

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind

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## Narcotics and Insurgency Go Hand in Hand

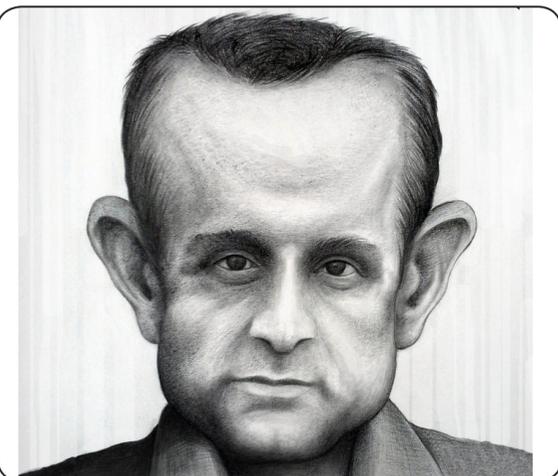
One of the main issues that Afghanistan has been facing, alongside insecurity, is the menace of narcotics. In fact, both narcotics and insecurity have been strengthening each other and paralyzing the peaceful life for the people of Afghanistan. The Afghan government, therefore, requires tackling the issue of narcotics if it is serious about putting an end to terrorism. The previous government promised many times that the menace of narcotics would be dealt with iron hands; but it failed to do so. The international community, as well, could not play a significant role in this regard and, thus, the menace has persisted and targeting us.

It is now an open secret that the poppy cultivation and its smuggling are linked with the networks of organized crime in the country that further extends to international mafia and drug dealing and they have their strong backers in the international drug market and national authorities who appear to be guardians of the nation. But one of the most alarming and unfortunate facts is that they have their links with the terrorist networks in the country. The growing insurgency and expanding networks of terrorism suggest that the terrorists have strong financial support and currently there are many reports that disclose the fact that the terrorist networks receive most of their funding from the same source. This scenario is really very much threatening. This is going to ruin the lives of the people of Afghanistan in various ways and unfortunately no break in it seems very much likely – at least not in near future as the statistics show that there has been and there will be increase in the opium production in the country if not handled properly.

The situation would not be difficult to handle if it was limited only to farmers but the fact is that the farmers are not alone to benefit from the rising prices and the rise in production; rather farmers take a negligible part of it while most of the income goes to the networks that manage its filthy business. And it is not concealed from knowing minds that the terrorist networks have a lion's share in such income. So, it means that with the growth in the production of opium, there will be considerable increase in insurgency from the terrorist networks that are already in the process of gaining strength. Moreover, it has also been observed that the cultivations mostly take place in the areas where Taliban seem to have more control. It is believed that most of the cultivation is concentrated in southern Afghan provinces, and heartland of the Taliban-led insurgency, where the government does not seem to have much control.

This clearly suggests that there is connection between the poppy business and the growing insurgency. Definitely, the poppy business in Afghanistan is well knit in the larger network of organized crime. But unfortunately, the measures that have been carried out to counter the growth of this menace have not been comprehensive and serious. It is even believed that the important figures are involved in backing this business that should, otherwise, have the responsibility to counter them. And the growing corruption and negligence of responsibility in the country does not let the government notice such realities. Though Afghanistan has been under international pressure to take notice of growing poppy cultivation, it is yet to hit the bull's eye in this regard. Moreover, there have been technical and financial assistance from the international community to help Afghanistan eradicate this evil, but most of it goes to the pockets of rampant corruption.

So, the menace of poppy cultivation is determined to influence the country in various ways. It, on one side, is making drugs available to a large number of people, who are both intentionally and unintentionally becoming addict to it and becoming responsible for giving birth to different social problems. On the other hand, it is providing the fuel for insurgency as it is bound to benefit the terrorist networks in the country that largely depend on such sources of income after losing support from elsewhere. Government authorities in this regard have to get very much serious and try to take concrete steps to make sure that the production is reduced to a considerable extent. Destroying the crops is one of the most practical steps at the present scenario and can to a very great extent discourage the poppy cultivation but it has certain complexities with itself. For the long-lasting solution it is preferable that the government must try to facilitate the farmers and landowners the opportunity of growing alternate crops. Moreover, corruption, in this regard, must not be tolerated in any condition, as it the matter that has been influencing the entire nation and would keep on influencing many generations to come. The relevant authorities must consider their responsibilities and play their part in extracting the nation out of this evil; otherwise it would be too late to mend anything.



## The US-Saudi Relationship After Khashoggi

By: Barak Barfi

The alleged killing of the Saudi Arabian dissident journalist Jamal Khashoggi, a permanent resident of the United States, in the Kingdom's consulate in Istanbul has unleashed a tidal wave of criticism. In the US Congress, Democrats and Republicans alike have promised to end weapons sales to Saudi Arabia and impose sanctions if its government is shown to have murdered Khashoggi.

But significant damage to bilateral ties, let alone a diplomatic rupture, is not in the cards, even if all the evidence points to a state-sanctioned assassination. Saudi Arabia is simply too crucial to US interests to allow the death of one man to affect the relationship. And with new allies working with old lobbyists to stem the damage, it is unlikely that the episode will lead to anything more than a lovers' quarrel.

Saudi Arabia's special role in American foreign policy is a lesson that US presidents learn only with experience. When Bill Clinton assumed the presidency, his advisers were bent on distancing the new administration from George H.W. Bush's policies. Among the changes sought by Clinton's national security adviser, Anthony Lake, was an end to the unfettered White House access that Saudi Arabian Ambassador Bandar bin Sultan enjoyed during the Reagan and Bush presidencies. Bandar was to be treated like any other ambassador.

But Clinton quickly warmed to Bandar, and Bandar and the royal court would become crucial to Clinton's regional policies, ranging from Arab-Israeli peace talks to containing Iraq. In 1993, when Clinton needed a quote from the Koran to go alongside those from the Old and New Testament for a ceremony marking an Israeli-Palestinian accord, he turned to the Saudi ambassador.

Before Donald Trump assumed office, he frequently bashed the Saudis and threatened to cease oil purchases from the Kingdom, grouping them with freeloaders who had taken advantage of America. But after the Saudis feted him with sword dances and bestowed on him the highest civilian award when he visited the Kingdom on his first trip abroad as US president, he changed his tune.

Even the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, could not damage the relationship. Though al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, himself a Saudi national, recruited 15 of the 19 hijackers from the Kingdom, senior Saudi officials dismissed the implications. In a November 2002 interview, the Saudi interior minister simply deemed it "impossible," before attempting to redirect blame by accusing Jews of "exploiting" the attacks and accusing the Israeli intelligence services of having relationships with terrorist organizations. Americans seethed, and it appeared that the awkward alliance between a secular democracy and a secretive theocracy, cemented by common interests during the Cold War, was plunging into the abyss separating their values. But the alliance not only survived; it deepened. Bandar provided key insights and advice as President George W. Bush planned the 2003 Iraq invasion.

Today, American politicians are again ratcheting up their rhetoric following Khashoggi's disappearance. The Turks claim they have audio and video revealing his death, and Senator Lindsey Graham warned, "If it did happen there would be hell to pay," while Senator Benjamin Cardin has threatened to target sanctions at senior Saudi officials.

But Saudi Arabia wears too many hats for America to abandon it easily. Though the US no longer needs Saudi oil, thanks to its shale reserves, it does need the Kingdom to regulate production and thereby stabilize markets. American defense contractors are dependent on the billions the Kingdom spends on military hardware. Intelligence cooperation is crucial to ferreting out jihadists and thwarting their plots. But, most important, Saudi Arabia is the leading Arab bulwark against Iranian expansionism. The Kingdom has supported proxies in Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen to contain Iran's machinations. Any steps to hold the Saudis responsible for Khashoggi's death would force the US to assume responsibilities it is far more comfortable outsourcing.

It is a role America has long sought to avoid. When the United Kingdom, the region's colonial master and protector, decided that it could no longer afford such financial burdens, US leaders ruled out taking its place. Policymakers were too focused on Vietnam to contemplate action in another theater. Instead, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger conceived a policy whereby Iran and Saudi Arabia, backed by unlimited US military hardware, would police the Gulf. While Iran stopped playing its role following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Saudis still do.

It is a quandary Trump seems to grasp. Though he vowed "severe punishment" if the Saudis did indeed kill Khashoggi, he refused to countenance canceling military contracts, instead lamenting what their loss would mean for American jobs.

It is not only defense contractors who are going to bat for the Saudis. Before Khashoggi became Washington's topic du jour, the Saudis paid about ten lobbying firms no less than \$759,000 a month to sing their praises in America's halls of power.

But it may be the Saudis' new best friend who will throw them a lifeline. As Iran has become the biggest threat to Israel, the Jewish State has made common cause with the Saudis. Former Saudi bashers such as Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's confidant Dore Gold now meet with the Kingdom's officials. Following the 2013 military coup that toppled Egypt's democratically elected government, Israeli leaders urged US officials to embrace the generals. They are likely to do the same today if US anti-Saudi sentiment imperils their Iran strategy.

The US-Saudi relationship has been a rocky one, and its setbacks and scandals have mostly played out away from the public eye. Yet it has endured and thrived. This time, too, in the wake of Khashoggi's disappearance, common interests and mutual dependence will almost certainly prevail over the desire to hold the Saudis to the standards expected of other close US allies.

Barak Barfi is a research fellow at New America.

## New Frontiers for Waste Management

By: Mahmoud Mohieldin, Sameh Wahba and Silpa Kaza

The world is mired in a serious, if underreported, crisis. Every year, humans generate about two billion tons of household waste, and much more industrial, hazardous, electronic, medical, and construction waste, much of which is disposed of inadequately. And, as usual, the consequences – environmental destruction, damage to health, and impeded development – are disproportionately affecting the world's poor.

As it stands, at least one-third of all global waste is openly dumped or burned. In low-income countries, which may already spend as much of 20% of their municipal budgets on waste management, that figure can rise as high as 93%.

The damage to human health and the environment is already profound. For example, each year, the world generates 242 million tons of plastic, which comprises as much as 90% of ocean debris, damaging the marine ecosystem and ending up in our own bodies. According to Ocean Conservancy, plastic has been found in every species of sea turtle and more than 25% of fish sampled from seafood markets around the world.

And the problem is set to worsen. The recent What a Waste 2.0 report projects that annual global waste generation will increase by as much as 70% by 2050, even as the world's population grows by less than half that. Half of the increase will come from Sub-Saharan Africa, where waste generation will more than triple, and South Asia, where it will more than double.

Confronting the escalating waste crisis will be crucial to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development commits countries to achieving sustainable production and consumption patterns (SDG12). It also calls for universal access to clean water and sanitation (SDG6) and the creation of healthy and sustainable cities (SDG11). And SDG14 – "conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development" – obviously cannot be achieved without major progress in fighting marine pollution.

Fortunately, the world finally seems to be recognizing the scale of the waste crisis. October's Our Ocean Conference in Bali, Indonesia, focused on generating commitments and formulating measures to maintain ocean sustainability, including by cutting marine pollution. In particular, there has been a surge in bans or taxes imposed on certain plastics or plastic products.

But addressing the issue of plastic consumption still requires far-reaching behavioral change. At the same time, the plastic waste that is produced needs to be managed better, in order to prevent

it from ending up in waterways. Given that larger countries make the biggest contributions to plastic pollution, improving waste management there will have a major impact. Where regulations to prevent dumping are insufficient, they should be strengthened and enforced.

There are already numerous successful models of waste management and disposal that may provide a useful starting point for such changes. Forward-thinking action will also be critical in countries anticipating rapid economic and/or population growth, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Nigeria, and Pakistan.

Of course, such changes cost money, which is often in short supply. On average, local governments pay 50% of countries' costs for solid waste management. Though lower-income countries spend less on waste management in absolute terms (around \$35 per ton), they have a harder time recovering costs.

Given this, international institutions should help countries – especially lower-income countries – plan and develop state-of-the-art waste-management systems, including by providing needed financing. In Morocco, the government, with the help of international loans, implemented a program that transformed solid waste management, including by boosting private-sector participation considerably.

International institutions should also support the introduction of policies that create incentives for reducing household waste. Here, again, there are successful models to emulate. In Ningbo, China, citizens receive a financial incentive to separate organic waste and recyclables, reducing the city's overall cost of collection.

Effective waste mitigation requires action at all levels of government and society. This means securing broad-based behavioral change, aligning incentives, reducing barriers to financing, and promoting private-sector participation. It also means providing support to the countries that need it most, such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia.

A cleaner, healthier future is within reach. We must not let it go to waste.

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