers only necessary or important events in order to reduce chances in detection from the intelligence agency.

Interestingly, the similarities and the relationships between drug traffickers and terrorists have ties for mutual advantages. Drug traffickers benefit from the terrorists’ military skills, weapons supply, and access to hide organizations. Terrorists get a source of income and expertise in illicit money laundering and transferring. Both groups need

some corrupt officials to provide false documents such as passports and customs papers. Eherenfeld (2003:2) and Newmeyer (2004:1) claim that all activities of terrorists groups such as the purchasing of weapons, traveling, providing living expenses for terrorists and their families, and a host of licit and illicit activities, need funds to conduct their operations.

Although there is some evidence showing that some terrorist groups involving in drug trafficking in some ways, more interestingly, the UN report present;

While many incidents of cooperation between terrorist groups and criminal organizations have been reported, the significance of the criminal-terrorism cooperation has in some cases been exaggerated. A well-known example is an advertisement stating “If you use drugs, you support terrorism”—a clear attempt to use the “terrorism card” to reinforce the drug control agenda.

Therefore, it is still argument that terrorists groups has involved directly to drug trade except in Columbia. Interestingly, in the 9/11 Commissions report states that “[N]o persuasive evidence exists that al Qaeda relied on the drug trade as an important source of revenue, had any substantial involvement with conflict diamonds, or was financially sponsored by any foreign government”. In others articles, term of “narco-terrorism” seems that political intelligence agencies attempt to link the narcotics with terrorism in order to create opportunities to win in the war on terrorism.

In short, at this moment, the US is exaggerating the link between drug trafficking and terrorism in some cases. However, it is likely that the link seems to increase and will probably be stronger in the future. Therefore, the international community should prepare and monitor closely for this link, but does not to exaggerate.

How to deal with the two wars – War on terrorists and drugs

It is commonly accepted that the UN and the US recently have played the major roles in controlling the narcotics threat as one of the most important campaigns. They launch many operations, in order to eliminate illicit crops and plan for alternative crop programs in target countries. Nevertheless, the ability of the international community to deal with narco-terrorism challenges may be inadequate. This is because the response to its challenges has lack of co-operation. For example, the intelligence agencies focus on intelligence on terrorist network, meanwhile the anti-drug organization look for the drug trafficker. Also The UN has become more and more concerned about lack of international cooperation;

“...The growing links between international terrorism and other forms of transnational organized crime require the strengthening of international cooperation. Among the major problems the

international community still faces is the lack of harmony and even incompatibility among national legal systems and also between systems and international agreements that are intended to provide international criminal justice cooperation mechanisms. This has slowed down and in some cases prevented international cooperation, while providing transnational criminals and international terrorists with opportunities to exploit those differences to their advantage...”

11th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, April 2005

Overall, combating with the link between the drug trade and terrorists requires a global effort. The international communities need to take actions in close cooperation with other governments against drug trafficking and terrorist activities. The combination alternative development with eradication, law enforcement, criminal justice and public information are essential for both national and international level. Importantly, the exchanging between law enforcement sector and intelligence communities is vital. Perhaps more significantly, having considered all networks such as drug growers, drug producers and drug traffickers, nations need to fight against organized crime and terrorists at the same time.

Conclusion

Indeed, it is important to note that drugs and terrorism direct and indirect affect on peace and stability. They have existed in society for a very long time, but now they are linking in some ways. In most cases, the relationship between terrorist and insurgent groups and drug trafficking organizations is a mutually beneficial. It is commonly accepted that this link provides exchanges of drugs for weapons, use of the same smuggling routes and methods to conceal profits and funds, use of the same resources for laundering money and use of the same corrupt government officials. Whether term of narcoterrorism is useful only for the US, it is a good signal for international community to be awareness of drug and terrorism threats. It is clear the close cooperation between criminal and terrorist is likely to increase and seems to be the stronger in the years ahead. This link poses a serious threat to the human security so that all cooperative efforts need to increase more national effective measure and the international cooperation at the high level.

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