THE FARC AND THE TALIBAN'S CONNECTION TO DRUGS

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INTRODUCTION

This study does not support the arguments of those who perceive the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the Taliban movement (1994-2001) — and these groups’ growing association with narco-trafficking — as components of an “axis of evil,” particularly in regard to human rights concerns. Instead, it aims more precisely at exploring whether the drug links maintained by a Marxist guerilla and a fundamentalist Islamic group (these groups were chosen precisely because they are dissimilar), can provide a model that could then be found in every conflict waged in drug producing countries. Does assisting peasants who engage in illicit cultivation because they lack other means of survival in exchange for those resources needed to carry on the political struggle necessarily lead armed groups to be implicated in the more lucrative business of narco-trafficking, with the risks of criminalization that this implies for them?

CONFLICTS AND DRUG PRODUCTION

Colombia and Afghanistan are the world’s largest producers of cocaine and opiates, respectively. Colombia has occupied this position since the beginning of the 1980s. During the second half of the 1990s, it became the leading producer of coca leaf, the raw material used in the manufacture of coca base. Before this time most coca leaf had been imported from Peru and Bolivia. At the beginning of the 1980s, Afghanistan was the second most important opium (the raw material for

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heroin] producing country, trailing Myanmar (Burma). Within 10 years, however, it surpassed the latter (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2003), and a significant portion of opium began to be processed into morphine base and heroin in Afghanistan.

Both Colombia and Afghanistan have been hotbeds of conflict and violence for more than 20 years. During that turbulent period, three distinct phases may be identified in Afghanistan: the first consisted of a political-religious civil war that followed the Soviet invasion of 1979 and continued until the communist regime’s downfall in 1992; the second involved political ethnic struggles occurring between 1992 and the takeover of Kabul by the Taliban in 1996; in the final stage, an ethnic-political-religious war began in 1996 and is still being fought (Doronsoro, 2000). In Colombia, the conflict began much earlier with a civil war, known as La Violencia (1948-1958), a conflict that generated, among other things, the communist FARC guerilla. In the 1960s, other movements emerged as reactions to Castro-Guevarist values, the most important example of which was the National Liberation Army (ELN). At the beginning of the 1980s, the FARC expanded and extreme-rightist paramilitary and narco-trafficking groups emerged, these conflicts between groups affected a substantial land area, especially in the rural regions.

In both of these cases, it is undeniable that drugs have played a significant part by financing the conflicts. However, the comparison stops here, as the causes and contexts of these conflicts are entirely different, and for several reasons. First, Afghanistan is economically backward, Islamic, and tribally structured. Colombia, on the other hand, although presenting acute social disparities, is an average Latin American country in terms of its economic development. Democratic institutions have been functioning there for about 50 years, even if electoral participation remains very low, and state presence does not extend to the territory as a whole. Secondly, the Taliban represents a fundamentalist Muslim movement, which is resolutely conservative in the economic and social realms (Doronsoro, 2000); in contrast, the FARC is an organization that claims to be Marxist and revolutionary (Ferro-Medina & Uribe-Ramón, 2002, pp.121-125). Finally, the Taliban has been in power and has controlled up to 80% of Afghan territory, whereas the FARC is a rebel movement that influences roughly 30% of the rural areas in Colombia. Despite these considerable differences, however, the group’s reliance on, and relationship to, the drug trade is strikingly similar, including their steadfast claims denying and condemning such practices.

THE ORIGINS OF DRUGS IN COLOMBIA AND AFGHANISTAN

In Afghanistan, only one group the – Ismaeli from Badakhshan – traditionally consumed opium for recreational purposes. Similarly, in Colombia only a few
Indian groups – in particular the Aruacos of the Sierra Nevada area and the Paez and the Guambianos of the Cauca department – consume coca leaf for ritualistic and recreational purposes. At the end of the 1960s and during the 1970s, Colombia became the major producer of marijuana, cannabis having been introduced into the region from India just after the Second World War (Arango & Child, 1984). At the end of the 1970s, a decline in cannabis production was replaced by the processing of cocaine from cocaine base that was being imported from Peru. This development expanded dramatically in the 1980s, and was accompanied by an acceleration of violence. Coca plantations underwent relatively slow growth in Colombia, yielding only 40,000 hectares at the beginning of the 1990s. Eventually, a combination of factors made it much more difficult to import the raw material from Peru and Bolivia (Labrousse, 2004), fostering an exponential growth of coca production in Colombia during the second half of the 1990s. As a result, Colombia became the world’s top producer of coca leaf. Ironically, this took place at the same time that the government was receiving extensive support from the United States to fight the coca trade.

In 1994, at the time of the Taliban’s emergence, Afghanistan was producing around 3,000 tons of opium per year, and many Mujahideen commanders resorted to drug funding to support their activities. In Colombia, cocaine production had been consolidated under the control of criminal organizations such as the Medellín and the Cali cartels until the end of the 1970s, when the FARC increasingly undertook the cultivation of coca plants in the zones they controlled, in particular in the Guaviare, Ariari, and Caquetá departments. The FARC organization denied such involvement however, insisting that it had existed for a long time and prospered without recourse to drug monies (Ferro-Medina & Uribe-Ramón, 2002, pp. 96-103).

Conduct With Regard to Illicit Cultivation

The Taliban was created by the Pakistani Secret Service (with the likely approval of the CIA) and benefited from Saudi financing in their efforts to end the extortion of Mujahideen groups on the Pakistani and Central Asian frontier and thereby reestablish order in the country (Rashid, 2001). The Taliban’s religious leaders and troops who fought the Soviets were trained by students of the Coranic schools (“madrasas”) that were established in Pakistan. Between the end of October and mid-December 1994, when the movement gained control of the three provinces of Kandahar, Zabul, and Ghazni, the Taliban proclaimed two goals: first, to halt the extortion practices of the Mujahideen groups through the groups’ elimination and second, to fight the continued cultivation of poppies and drug production. After taking Kandahar, the Taliban closed the hashish sales outlets, beating and imprisoning consumers. Seized opium was destroyed by fire.
Similarly, at the end of the 1970s, when the FARC was brought in to manage the problem of illicit drug production in the territories they controlled, the movement’s leaders initially opposed the further production and trafficking of drugs. According to their Marxist interpretation of the situation, production and trafficking were the fruits of “capitalist degeneration.” However, they were rapidly compelled to acknowledge that coca cultivation was vital to the very survival of the peasants who comprised its social base.¹ By the end of the 1970s, the state’s efforts at repression of the peasant movement and the use of armed militias by large landholders had effectively pushed the settlers into the arms of the guerillas (Reyes-Posada & Bejarano, 1988, p. 17). For the peasants, the presence of the FARC guaranteed that the cattlemen would not be able to expel them from those lands that they had painstakingly maintained in the preceding years. When the peasants harvested coca leaves on the property of large landholders, the FARC determined their salaries. Likewise, the guerillas set the price of coca paid by merchants to small proprietors, in exchange for a levy of 7% to 10% on the sale of their harvest. This tax, dubbed “gramaje,” was not applied to subsistence cultures. It was, however, extended to coca paste and cocaine base when the peasants began to manufacture those products. The guerillas also collected 8% of the price paid by merchants for the acquisition of either leaves or paste. Concurrently, the FARC exerted pressure on farmers so that they would not confine themselves to coca production alone, since 75% of the lands were, at least in principle, to be dedicated to subsistence agriculture necessary to the guerillas’ survival. Simultaneously, the FARC repressed theft and murder and took rigorous measures against consumers of “basuco” (tobacco cigarettes mixed with cocaine base), going so far as to resort to the death penalty for violations.

The Taliban enjoyed the popular support of their representatives in rural areas, as the latter implemented safety measures to prevent thefts of regular agricultural products and opium. These interventions were especially important because of the continuous efforts by the Mujahideen commanders to extract payments from them. Like the FARC, the Taliban severely penalized individual drug consumption. Transgressors were imprisoned (United Nations International Drug Control Programme [UNDCP], 2001a, p. 9), and repeat offenders could even be thrown into rivers in the dark of winter, thereby risking death. Like the Colombian guerillas, the Taliban realized that in a country devastated by war, with its infrastructure destroyed, the peasants had access to no other resource than poppy cultivation. Their tolerance was reinforced by the fact that the two most important areas of opium cultivation, Helmand in the south and Nangarhar in the east, remained strongholds of the Pashtun ethnic group, on whom the Taliban relied to fight organizations with Tadjik and Hazara dominance. With regard to opium, the religious scholars applied a system of levies on harvests and the practice of redistribution to the poorest,
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called "ochor." They demanded from peasants a "tax" on opium, 10% of the value of the output from irrigated plantings and 5% from nonirrigated ones. This tax was divided into equal shares. The first was distributed to the most needy villagers (blind, handicapped, widows, orphans, etc.), and the Taliban pocketed the other two. This levying in kind was not unique to opium, but applied to the harvesting of every product (Legeay, 1999, pp. 38-39). It reached, for instance, 10% for cereals cultivated in well-irrigated soils, but dropped to 5% for those produced in dry areas. For opium, the tax, still in kind, reached 12.5%. However, the "zakhat," the Islamic tax that was imposed simultaneously, represented roughly 10% of the opium sales price (Chouvy, 2002, pp. 142-143.)

Discourse Held in Relation to Illicit Cultures

Taking into account the differing contexts of their cultural and political environments, one can see that the practices of the Taliban and FARC have been relatively similar. Corresponding likenesses can be found at the level of public discourse. While the FARC has prohibited many reports on drugs, in particular on their internet site (www.farc-ep.org), the Taliban has not presented any analysis on the topic, except for several specific declarations. However, the latter's position was summarized at the beginning of 1977 by its supreme leader, the Mullah Mohammad Omar, in response to a question addressed to him during a rare interview given to the international press:

One thing, at least, is clear: we will permit neither opium nor heroin to be sold in Afghanistan itself. It is not up to us to protect non-Muslims who wish to buy drugs and get intoxicated [...] Our goal for ourselves is to gradually eliminate all drug production in the country so as to safeguard our youth.

The FARC's discourse has been even more explicit:

It is necessary to reassert that the FARC-EP have no relationship whatsoever, with the narco-traffickers. They reject all contact with them on principle, and for ethical reasons. It would be incompatible with democracy and citizenry, and in addition because these activities generate among others corruption, impunity, criminality, social decomposition, and also because they affect primarily, the world's youth. (FARC-EP, 1997)
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One might observe that, unlike Mullah Omar's statement, the FARC represent an "internationalist" position when they show concern for the world's youth.

The convergence of public statements by representatives of the two groups is also evident in the discussion of illicit cultivation. Here, the Taliban chief declared:

In the long run, our aim is to cleanse Afghanistan totally of drugs. But one cannot ask those whose existence totally depends on poppy harvesting to switch from one day to another to other crops and to find markets for their new products.

The FARC provides a comparable analysis, albeit more political:

If Colombia is today the first producer of coca leaf, it is because the peasants, evicted by the agrarian counter-revolution, direct themselves towards areas of colonization to plant the only things that permit them to subsist: coca, poppy and marijuana; zones in which there exists no means of communication, no infrastructure, no politics of commercialization, no technical assistance, and even less economic assistance. It is therefore the only solution in order not to die of hunger. (FARC-EP, 1997)

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT: FROM PROJECT TO REALIZATION

These idealized positions brought each of the two movements to verbally support projects of alternative development. But while the Taliban was in power and was able to implement such a development, the FARC remained at the project stage. During the Andrés Pastrana presidency (1998-2002), peace negotiations with the FARC granted it the control of a territory of 42,000 square km in the Caguán area. The drug issue in the text of the guerillas' proposals was presented as the basis for negotiation and was entitled "For a Government of Reconstruction and National Reconciliation." This document was accompanied by a five-year plan of crop eradication in the municipality of Cartagena del Chairá, in the Caquetá Province (Municipio de Cartagena del Chairá, 1999). This proposal was preceded by a proposal of crop substitution presented at the beginning of the 1980s in the context of the first peace negotiations with the Belisario Betancur government (1982-1986) regarding the same area. At the end of 1989 and the beginning of 1990, in areas controlled by the guerilla, several UN projects "were developed only with the FARC's agreement, and with its collaboration" (interview of a UNFDAC executive in Colombia by the author in 1990). This tends to show that the FARC, like the Taliban, is not automatically averse to crop substitution programs. In this context, the project regarding the municipality of Cartagena del Chairá aimed at replacing 8,765
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Hectares of illicit crops by increasing the 17,000 hectares of subsistence cultures developing cattle growing on 155,200 hectares of underutilized pasture. This project would have been financed primarily by national and foreign investors and donors from those countries particularly interested in the fight against narco-trafficking, and by others committed to purchasing the project’s agricultural products during the first five years of its implementation. The agricultural development was to be supplemented by a vast improvement of the infrastructure: roads, bridges, railroad tracks, airport, hospitals, sports centers, etc. would all be affected. The failure of the peace negotiations in February 2002 and the conflict’s resurgence did not allow for a verification of the FARC’s earlier commitment. The FARC leadership was probably well aware that the wealth of resources that would be needed for the plan’s fulfillment made it utopian at best.

The Taliban remained in power in Afghanistan until the end of 2001 and controlled over 80% of the areas where poppies were grown. Like the FARC, it quickly learned that the drug issue could be used as an element of diplomacy in becoming recognized as a legitimate Afghan government and occupying that country’s seat in the United Nations. Indeed, in November 1996, Mullah Mohamed Gauss, Minister of Foreign Relations, sent a letter to Giovanni Quaglia, a section director of the UNDCP in Islamabad, in which he asserted among other things: “The fight against the production, processing, and the traffic of psychotropic drugs is only possible through regional and international cooperation.” This letter was followed by a November 1997 visit of Pino Arlacchi, Executive Director of the UNDCP. After completing negotiations with Arlacchi, the Taliban declared that, beginning the following year, it was disposed to eradicate all of the country’s poppy cultures and to destroy the heroin processing plants. The adoption of this drastic position seems to have taken Arlacchi by surprise, as he declared to his interlocutors that such a plan was too radical, suggesting a more gradual strategy. In exchange for the Taliban’s actions, the UNDCP was to finance certain projects, beginning in the rural areas, and also to build a textile factory in Kandahar that was to create 1,200 jobs, a portion of which were to be reserved for women. Later, however, the donors to the UNDCP proved to be very reluctant to finance projects in Afghanistan, estimating that doing so would be tantamount to recognizing the legitimacy of the Taliban. In March 1997, the same UN organization launched a pilot program, one of the four sections of which related to the reduction of poppy cultivation. This program had only limited success. In 1999, the Afghan opium production of 4,500 tons beat all previous records, and in the following year, the Taliban only decreased the cultivated areas by 10%.

In August 2000, Mullah Omar suddenly intervened, decreeing the absolute prohibition of any planting in the fall. In the beginning of 2001, a UNDCP survey
of Helmand and Nangahar, the two main producing provinces (UNDCP, 2001b), and other areas controlled by the Taliban revealed that the cultivated areas had decreased from 71,000 hectares in 2000 to 27 hectares in 2001. The prohibition was enforced with minimal constraints (a few beatings and imprisonments). The Taliban, however, dispatched messengers to all concerned villages, declaring: “if those areas had been afflicted by a terrible drought for the past three years, it was because of the cultivation of an impious plant.” In the eastern part of the country (Nangahar Province), the Shinwari tribe, one of the biggest opium producers, was paid so that it would not continue to lead the tribal opposition to the new restrictions as it had before. This strategy successfully disarmed the tribal opposition. The purpose of Mullah Omar’s initiative remains to be clarified. Its goal was probably to remove one of the primary obstacles to a UN seat for Afghanistan, while the Taliban still thought they were capable of forcing the retreat of the forces of the United Front led by Shah Massud. This strategy was unsuccessful, as a new wave of UN sanctions at the end of 2000 reinforced within the movement the sector hostile to any advances by the West. These sanctions pressed Mullah Omar to order the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha at the beginning of 2001, an act which defeated the prospect of the benefits that the Taliban had hoped to reap from opium eradication. In all likelihood, this measure was financially compensated in whole or in part by the Pakistani and Central Asian drug mafias that, owing to the substantial stocks accumulated through the two preceding record-setting years, risked plummeting heroin prices on the international market.

For the FARC to adopt a similar measure to that adopted by the Taliban, the guerrillas would have to control more than 30% to 40% of the illicit cultivation than they currently do (about 30% to 40% now). Also, unlike the Taliban case, adopting such a measure would alienate a portion of the peasantry, whose support is already tenuous and scarcely motivated by ideological factors. It is therefore unlikely that such an approach would ever be adopted by the FARC.

**Involvement in Narco-Trafficking**

The change in relations between the FARC and narco-traffickers occurred between 1981 and 1982 (Labrousse, 1996, p. 408) as one element in a broader economic strategy touching on all primary sector products of great value. In 1982, the FARC held its Seventh National Conference, the goal of which was to “elaborate a strategic plan for [the next] 8 years,” a period thought necessary for accomplishing their goals of assuming power (Agudelo, p. 1994, pp. 22-23). At the end of the 1970s, the FARC leadership had ordered a socio-economic study of the country. During the 1960s, they had entrenched themselves in the poorest and most isolated areas of the country, in order to recruit militants and to shield themselves from repression.
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The policy of splitting their fronts (these grew from seven to 42 between 1978 and 1986), was directed at their establishment in areas rich in oil, gold, coal, coca, and later, poppy, and these efforts accelerated after the Seventh National Conference.

It did not escape the attention of FARC’s leadership that drugs were the most profitable commodity among these coveted products. After 1982, the secretary general's staff began to require a much higher financial contribution from those fronts operating in coca producing areas. Diverse sources indicate that every week, between two and three tons of cocaine were being flown out of the sole airport at San José del Guaviare, in the department of Meta, an area controlled by the FARC. The shipment of such large quantities of contraband not being produced by the FARC suggests close links with the narco-traffickers. Although FARC relations with the Cali cartel and with important members of the Medellín cartel (such as Carlos Ledher and Pablo Escobar) were relatively nonproblematic, they were extremely conflictual with another capo, Rodríguez-Gacha. In the latter's case, it was the FARC that violated the existing agreements with Rodríguez-Gacha. Indeed, at the end of 1983 the guerillas attacked his properties and laboratories located in northwest Meta. In reprisal, Rodríguez-Gacha organized paramilitary groups with the aim of leading "campaigns of extermination" against the social bases of the guerillas. These campaigns were remarkably efficient. In 1985, Rodríguez-Gacha, in alliance with the big landlords' self-defense militias, succeeded in chasing the guerillas from the middle Magdalena area.

Over time, the FARC has revealed an undeniable tendency to increasingly implicate themselves in activities linked to narco-trafficking and not to be content with simply collecting taxes at different levels of production and traffic. In 1990, when poppy cultivation developed in several areas of the country because it was much more profitable than coca, the FARC's secretariat decided to introduce this plant in other areas that belonged to the guerillas and sell the product directly to traffickers. A former guerilla leader believes that this development represented a victory of the "drug lobby" within the FARC's infrastructure commission and some members of the finance committee.

In 1998 and 1999, the FARC decided to eliminate the middlemen ("chichipatos") who went from farm to farm to collect the basic paste made by the peasants for the traffickers allegedly because the latter could be used as informers by the army or the paramilitary. A majority of observers (Vargas, 2003, p. 89) felt that the real goal of the FARC in these actions was the appropriation of increased revenues that would result from the elimination of the middlemen. To regulate these activities, the FARC employed militias made up of sympathizers "who become the backbone in the linkage of the FARC to the drug economic circuit" (Vargas, p. 90).
The links between the Taliban and drug trafficking are not immediately obvious. First of all, in the case of the collection of ochor, it is evident that opium was not actually destroyed but was instead sold to laboratories to be processed into heroin. Many informants have confirmed that the Taliban allowed these laboratories to continue functioning and that the rare campaigns directed against them, such as the one led in mid-February 1999 in the eastern part of the country, were really carried out to sway international opinion. On that occasion, the commander in chief of the Taliban police of Nangahar, Maulawi Ahmatullah, declared somewhat naively to the press that the traffickers had previously been warned that “a raid would be undertaken against them if they did not cease their activities.” Further, the Taliban did not limit itself to taxing the laboratories but also taxed the convoys of heroin heading to the Iranian frontier. At the end of 1995, when the religious scholars had taken control of the southern provinces bordering their frontier, the Tehran government indicated that the seizing of opiates originating from Afghanistan had increased since the previous year, particularly in the neighboring province of Khorassan. Members of humanitarian missions have testified to the existence of drug (opium, morphine, hashish) convoys being driven into Pakistan while under the protection of the Taliban. Moreover, the Taliban relied on the support of many local Muhaddjiddin, many of whom were traffickers themselves.

**Drug Profits Amassed by the FARC and the Taliban**

Differing estimates of the drug trafficking profits reaped by the Taliban up to the year 2000 averaged between $75 and $100 million annually (Chouvy, 2002, p.143). This amount would be equal to that received from the transit and contraband of all merchandise. These revenues served to finance a rudimentary administration and, especially, the conflict against the Common Front. In regard to the FARC, various estimates are around $300 million. The profits are made at various stages in drug production and trafficking, amounting to roughly 40% of the FARC’s revenue, and this money is then used to increase their military potential. The relative importance of the disparity of these revenues for both movements is not merely quantitative. It is evident that $75 to $100 million represents a relatively modest sum for a movement that led a country in its struggle against an opposition, especially as this sum represented a significant fraction of its total revenues. This observation also challenges the Western notion that the Taliban had the financial resources to finance Osama Bin Laden and his networks after September 11, 2001. On the contrary, everything points to the fact that Bin Laden contributed his own money to help finance the Taliban (Chouvy, p. 143).

In spite of the fact that these funds were quite significant in the case of the FARC, the organization constantly denied that drug profits were being used. In fact, the
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FARC had developed for many years without resorting to coca trafficking, and in some departments, Córdoba and Urabá for instance, their fronts had multiplied without the support provided by illicit drugs (Ferro-Medina & Uribe-Ramón, 2002, p. 96). Moreover, their spokesmen have stated that they only entertain relations with the peasants and not with the other actors involved in the subsequent processing and commercialization of the product. This assertion contradicted by others however, such as a FARC collaborator, a farmer and peasant leader of the Caguán department, who said while being interviewed by a Colombian researcher in the demilitarized zone during the peace negotiations: “Personally, I think that the large sum of money coming from narco-trafficking played a fundamental role, both from the standpoint of the guerillas’ financial resources and of the increase of its military power. This also holds true for the paramilitary and auto-defense groups” (Ferro-Medina & Uribe-Ramón, p. 99). Another peasant pointed out that the FARC’s South Bloc, which operates in two of the biggest coca producing departments of Caquetá and Putumayo (where 15 tons of coca paste are produced every month), was responsible for the biggest successes against the Colombian army between 1996 and 1998. FARC fronts in this area have even been able to provide economic support to those fronts operating in other zones. Their economic power, which is also the source of their military potential, undoubtedly contributes to their obduracy during peace negotiations with the government. Simultaneously, clashes with the paramilitary derive not only from ideological differences, but also from the drive to control rich lands, and, in particular, those that drugs have rendered opulent.

It is a matter of conjecture whether the FARC and the Taliban set up their own processing plants, and, in the case of the FARC, established networks for exportation. The Colombian army periodically announces that it has raided such facilities, but its objectivity in this matter is questionable. However, Daniel Pécaut believes that

… the FARC own its own laboratories or administers them with the narco-traffickers. It contributes to the financing of the guerillas and serves to control the main stages of the trafficking, with the exception of those stages which generate the most profit, exportation and distribution to consumers. (Pécaut, 2003, pp. 154-155)

Under these conditions, what benefits are there in fabricating the finished product without controlling its exportation? Here again, recent events disclosed by the police forces of Latin American countries have implicated the FARC in Mexico, Paraguay, Venezuela, and Brazil, without really providing any convincing proof. The arrest by the Colombian army of a Brazilian drug lord, Luis Fernando da Costa, known as Fernandinho Beira-Mar, in April 2001, presented some solid proof, even
if the quantities of cocaine that he purported to have bought every month from the FARC appeared vastly exaggerated.3 The paramilitaries, on the other hand, exert some control over about 40% of the coca being cultivated, and a large number of trafficking organizations escape all manner of control. According to the U.S. Justice Department, Fernandinho advanced to the FARC the amount necessary for the purchase of 10,000 Kalachnikovs imported from Jordan through the former head of Peruvian intelligence, Vladimiro Montesinos.4

Before the Taliban’s defeat at the end of 2001, it was undeniable that heroin laboratories functioned in Afghanistan with their assent. No proof exists that they themselves operated them. However, the Iranian anti-narcotics police have asserted several times that the Taliban were present among traffickers accompanying convoys that were intercepted in desert zones. It seems, however, that these denunciations were aimed mainly at discrediting those fighting the allies of Iran in Afghanistan, Massud’s Tadjik, and, especially, the Hazara Chittes. Since the Western intervention in Afghanistan began at the end of 2001, the latter alleged that the Taliban were financing their attempts at reorganization through revenues provided by heroin laboratories and drug exports into Pakistan. This assertion must be qualified. It is clear that when the Taliban established itself in the territory of a tribal leader who monitored the production and processing of opium, the profits derived from these activities contributed, like all other resources, to their financing.

CONCLUSION

Beyond the manifest differences deriving from geographical, political, and ideological contexts, a number of similarities exist between the Taliban and the FARC’s relationship to drug production and narco-trafficking. While both movements have denied any direct involvement with trafficking, each undoubtedly benefited substantially from the processing and trading of illicit products. In fact, the gradually deepening involvement at increasingly advanced stages appears inevitable, once it has been accepted that profits are being obtained through illicit cultivation, the first stage in the chain of drug production. Indeed, it would be both illogical and unfair for armed movements to halt their involvement at this stage. Illogical because without buyers and without chemical processing, the peasants’ production would offer no economic incentive; unfair because only the peasants, rather than the traders and the narco-traffickers who make the most profits, would pay a tax to the armed groups. Perhaps the leaders of the FARC and of the Taliban have followed this logic in the belief that those struggling for a transformation of society should be the ones to administer this industry rather than others who are mere profiteers.

To answer the question that prompted this discussion, one can estimate that the FARC and the Taliban serve as examples illustrating the inevitable relationship that
develops between “ideological” armed movements lacking any real financial assets and the drug trade. Validating this assertion would be difficult because of the very limited number of countries that combine armed struggle with the existence of illicit cultivation on any important scale.\(^5\) In the case of Myanmar, the groups linked to drugs are led by mere warlords and have no ideological motivation, even though they sometimes invoke aspirations to a national identity, as in the case of Khun Sa (Labrousse, 2004). The only exception is the Kachin organization (KIO), which attempts to preserve the autonomy of a part of its state, even though it has entered into some agreements with the Burmese government. However, during the last 10 years, it has drastically limited opium production in the areas under its control.\(^6\) In many other cases—African countries, the Philippines, Nepal—where cannabis is the only drug produced, guerillas make agreements with the peasants, and possibly with the buyers of marijuana, but not with true criminal organizations. The assertion that a possible generalization can be made regarding the inevitability of a relationship between a politico-military organization and the chain of drug production is not, at present, validated by many examples. However, it can be applied to groups as different as the Islamic Taliban on the one hand, and to Marxist organizations such as the FARC on the other.

**Notes**

1. When the FARC established itself in the Caguán in 1979, the area was hit by a severe drought that threatened the region with a famine. Coca appeared therefore as the only alternative.

2. The following extracts are taken from the interview held by Bizhan Torabi, from the *Deutsch Press Agentur*, *published by Politique Internationale, n°74, hiver 1996-1997*, pp.135-143.

3. Between 18 and 20 tons per month, which would represent more than a third of Colombian production.


5. The resources of the other left wing guerrilla organization, the National Liberation Army, or ELN, come from kidnapping for ransom, gold and coal mining, and especially from extortions from oil companies. While not excluded, the recourse to drugs appears to be only marginal.

6. This policy was formulated in response to the epidemic of heroin and consumption and HIV in the Kachin territory.
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