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**Counter-Narcotics in Afghanistan: The Canadian Contribution**

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24 April 2009

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## ABSTRACT

After eight years of fighting and instability, Afghanistan finds itself in an extremely vulnerable position. Despite the progress made toward rebuilding the nation since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the country's Government continues to struggle to deliver basic social services to its population. Confidence in the Government is eroding rapidly and reports of rampant corruption only serve to fuel the distrust. Indeed, Afghanistan is in a fight for democracy; a democracy that is continuously under attack from insurgents seeking to exploit the country's vulnerabilities to advance their own agenda. At the heart of the problem is opium, which has long been a source of income for Afghans and now finances the anti-government fight. To date, the response to the growing drug problem has been to escalate eradication in the hope of reducing the money available to fund the insurgency. Unfortunately, eradication forces have been met by very strong opposition and have fallen short of meeting their objectives by a large margin. Consequently, in 2008, the UN called for the abandonment of eradication, given its high cost and poor results.

This paper evaluates the appropriateness of Canada's contributions to the Afghan National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS) and assesses the possibility of future investments. It begins with a description of the opium situation in Afghanistan and follows with a review of the NDCS. Subsequently, the paper provides a detailed account of Canada's involvement and examines the elements of the counter-narcotics strategy to which it contributed. Finally, suggestions are made regarding potential support beyond 2011. The paper will show that by focusing its current and future efforts on rebuilding key institutions and a licit economy, Canada is smartly working toward a drug free Afghanistan.

## Introduction

In 2011, Canada's military will end its combat mission in Afghanistan. This decision, based upon the recommendations of the Manley Report, comes after nearly eight years of human sacrifices trying to secure a part of the country that is still very much threatened by insurgents and criminal elements.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the Canadian Government is maintaining its stance and by 2011, it intends to handover responsibility for securing Kandahar province to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), or alternatively, to another nation under the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). It is envisioned that the military mission will increasingly transition to training the ANSF, and that the focus of the Canadian effort will shift towards diplomacy, reconstruction and governance as the principal means of carrying out Canada's foreign policy objectives in Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup>

In keeping with its intent, the Canadian Government has recently authorized a \$600 million increase in funding to help rebuild Afghanistan and establish a free-elected

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<sup>1</sup> Security conditions remain dangerous in Kandahar Province where the overall severity and frequency of attacks continued to rise, as Canadians and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) targeted insurgent strongholds during the past quarter. See *Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan - Quarterly Report December 2008* (Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada, 2008), 3; [http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/assets/pdfs/docs/r02\\_09\\_e.pdf](http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/assets/pdfs/docs/r02_09_e.pdf) ; Internet, accessed 24 February 2009.

<sup>2</sup> The Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan, led by the Honourable John Manley, was convened to help the Canadian Government decide whether it should withdraw Canadian Forces personnel from Afghanistan in February 2009 as previously planned, and to make recommendations on how Canada could transition from a primarily military-led mission to one where the focus is on diplomacy, development and governance. The report has been referred to by several as the Manley Report, a nomenclature that will be used in this paper. See Independent Panel on Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan, *Final Report* (Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada, 2008), 37; [http://dsp-psd.communication.gc.ca/collection\\_2008/dfait-maeci/FR5-20-1-2008E.pdf](http://dsp-psd.communication.gc.ca/collection_2008/dfait-maeci/FR5-20-1-2008E.pdf) ; Internet, accessed 9 February 2009.

government.<sup>3</sup> On 12 June 2008, the international community also renewed its commitment to Afghanistan by announcing \$21 billion in aid.<sup>4</sup> Despite these recent announcements, there is reserved optimism among those responsible for overseeing the overall development strategy. While promising, this financial aid will not achieve the desired results unless some of the constraints to the implementation of the Compact are addressed.<sup>5</sup> Deterioration of the security situation, the increasing dominance of the opium economy, mismanagement of aid money and a growing corruption problem all conspire to derail the progress made thus far.<sup>6</sup>

Opium production and trafficking has severely undermined efforts to improve governance and decrease corruption, and represents perhaps the most important obstacle to Afghan development. Over the past few years, opium cultivation has skyrocketed and in spite of the attempts by the international community to fight this affliction, progress

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<sup>3</sup> For the period 2001-2011, the Government has authorized a total of \$1.9 billion. See *Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan - Quarterly Report September 2008* (Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada, 2008), 2; [http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/assets/pdfs/docs/rep-rap09\\_08\\_e.pdf](http://www.afghanistan.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/assets/pdfs/docs/rep-rap09_08_e.pdf); Internet, accessed 24 February 2009.

<sup>4</sup> The Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board is co-chaired by the President of Afghanistan's Senior Economic Advisor and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for Afghanistan. This entity is responsible for reporting progress to the international community. See Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, *Annual Report: March 2007 - March 2008* (Kabul: Government of Afghanistan, 2008), 2; <http://www.ands.gov.af/ands/jcmb/site/src/Meeting%20and%20Documents/eighth%20JCMB/files/02-JCMB%20Annual%20Report-Eng.pdf>; Internet, accessed 9 February 2009.

<sup>5</sup> The Afghanistan Compact is a five-year agreement between the Afghan Government and the international community that provides a blueprint for rebuilding a democratic state based on Islamic principles that provides security and livelihood for its people and is as peace with the world. Canada's six priorities are aligned with the goals stated in the Compact and aim to improve security, basic services, national institutions, border security between Afghanistan and Pakistan, facilitate political reconciliation and provide humanitarian aid. See The London Conference on Afghanistan, *The Afghanistan Compact* (London, England: Government of Afghanistan and International Participants to the Conference, 2006), 1-15; [http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/afghanistan\\_compact.pdf](http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/afghanistan_compact.pdf); Internet, accessed 15 January 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, *Report on the Implementation of the Afghanistan Compact* (Kabul: Government of Afghanistan, 2008), 4-6; <http://www.ands.gov.af/ands/jcmb/site/src/Meeting%20and%20Documents/eighth%20JCMB/files/08-Afghanistan%20Compact%20review-Eng.pdf>; Internet, accessed 9 February 2009.

has been slow.<sup>7</sup> To date, the response to the growing drug problem has been to escalate eradication in the hope of reducing the money available to fund the insurgency.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, eradication forces have been met by very strong opposition and have fallen short of meeting their objectives by a large margin. Consequently, in 2008, the UN called for the abandonment of eradication, given its high cost and poor results.<sup>9</sup>

In its bid to see rapid results, the international community has fallen prey to the pitfall of treating symptoms rather than the cause therefore, there has been a propensity to equate counter-narcotics with eradication, interdiction, information campaigns and alternative livelihood projects. While all of these approaches may be necessary to achieve results, they are insufficient on their own to reduce opium production. Without relying on an all-encompassing process of state-building and economic development, counter-narcotics are bound to fail in Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup> For its part, Canada has announced

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<sup>7</sup> Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, *Annual Report: March 2007 - March 2008*, 4

<sup>8</sup> Rubin argues that eradication is having the exact opposite effect in that it drives prices up, given a reduction in production, and that cultivation will simply migrate to other more remote areas of the country. Furthermore, eradication delivered without the prospect of alternative livelihood only contributes to the problem and tends to escalate violence. See Barnett R. Rubin and Jake Sherman, *Counter-Narcotics to Stabilize Afghanistan: The False Promise of Crop Eradication* (New York University: Center On International Cooperation, 2008), 11; <http://74.125.95.132/search?q=cache:vB42M1A-wKwJ:www.cic.nyu.edu/afghanistan/docs/counternarcoticsfinal.pdf+Counter-Narcotics+to+Stabilize+afghanistan&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=ca>; Internet, accessed 5 January 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Jon Boone, "UN Call to Abandon Afghan Poppy Eradication," *Financial Times*, sec. World, Asia-Pacific, Afghanistan, 26 August, 2008, [http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/10bfc3d6-737f-11dd-8a66-0000779fd18c.html?nclick\\_check=1](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/10bfc3d6-737f-11dd-8a66-0000779fd18c.html?nclick_check=1); Internet, accessed 5 January 2009.

<sup>10</sup> David Mansfield is a specialist on development in a drugs environment. He has spent 17 years working in drug producing countries, 11 of which have been spent in Afghanistan conducting field research into the role of opium in rural livelihood strategies. The co-writer of this paper, Adam Pain also has extensive experience on issues of rural livelihood, working in the Himalayan region for the last 20 years. See David Mansfield and Adam Pain, *Counter-Narcotics in Afghanistan: The Failure of Success?* (Kabul, Afghanistan: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008), 18; [http://209.85.173.132/search?q=cache:bo5k9uOIZ-IJ:www.areu.org.af/index.php%3Foption%3Dcom\\_docman%26Itemid%3D26%26task%3Ddoc\\_download%26gid%3D617+long+term+counter+narcotics+for+afghanistan&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=ca](http://209.85.173.132/search?q=cache:bo5k9uOIZ-IJ:www.areu.org.af/index.php%3Foption%3Dcom_docman%26Itemid%3D26%26task%3Ddoc_download%26gid%3D617+long+term+counter+narcotics+for+afghanistan&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=ca); Internet, accessed 2 March 2009.

that it would assist with the implementation of the Afghanistan National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS) by providing funds for alternative livelihood programmes in Kandahar and financing anti-corruption initiatives, in addition to the aid money it has earmarked for reconstruction and development.<sup>11</sup>

This paper evaluates the appropriateness of Canada's contributions to the NDCS and assesses the possibility of future investments. It begins with a description of the opium situation in Afghanistan and follows with a review of the NDCS. Subsequently, the paper provides a detailed account of Canada's involvement and examines the elements of the counter-narcotics strategy to which it contributed. Finally, suggestions are made regarding potential support beyond 2011. The paper will show that by focusing its current and future efforts on rebuilding key institutions and a licit economy, Canada is smartly working toward a drug free Afghanistan.

### **Opium situation in Afghanistan**

In its 2008 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) annual opium survey, the UN reported that since 2007 cultivation has declined by 19% and suggested that the problem is diminishing in size and concentrating geographically to the seven south-west provinces. Additionally, the number of opium-free provinces has increased from 13 in 2007 to 18 in 2008, which would imply progress in terms of control over cultivation.<sup>12</sup> Notwithstanding these positive trends, Afghanistan remains the world-leading opium poppy producer with 93% of the global production and an estimated 2.4

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<sup>11</sup> Prime Minister's Office, "Canada's New Government Substantially Boosts Support to Development Efforts in Afghanistan," Government of Canada; [http://www.pm.gc.ca/includes/send\\_friend\\_eMail\\_print.asp?id=1552](http://www.pm.gc.ca/includes/send_friend_eMail_print.asp?id=1552); Internet, accessed 6 January, 2009.

million people involved in its cultivation. Moreover, enthusiasm for the past year's success needs to be weighed against some harsh realities.

First, the UN suggested that restraint at planting has been successful as a result of pressures exerted by governors, shuras and village elders.<sup>13</sup> Taken at face value, it would appear that the actions taken to entice farmers not to cultivate opium have worked and that alternative crops have replaced opium for good. Looking below the surface however, reveals significant issues that could very well upset the delicate balance achieved. Of key importance are the dynamics of farm prices. Because Afghan production of opium has once again exceeded the world demand, prices have fallen by 20% and consequently, it has become less lucrative for farmers. At the same time, the revenue from wheat has increased threefold between 2007 and 2008, partly as a result of drought in the country. For 2008, the net income ratio between wheat and opium was 2:1 and, as long as this positive ratio can be maintained, so will the progress made.<sup>14</sup>

Second, the lack of security in the south of the country has made it extremely difficult to pursue long term economic development of that region. Insurgents have taken hold in the territory and money derived from the opium trade has ensured that they

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<sup>12</sup> For 2008, opium cultivation was estimated at 157,000 hectares. Since 2006, production has been at an all time high and despite the reduction in 2008, the amount produced far exceeds cultivation levels preceding and immediately after the fall of the Taliban in 2001. See United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2008* (Vienna, Austria: United Nations, 2008), 5; [http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan\\_Opium\\_Survey\\_2008.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/Afghanistan_Opium_Survey_2008.pdf); Internet, accessed 5 January 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Shuras consist of higher level committees of elders.

<sup>14</sup> The drought in 2008 affected both licit and illegal crops. In areas where crops were rain fed, wheat has failed and consequently food prices have risen, which also affected overall inflation. Many farmers have lost the income previously generated by opium poppies and have to buy wheat and other food stuffs at very high prices. The net result is that farmers will likely look to alternatives to ensure they can feed their families. One of the few alternatives available to them is to return to opium production, unless the international community can provide some form of relief. *Ibid.*, 2,17

remain a threat to good governance and security. In fact, Afghanistan's opium is grown almost exclusively in the seven south-western provinces where 98% of the country's production originates. The UNODC estimates that opium farming may have generated \$50-\$70 million through the application of nuisance taxes by local authorities and a further \$200-\$400 million may have been raised through drug trafficking. The benefactors of these revenues are war-lords, drug-lords and insurgents who stand to gain tremendously from these illegal activities.<sup>15</sup>

Third and perhaps most importantly, for several years in a row, the production of opium has exceeded world demand and this overproduction should have had more impact on the global opium market. Prices should have decreased more dramatically, which would indicate the existence of stockpiles. While farmers are known to hold some quantities, it would not be to the extent observed. Since traffickers are unlikely to hold on to a devaluating commodity, the UNODC believes that stocks could be held in areas of insurgency on both sides of Afghanistan's southern border to help fuel the insurgency once prices rebound. Furthermore, the UN fears that if prices are allowed to increase, the result could be disastrous for provinces that have abandoned poppy cultivation for other crops. There is a real possibility that farmers may revert to growing poppies as a means of sustenance if opium cultivation, once again, becomes more lucrative than wheat.<sup>16</sup>

Fourth, another factor which needs to be considered is that the "very large opium economy is widely considered to be the most important source of corruption in the

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 2. Estimates from NATO are more conservative at \$80-\$100 million but suffice it to say that opium derived funding plays an important role in financing the insurgency. See Dave Pugliese, "Canadian Troops to Take Aim at Taliban Opium Labs," *National Post*, sec. News/Canada, 25 October, 2008; <http://www.nationalpost.com/news/canada/story.html?id=907028>; Internet, accessed 11 February 2009.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2008*, 2

country.”<sup>17</sup> Increasingly, corruption is playing a major role in countering the gains made through counter-narcotics efforts. Drug traffickers operate at all levels of government, including the police force and judiciary, and have the ability to seriously undermine the effectiveness of any counter-narcotics strategy.<sup>18</sup> The fight against illegal narcotics is further frustrated by the fact that government officials who wish to address the problem are being intimidated by those who want to maintain the status quo.<sup>19</sup>

In brief, the opium economy represents a complex development challenge for the Afghan Government and the international community. On one hand, a large segment of the population derives its livelihood from opium production. On the other hand, the illegal activities that it serves to finance and its association with corrupt officials greatly undermine the legitimacy of state institutions.<sup>20</sup> After eight years of instability, Afghanistan finds itself at a critical juncture and must capitalize on the current opium market conditions to solidify the gains it has made in 2008. Last year’s drought has been a contributing factor in reducing poppy cultivation but, it has also brought on a food crisis in regions struggling with poverty. Without relief in those regions, it is likely that

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<sup>17</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Fighting Corruption in Afghanistan: A Roadmap for Strategy and Action* (Vienna, Austria: United Nations, 2007), 1; [http://www.unodc.org/pdf/afg/anti\\_corruption\\_roadmap.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/pdf/afg/anti_corruption_roadmap.pdf); Internet, accessed 23 March 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Ali A. Jalali, Robert B. Oakley and Zoe Hunter, "Combating Opium in Afghanistan," *Strategic Forum*, no. 224 (November, 2006), 2; <http://www.ndu.edu/inss/strforum/SF224/SF224.pdf>; Internet, accessed 16 January 2009.

<sup>19</sup> There have been instances where intimidation escalated to violence, as was the case for the head of the appeals court of the Central Narcotics Tribunal who was murdered on his way to work. See United Nations Secretary General, *The Situation in Afghanistan and its Implications for International Peace and Security* (New York City, United States: United Nations, 2008), 9; <http://www.unama-afg.org/docs/UN-Docs/reports-SG/2008/08sep23-SG-report-SC-situation-in-afghanistan.pdf>; Internet, accessed 5 January 2009.

<sup>20</sup> William A. Byrd, *Responding to Afghanistan's Opium Economy Challenge: Lessons and Policy Implications from a Development Perspective* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2008), 5; [http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/IW3P/IB/2008/03/04/000158349\\_20080304082230/Rendered/PDF/wps4545.pdf](http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/IW3P/IB/2008/03/04/000158349_20080304082230/Rendered/PDF/wps4545.pdf); Internet, accessed 5 January 2009.

survival needs will supplant all other reasons for not growing poppy as a matter of priority.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, future counter-narcotics strategies that fail to provide sustainable livelihood for those that choose to give up the poppy growth will not succeed. Likewise, failure to improve security and eliminate corruption will continue to undermine economic development and governance.<sup>22</sup>

The Afghan Government recognizes that the opium economy poses a significant threat to the country's overall development. It also understands that a comprehensive approach is necessary, and that single projects or programmes will not suffice to address the multitude of factors that have led to the expansion of poppy cultivation in the country. Experience in other drug-producing countries has shown that to reduce overall dependency on opium will require a combination of security, economic growth and good governance.<sup>23</sup> For this reason, the Government of Afghanistan aided by the United Kingdom and other international partners, developed the National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS) to guide counter-narcotics efforts.

### **Afghanistan National Drug Control Strategy (NDCS)**

The NDCS provides a strategic framework to initially reduce, and ultimately eliminate the country's reliance on the drug economy. It has four key priorities:

- a. disrupting the drug trade by targeting traffickers and the top end of the trade;
- b. strengthening and diversifying legal rural livelihoods;

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<sup>21</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan Opium Winter Assessment - January 2009* (Vienna, Austria: United Nations, 2009), Preface; [http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/ORA\\_report\\_2009.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/crop-monitoring/ORA_report_2009.pdf); Internet, accessed 16 February 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Mansfield and Adam Pain, *Counter-Narcotics in Afghanistan: The Failure of Success?*, 20

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 19

- c. reducing the demand for illicit drugs and treating drug users; and,
- d. developing state institutions at the central and provincial level vital to the delivery of the counter-narcotics strategy.<sup>24</sup>

The Strategy is anchored by eight pillars of activities, which taken together will contribute to the achievement of the objectives set out in the policy document. The pillars consist of: public awareness, demand reduction, law enforcement, criminal justice, institution-building, alternative livelihoods, eradication and, international and regional cooperation.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, the implementation of the NDCS as intended has been problematic thus far, primarily because of insecurity and corruption throughout the country, but also because of the misguided pursuit of short term successes such as reducing hectares of opium poppy without due consideration for the circumstances that have driven the population to cultivate it in the first place.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, without improving security and addressing corruption as a matter of priority, attempts to eliminate narcotics in Afghanistan will prove futile.

The security situation remains extremely volatile, especially in the southern provinces. Development and reconstruction efforts have been hindered by the dangerous

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<sup>24</sup> Counter-Narcotics Ministry, *National Drug Control Strategy: An Updated Five-Year Strategy for Tackling the Illicit Drug Problem* (Kabul: Government of Afghanistan, 2006), 6; [http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/pdf18/fco\\_nationaldrugcontrolstrategy](http://www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/pdf18/fco_nationaldrugcontrolstrategy); Internet, accessed 5 January 2009.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-42

<sup>26</sup> David Mansfield, *Responding to Risk and Uncertainty: Understanding the Nature of Change in the Rural Livelihoods of Opium Poppy Growing Households in the 2007/08 Growing Season* (London, England: UK Government, 2008), 18; [http://www.davidmansfield.org/data/Field\\_Work/UK/FINAL\\_UK\\_DRIVERS\\_REPORT\\_08.pdf](http://www.davidmansfield.org/data/Field_Work/UK/FINAL_UK_DRIVERS_REPORT_08.pdf); Internet, accessed 2 March 2009.

conditions and, where such conditions exist, the local population has been “vulnerable to choices that perpetuate instability.”<sup>27</sup> Consequently, in exchange for food and security, otherwise law-abiding citizens have in some instances resorted to taking up arms against international forces or simply returned to illicit crop cultivation as a matter of survival.

In the face of these challenges, there has been a tendency on the part of the Afghan Government and intervening countries to seek rapid and actionable ways to curtail the violence. Since poppy production could be linked to insecurity in the country, eliminating cultivation seemed like a logical solution to the problem. Furthermore, despite being considered a “cross-cutting” issue for the Afghan Government, the reality was, and still is, that it was not in a position to fully implement a comprehensive counter-narcotics policy, especially in provinces where anti-government opposition is strong.<sup>28</sup> As a result, past counter-narcotics practices have relied heavily on eradication as the primary means of reducing production in high-risk provinces.<sup>29</sup> And while eradication programmes have widely been implemented, the Afghan government and the

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<sup>27</sup> Natalie Mychajlyszyn, *Afghanistan: Reconstruction and Development* (Ottawa, ON: Political and Social Affairs Division, Government of Canada, 2007), 6; <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb0735-e.pdf>; Internet, accessed 11 February 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Recently, the UNODC even went as far as suggesting that without improvements in the security situation, it is difficult to imagine how implementing any of the NDCS pillars can be successfully achieved. See United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan: Opium Poppy Free Road Map and Provincial Profiles*, (Vienna: United Nations, 2008), 106; [http://www.unodc.org/documents/regional/central-asia/Blue\\_Opium%20Poppy%20Roadmap-Work%20in%20Progress\\_June08.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/regional/central-asia/Blue_Opium%20Poppy%20Roadmap-Work%20in%20Progress_June08.pdf); Internet, accessed 5 January 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Here, the term “cross-cutting” is used to emphasize the point that counter-narcotics cannot be viewed in isolation and considered only the responsibility of a small number of agencies or departments. The implementation of the strategy must be part of a mainstreaming effort that aligns the Government’s efforts to control the production, trafficking and use of drugs with policies, programs and initiatives being implemented by line ministries and departments, international donors, NGO’s and other implementing agencies. See Counter-Narcotics Ministry, *Report to the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB): Implementation of the National Drug Control Strategy* (Kabul: Government of Afghanistan, 2008), 6; <http://www.ands.gov.af/ands/jcmb/site/src/Meeting%20and%20Documents/seventh%20JCMB/files/II.%20JCMB%20VII%20Reports/JCMB%20CN%20Position%20Paper%20Final%20-%20eng.pdf>; Internet, accessed 21 January 2009.

international community have largely failed to provide the necessary assistance and alternative livelihood opportunities to support the discontinuation of poppy farming, resulting in tremendous tensions within the affected areas.<sup>30</sup>

Likewise, corruption has been a major source of problems in the implementation of the NDCS. The proliferation of checkpoints and nuisance taxes sponsored by corrupt government officials has rendered the transportation of licit goods to the market exceptionally costly and dangerous. Those electing to travel by road face a constant barrage of intimidation, violence and extortion. Given these circumstances, many have preferred opium cultivation over licit products since it allows them to sell at the farm, thereby significantly reducing the level of risk to which they are exposed. Additionally, there is a growing perception that those working for the government in the south are even more actively involved in the narcotics trade than the Taliban therefore, removing some of the most senior governmental representative may prove necessary if there is to be any hope of regaining the population's confidence.<sup>31</sup>

A further impediment to the implementation of the NDCS has been the lack of predictable funding to support it and the Government's insufficient capacity to manage the aid received. In 2006, the Afghan Government had estimated the cost of implementing the strategy at \$2.5 billion and suggested that funds received from donor countries be integrated into the national budget to ensure central control. Accordingly, it created the Counter Narcotics Trust Fund (CNTF) as an instrument to manage resources

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<sup>30</sup> The International Council on Security and Development, *Afghanistan Five Years Later - the Return of the Taliban* (London, England: MF Publishing Ltd, 2006), 15; [http://www.icosgroup.net/documents/Afghanistan\\_5\\_Years\\_Later.pdf](http://www.icosgroup.net/documents/Afghanistan_5_Years_Later.pdf); Internet, accessed 5 January 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Mansfield and Adam Pain, *Counter-Narcotics in Afghanistan: The Failure of Success?*, 18

allocation.<sup>32</sup> To date, international assistance has not been channelled through the CNTF for the most part, mainly for fear of corruption. Moreover, the support provided has often been in the form of tied aid. As a result, the parallel structures that have been put in place to deliver the assistance have not been conducive to state-building and there has been duplication of effort which in turn has led to significant waste of aid money.<sup>33</sup>

It is therefore clear that without rooting out corruption from governmental institutions and significantly improving the security situation over the shorter term, counter-narcotics efforts will at best achieve impermanent results. Additionally, building the government's institutions so that they are able of independence over the long term will necessitate a substantial commitment on the part of the international community, as will the development of a licit economy. The NDCS encompasses all of the elements necessary to overcome narcotics in Afghanistan however, a better coordinated approach and increased resources from donor countries will be needed to succeed.

### **Canada's strategy and current role in counter-narcotics**

Canada's approach in Afghanistan is multifaceted and centres on six priorities that are aligned with the Afghanistan Compact's three pillars of security, governance and development.<sup>34</sup> Over the next two years, the Canadian whole-of-government team will

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<sup>32</sup> Counter-Narcotics Ministry, *National Drug Control Strategy: An Updated Five-Year Strategy for Tackling the Illicit Drug Problem*, 28

<sup>33</sup> Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, *Annual Report: March 2007 - March 2008*, 4

<sup>34</sup> Canada, "Canada's Approach in Afghanistan," Government of Canada; <http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/approach-approche/index.aspx>; Internet, accessed 6 February, 2009.

primarily direct its attention to Kandahar province, investing approximately 50% of Canada's total \$821 million financial commitment to Afghanistan in that region.<sup>35</sup>

While not listed as one of its six priorities, Canada's investments in counter-narcotics initiatives are also significant, necessary and mutually reinforcing of other projects undertaken. In February 2007, the Government announced an inject of \$30 million to the UNODC budget, to be distributed over a period of two years to support the fight against drugs in Afghanistan.<sup>36</sup> The funding is intended to support the implementation of NDCS and has been earmarked for alternative livelihood programs and legal institution building. The latter will assist in building a capacity to apprehend and bring traffickers to justice, disrupt the flow of heroin-making chemicals into Afghanistan and, eliminate cross-border trafficking with neighbouring countries.<sup>37</sup>

Canada's primary objective in Kandahar province has been to improve the security situation in order to allow development efforts to take place. As with other southern provinces, opium trafficking has greatly contributed to the insecurity and attempts have been made to curtail production, primarily through eradication. Ultimately, eradication has failed to achieve the required results. Kandahar province has benefited from large amounts of international aid and has been targeted by intense eradication efforts yet, it remains one of the greatest producing provinces in the

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<sup>35</sup> It is estimated that by 2011, Canada will have contributed approximately \$1.9 billion in assistance to Afghanistan, making it one of the country's top five donors. See Canada, *Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan - Quarterly Report September 2008*, 2

<sup>36</sup> This latest donation was in addition to the \$27 million previously allocated for rural development projects for the period 2006-2010, which included funding allocated specifically for alternative livelihood projects in Kandahar province totalling \$18.5 million. See Mychajlyszyn, *Afghanistan: Reconstruction and Development*, 6

<sup>37</sup> Prime Minister's Office, *Canada's New Government Substantially Boosts Support to Development Efforts in Afghanistan*, 3-5

country.<sup>38</sup> In June 2008, the UNODC suggested that Afghanistan shift its focus from eradication to interdiction.<sup>39</sup> The rationale for this proposed change stemmed from the fact that in 2008, only 5480 hectares of poppies were destroyed using manual eradication at a cost of \$10 million. More importantly, seventy-seven people were killed in the process, as a result of attacks by insurgents or angry farmers. Consequently, the UNODC Executive Director has called upon the Afghan Government to abandon the use of ground forces to destroy poppy crops.<sup>40</sup>

Wisely, Canada has refrained from getting directly involved in eradication, mainly because of the perceived impact this may have on relations with Afghan communities whose livelihoods are affected by it.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, experience has shown that although it strikes at the most visible part of opium economy, eradication produces unsustainable results over the long term, despite immediate and quantifiable gains.<sup>42</sup> That said, the Canadian Forces like other ISAF partners have provided support to Afghan-led eradication when necessary to target elements of the insurgency, where there

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<sup>38</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan: Opium Poppy Free Road Map and Provincial Profiles*, 106

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 13

<sup>40</sup> Jon Boone, "UN Seeks Rethink Over Eradication of Afghan Poppy Crop," *Financial Times*, sec. World, Asia Pacific, 27 August, 2008; <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/c91378ce-73cf-11dd-8a66-0000779fd18c.html>; Internet, accessed 5 January 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Gordon Lubold, "NATO Commanders in Afghanistan Wary of Antidrug Effort," *The Christian Science Monitor* 26 December, 2008; <http://www.csmonitor.com/2008/1226/p04s04-usfp.html>; Internet, accessed 21 January 2009.

<sup>42</sup> Generally, eradication has not had a sustainable impact. There are three main reasons for this. First, eradication is technically difficult. Second is the political resistance and corruption associated with the implementation of the eradication programmes. Third, eradication does not address the deeper determinants of poppy cultivation and have lacked the support of sustainable alternative livelihood. See Byrd, *Responding to Afghanistan's Opium Economy Challenge: Lessons and Policy Implications from a Development Perspective*, 17-18

was insufficient Afghan capacity to do so and where alternative livelihood opportunities existed.<sup>43</sup>

To complement the targeted eradication carried out by the Afghan Government in Kandahar province and offer incentives to discontinue poppy cultivation, Canada has tried to deliver a number of alternative livelihood projects. The purpose of these projects was to assist farmers by substituting other crops for opium, however, their execution was rendered extremely difficult because of the security situation. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the organization responsible for delivering Canadian aid in Afghanistan, has found it tremendously challenging to operate in Kandahar and while efforts were made, the assistance provided did not succeed in addressing the root cause of opium cultivation.<sup>44</sup> The ability of these discrete projects to produce long-term, sustainable results was greatly overestimated given their small-scale and localized nature. Additionally, the funds provided by Canada to the Counter-Narcotics Trust Fund (CNTF) to facilitate the implementation of the NDCS and more specifically, sustainable livelihood development, failed “to deliver meaningful livelihood to Afghans”<sup>45</sup> because of poor management on the part of the Afghan Government.

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<sup>43</sup> Gerald Schmitz, *Afghanistan: Drug Production and Trafficking (PRB 07-18E)* (Ottawa, ON: Political and Social Affairs Division, Library of Parliament, Government of Canada, 2007), 5; <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb0718-e.pdf>; Internet, accessed 5 January 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Canadian International Development Agency Evaluation Division, Performance and Knowledge Management Branch, *Review of the Afghanistan Program (Final Version)* (Gatineau, QC: CIDA, 2007), 7, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/49/63/39591223.pdf>; Internet, accessed 27 January 2009.

<sup>45</sup> The CNTF was poorly managed and despite receiving hundreds of millions in assistance to fund the program, it has only disbursed \$8 million. Canada is one of the fund’s contributors, with \$3 million earmarked for it as part of the \$30 million contribution to UNODC. As a result of this mismanagement, the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB), the entity responsible to monitor the implementation of the Afghanistan Compact, has directed that the CNTF undergo reform and restructuring. See Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, *Report on the Implementation of the Afghanistan Compact*, 6

Alternative livelihood projects usually do not address the much wider development perspective and fail to consider the key economic factors that are necessary to sustain the licit commerce. To be successful, these initiatives need to ensure farmers have access to land, water and credit. In addition, markets must be able to accept the goods produced and distribute them internationally, which is simply not the case in most parts of Afghanistan.<sup>46</sup> Given the drawbacks and challenges associated with alternative livelihood projects, it would seem prudent for Canada to limit its involvement with similar programmes.

Another significant challenge which Canada has had to face is the growing corruption and erosion of the rule of law resulting from the drug trade in Kandahar. While corruption is rampant throughout the country, it is particularly pronounced in the southern provinces.<sup>47</sup> In order to address the issue and eliminate high-level contributors, several policy instruments need to be instituted. First, emphasis must be placed on interdicting drug trafficking, mainly through destruction of the product and processing facilities. Secondly, arresting drug traffickers and corrupt officials so that they can be tried and brought to justice is essential if the Government is to be taken seriously. Unfortunately, corruption has managed to extend to the security and justice sectors, thereby undermining the limited progress made to date in re-establishing a credible justice system. Significant work will be required to rebuild these institutions and at the June 2008 Paris meeting on the Afghanistan Compact, the Afghan Government restated its commitment to fighting corruption through the announcement of its National Anti-

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<sup>46</sup> Schmitz, *Afghanistan: Drug Production and Trafficking (PRB 07-18E)*, 3

<sup>47</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Fighting Corruption in Afghanistan: A Roadmap for Strategy and Action*, 6

Corruption Strategy.<sup>48</sup> The strategy was preceded by the ratification of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) earlier in 2008. In addition to the policy instruments just discussed, the Afghan Government will “implement merit-based recruitment processes, reform and strengthen audit procedures and financial controls...” in order to bring back integrity within its ranks.<sup>49</sup>

Canada is playing a key role in combating corruption associated with the narcotics trade. Through its investment of \$27 million (UNODC), it is helping rebuild a capacity to apprehend and bring traffickers to justice, disrupt the flow of heroin-making chemicals into Afghanistan and, eliminate cross-border trafficking with neighbouring countries.<sup>50</sup> In addition, Canada’s Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General Natynczyk, stated that the Canadian Forces would be used to target opium-processing laboratories and high-level drug traffickers after NATO acquiesced to a request by the UNODC Executive Director for a military involvement in drug interdiction.<sup>51</sup>

Given the circumstances that currently prevail in Kandahar province, Canada’s counter-narcotics strategy is sensible. Strengthening governmental institutions has been one of Canada’s priorities and by investing in the justice system so that those involved in the drug trade can be prosecuted, it is helping Afghanistan become self-sufficient and

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<sup>48</sup> Rubin and Jake Sherman, *Counter-Narcotics to Stabilize Afghanistan: The False Promise of Crop Eradication*, 38

<sup>49</sup> Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, *Report on the Implementation of the Afghanistan Compact*, 5

<sup>50</sup> Prime Minister's Office, *Canada's New Government Substantially Boosts Support to Development Efforts in Afghanistan*, 4

<sup>51</sup> Yochi J. Dreazen, "World News: NATO Agrees to Escalate Strikes Against Afghanistan's Drug Industry," *Wall Street Journal (Eastern Edition)* 11 October, 2008; <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1571689551&Fmt=7&clientId=1711&RQT=309&VName=PQD>; Internet, accessed 21 January 2009.

fight corruption over the longer term. Through interdiction, Canada is helping Afghanistan target the elements of the drug industry rather than criminalizing farmers, which can enhance the government's credibility. It is also easier to implement than eradication because of the smaller number of potential targets.<sup>52</sup> That said, interdiction also carries downfalls if not implemented equitably and may run into some strong opposition from government officials that may benefit from the drug industry therefore, it should not become Canada's main effort and it is not. Canada reluctantly accepted the interdiction task, and only until such time as Afghan authorities can develop sufficient autonomy to take it on themselves. Instead, the focus has been on training the Afghan military and police force in order to facilitate the transition in the future.<sup>53</sup> Institution building has therefore been the preferred Canadian approach, which makes sense when trying to rebuild a nation and its economy.

Finally, until such time as security can be improved and corruption brought under control, it will remain extremely difficult to pursue interventions that aim to improve the licit economy. Alternate livelihood programmes, while less than perfect, have contributed to relieving some of the pressure on farmers that chose to abandon poppy cultivation. Such interventions are necessary but have not been Canada's only contribution to economic development. From being the top donor for the microfinance programme to establishing schools, refurbishing roads, constructing irrigation systems

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<sup>52</sup> Byrd, *Responding to Afghanistan's Opium Economy Challenge: Lessons and Policy Implications from a Development Perspective*, 21

<sup>53</sup> Pugliese, *Canadian Troops to Take Aim at Taliban Opium Labs*

and repairing the Dahla Dam, Canadians are making a difference toward building a licit economy in spite of the tremendous insecurity that persists in the south.<sup>54</sup>

### **Canada's Future Role in Afghanistan Counter-Narcotics**

Fundamentally, until the Afghans' most basic needs are met, opium poppy cultivation will continue to thrive. Afghans want reassurance that they will have a roof over their head and the ability to earn a living for themselves and their family. Secondly, being able to do so in a secure environment is paramount. Quick solutions like legalizing opium production for sale in the legal market may appear attractive at first glance but carry their own drawbacks. Canada has been opposed to this approach and should maintain its position in the future. The main reasons are that legalizing some of the opium cultivation would simply attract more farmers to cultivate poppy. It is felt that licit cultivation would add to the illicit problem rather than replace it, since the Afghan production by far exceeds the demand for licit production. Secondly, the Afghan Government does not have the capacity to manage the mandatory stringent controls for such a program. Illegal diversion of licit product into the illegal market would be highly probable in a country like Afghanistan.<sup>55</sup>

Buying the opium crop is another approach that has not been tried yet but unfortunately, it does not fare any better than legalizing production in terms of potential

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<sup>54</sup> "Rebuilding Afghanistan: Statistics," Government of Canada; [http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/assets/pdfs/Tableau\\_WoG\\_MAY08-en.pdf](http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/assets/pdfs/Tableau_WoG_MAY08-en.pdf); Internet, accessed 10 February, 2009.

<sup>55</sup> Canada, "Legalizing Opium Production in Afghanistan? Not the Answer," Government of Canada; [http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/documents/legalize\\_opium\\_legaliser.aspx?lang=eng](http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/canada-afghanistan/documents/legalize_opium_legaliser.aspx?lang=eng); Internet, accessed 8 February, 2009. For more details on this issue, see Rubin and Jake Sherman, *Counter-Narcotics to Stabilize Afghanistan: The False Promise of Crop Eradication*, 1-63

outcome. The proposal would see the international community buying the opium poppy for a period of a few years during which alternative livelihood programmes would be implemented. While it could contribute to reducing funding available for criminal activities, it is also problematic because it expects economic development to occur extremely rapidly and would more than likely encourage further growth rather than having the reverse effect. Economic development takes time and this approach would not be sustainable if it does not address the entire infrastructure necessary to support it.<sup>56</sup>

Experts agree that there are no magic solutions to the opium problem in Afghanistan. That said, the NDCS contains all of the elements necessary to tackle this challenge. Several multilateral organizations such as the UNODC and the World Bank have contributed to its development along with the UK, the US and Afghanistan as the primary drivers. These collaborators have at their disposal a wealth of expertise to help guide the strategy. Where the strategy falls short is often in its execution. The Afghan Government is relatively new and does not have the capacity to address the issue on all fronts simultaneously. Additionally, provincial governments have not been involved in the development of their own counter-narcotics action plans and lack the resources to do so. Finally, the international community has not been consistent in providing funding, which threatens to disrupt long-term initiatives.<sup>57</sup> In 2004, it was estimated that “to make Afghanistan secure and enable its people to live in a typically underdeveloped country,

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<sup>56</sup> Byrd, *Responding to Afghanistan's Opium Economy Challenge: Lessons and Policy Implications from a Development Perspective*, 23

<sup>57</sup> Counter-Narcotics Ministry, *Report to the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCMB): Implementation of the National Drug Control Strategy*, 6

US\$27.6 billion dollars would need to be committed over seven years.”<sup>58</sup> At the June 2008 International Conference in Support of Afghanistan, donors made commitments of \$21 billion in aid and agreed to work with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to ensure the aid is aligned with Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS).<sup>59</sup> For its part, the Afghan Government committed to intensifying actions to combat corruption, which remains a major concern for donor countries.<sup>60</sup>

Fighting corruption in Afghanistan is essential to the development and stability of the country. It is a cross-cutting issue that can be linked to the narcotics trade and there are several ways in which Canada could contribute in the future to this pillar of the counter-narcotics strategy. Building an institution for prosecuting criminals is certainly one of them. The key to reducing corruption is to have institutions and systems that work both in terms of prevention (financial controls, budget process, procurement) and in terms of detection, investigation, prosecution and punishment. Strengthening other core Government agencies such as finances and revenue, and line ministries involved in major service delivery, infrastructure, regulatory or contracting functions would also play a key role in the fight against corruption.<sup>61</sup> As it stands, the Ministry of Justice as well as the Attorney General’s Office and Supreme Court seriously lack the resources and the number of qualified judges required to make a difference. Low salaries pose a significant

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<sup>58</sup> The London Conference on Afghanistan, *The Afghanistan Compact*, 13

<sup>59</sup> For details on the ANDS, see Strategy Secretariat, *Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS)* (Kabul: Government of Afghanistan, 2008), 1-259; <http://www.ands.gov.af/>; Internet, accessed 12 January 2009.

<sup>60</sup> Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, *Annual Report: March 2007 - March 2008*, 2

<sup>61</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Fighting Corruption in Afghanistan: A Roadmap for Strategy and Action*, 12

challenge to the recruitment, retention and the deployment of justice sector officials in areas where they are most needed further compound the corruption problem.<sup>62</sup> Without international help, it is difficult to imagine how Afghanistan can win this battle.

Diplomatically, Canada should continue supporting Afghan-Pakistani cooperation in securing their border and work with other G8 partners to provide the resources necessary to develop the border region.<sup>63</sup> But, the best way for Canada to help defeat the narcotics industry in Afghanistan is to invest into the licit economic engine of the country where the security situation permits. The development of infrastructure is an essential component of the long-term economic growth of Afghanistan and contributes to the well-being and productivity of the people. With approximately 80 percent of the population living in rural areas and depending on agriculture for subsistence, it is paramount that this sector be revived. Sustainable agricultural programmes and stronger institutional capacity within the Government are needed to discourage opium cultivation.<sup>64</sup> In essence, these programmes need to provide all the services currently offered to farmers by drug traffickers such as “guaranteed marketing, financing, and technical assistance.”<sup>65</sup> Micro-financing programmes must be implemented so that funds can easily be made available to farmers and regions, in addition to establishing viable markets. Transportation safety is also essential to encourage those located nearest the provincial centres to migrate to licit cultivation. The international community will need to scale up

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<sup>62</sup> Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, *Annual Report: March 2007 - March 2008*, 8

<sup>63</sup> Canada, *Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan - Quarterly Report September 2008*, 2

<sup>64</sup> Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, *Annual Report: March 2007 - March 2008*, 13

<sup>65</sup> Rubin and Jake Sherman, *Counter-Narcotics to Stabilize Afghanistan: The False Promise of Crop Eradication*, 45

investments in the agricultural sector and help the Afghan Government build popular support in rural areas by assisting in the delivery of services. Protection of the local population against intimidation and extortion will be crucial in building this trust.<sup>66</sup> Finally, investments in the transportation network, energy sector and water resources are seen as complementary and necessary to ensure the success of agricultural development initiatives. Canada should consider financing initiatives that support institution building and infrastructure development within these specific areas.

## **Conclusion**

After eight years of fighting and instability, Afghanistan finds itself in an extremely vulnerable position. Despite the progress made toward rebuilding the nation since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the country's Government continues to struggle to deliver basic social services to its population. Confidence in the Government is eroding rapidly and reports of rampant corruption only serve to fuel the distrust. Indeed, Afghanistan is in a fight for democracy; a democracy that is continuously under attack from insurgents seeking to exploit the country's vulnerabilities to advance their own agenda.<sup>67</sup> At the heart of the problem is opium, which has long been a source of income for Afghans and now finances the anti-government fight.

Opium cultivation has become engrained into the Afghan society due to the absence of an effective government, the progressive degradation of the agricultural infrastructure and the lack of suitable alternatives for ensuring the survival of the

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<sup>66</sup> Mansfield, *Responding to Risk and Uncertainty: Understanding the Nature of Change in the Rural Livelihoods of Opium Poppy Growing Households in the 2007/08 Growing Season*, 50

<sup>67</sup> David J. Liddell, *Drugs in Afghanistan: The Challenges with Implementing U.S. Strategy* (Pennsylvania: U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, 2008), 20.

population.<sup>68</sup> Without viable and sustainable alternatives to the opium economy, Afghanistan will never prosper. International partners need to continue investing into the development of the Afghan economy otherwise the progress to date may well be negated.

Canada has been a leader among donor countries for its development assistance and current involvement in counter narcotics. Relying on institution building and economic development as a means to curtail drug production and trafficking, Canada has taken an important first step toward rebuilding a licit economy. But progress has been slow and there will no doubt remain many opportunities to make significant contributions even after it ends combat operations in 2011.

Through diplomacy, reconstruction and support to good governance, it is possible to help Afghans overcome their dependency on opium for subsistence, but it will take time. By investing in the law enforcement and criminal justice pillars of the NDCS, Canada can help target the criminal element of the drug trade and progressively root out corruption from governmental institutions. On the diplomatic front, Canada could use its influence to facilitate cooperation between Afghanistan and its neighbours to disrupt the flow of drugs in and out of Afghanistan. Finally, by pursuing long-term economic development initiatives, Canada will help ensure that Afghans have viable alternatives to poppy cultivation.

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<sup>68</sup> Christopher M. Blanchard, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2007), 7; <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32686.pdf>; Internet, accessed 5 January 2009.

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