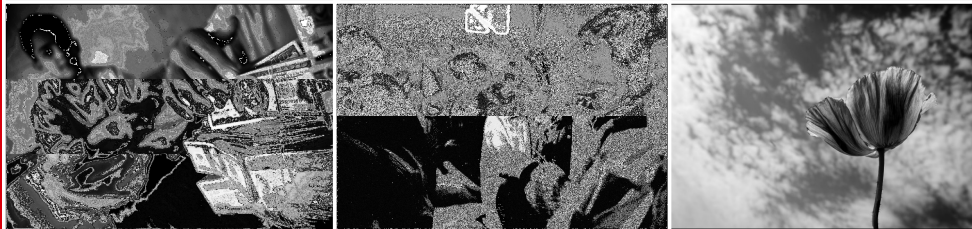
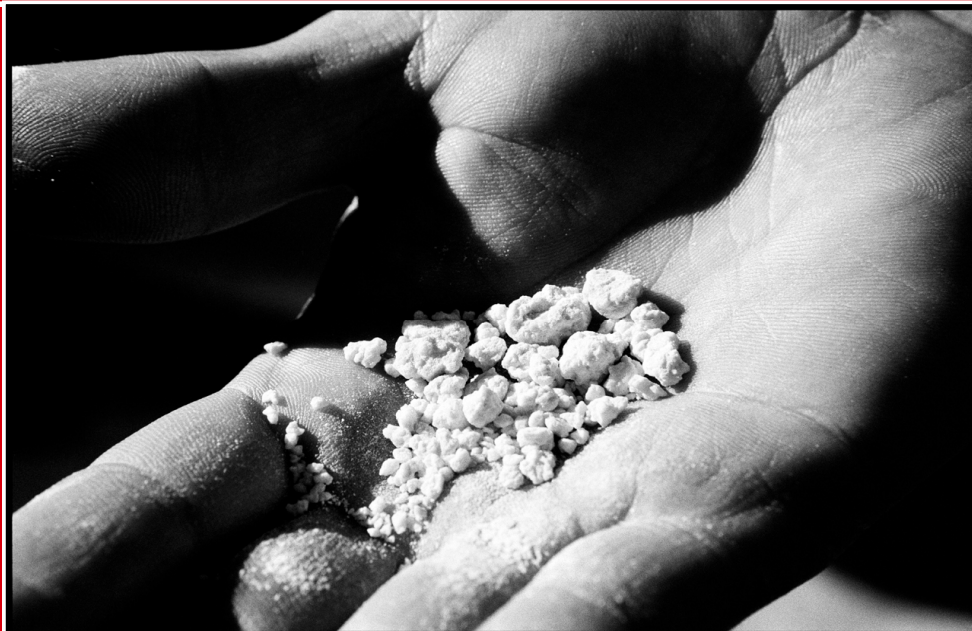


# Targeting Precursors used in Heroin Manufacture



**November 2008 – Work in Progress**



This document is part of the UNODC's Rainbow Strategy which aims to reduce the supply, trafficking and consumption of opiates in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries. Each of its seven operational plans addresses jointly agreed targets in the region; supplements existing interventions from national governments and other Paris Pact partners; and allows for constructive engagement with prime regional actors.

This document has not been formally edited. The boundaries, names and designations used in the maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



This report is a work-in-progress developed at the Paris Pact Expert Round Table on Precursors used in Heroin Manufacture held at the United Nations Office in Vienna on 29 and 30 May 2007. This document was jointly drafted by the UNODC Europe, West and Central Asia Unit and the Regional Office for Central Asia (ROCA) during April and May 2007 and updated in November 2008.

© Cover photograph: Alessandro Scotti, Afghanistan, 2 July 2006



# **Operation TARCET: Targeting Precursors used in Heroin Manufacture**

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## **Introduction**

This document has been prepared to assist Paris Pact partners in forging a coordinated approach targeting chemical precursors in a region that ranges from Europe to Asia. It also defines the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) guidelines to enhance precursor control actions in Afghanistan and neighbouring countries in 2009-2011.

The original document developed in May 2007 provided the skeleton framework for the launching of Operation TARCET, a regional, time-bound operation targeting the illicit trafficking of precursor chemicals, including acetic anhydride, to Afghanistan through the neighbouring countries. That document was approved at the Paris Pact Expert Round Table on Precursors used in Heroin Manufacture held at the United Nations in Vienna on 29 and 30 May 2007, as well as at the Paris Pact Policy Consultative Group Meeting held at the United Nations in Vienna on 3 and 4 December 2007.

This document was jointly drafted by the Regional Office for Central Asia and the Europe, West and Central Asia Unit in 2007 and has been updated and revised in September and November 2008. As this paper is not an official document of the United Nations, it has not been formally edited. The boundaries, names and designations used in the maps contained in this document do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

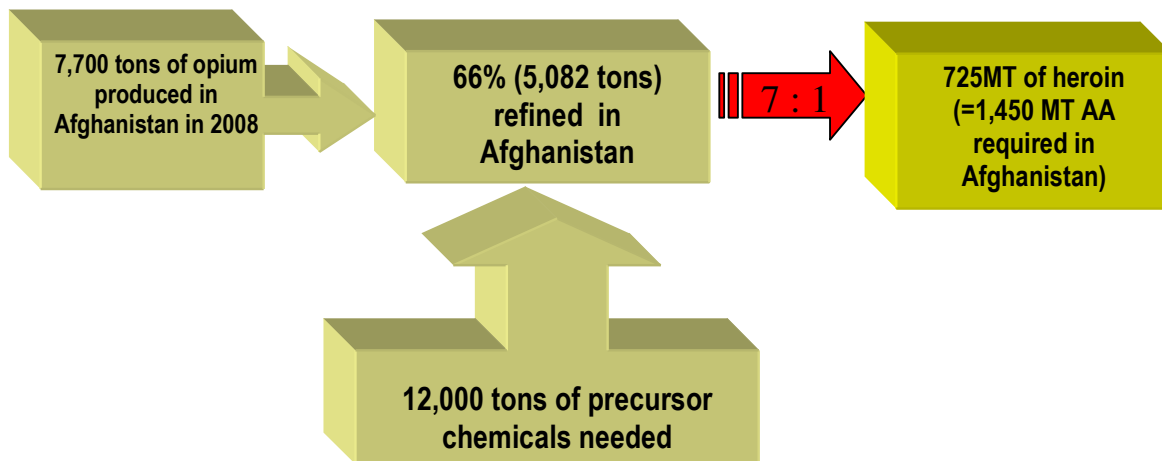
## **Background**

Afghanistan is the world's leading producer of opium, accounting for more than 90 per cent of the global supply. UNODC continually monitors illicit opium cultivation in Afghanistan providing the international community with valuable insight into the extent and dimensions of this problem. Between 2001 and 2007, a steady increase in both the area under cultivation and opium production was identified in the country. In 2008 however, the situation improved slightly with the number of poppy free provinces rising to 18, the area under cultivation falling by 19 percent and opium production declining by seven percent. While these figures may indicate progress by the Afghan Government, supported by the international community, an alarming 7,700 metric tonnes of opium will be produced in Afghanistan during 2008.

During the 1990s the process of converting opium to morphine and then to heroin took place mainly in primary and secondary transit countries along the trafficking routes. Over the last few years however, law enforcement and military interventions have provided evidence of heroin manufacturing within Afghanistan's borders. UNODC estimates that approximately two thirds of the Afghan opium produced is converted into heroin within the country.

At current production levels, this conversion process would require the availability of an estimated 1,450 tonnes of acetic anhydride, as well as 12,000 tonnes of other chemicals such as acetone, ammonium chloride, ammonia solution, charcoal, hydrochloric acid and sodium carbonate (see figure I). Large amounts of water and wood would also be necessary.

**Figure I: Opium and the production of heroin**



None of the required chemicals are currently manufactured in Afghanistan. Instead, they are diverted from licit trade in Europe/Middle East/Asia and then trafficked into the areas where the illicit production of heroin takes place.

International interdiction efforts continue to focus on acetic anhydride as this chemical is essential to, and cannot be easily replaced in, the manufacturing process as well as being cheap (approximately \$1/litre in licit trade) and readily available in industrialised nations. Furthermore, Afghanistan does not have a local licit need or requirement for the substance. On the contrary, the other chemicals used for clandestine heroin production have licit uses within the country and are locally available, thus making interdiction efforts more difficult.

Enforcement interventions focussing on acetic anhydride were initially successful and large consignments being smuggled to Afghanistan were seized in the region between 1997 and 2001 in the Islamic Republic of Iran (36 tonnes), Pakistan (10 tonnes) Turkmenistan (238 tonnes) and Uzbekistan (80 tonnes). While those seizures were significant, they only represented a small portion of the acetic anhydride required in Afghanistan for the illicit production of heroin. From 2001 to 2007, Afghanistan started reporting limited and mostly small seizures of acetic anhydride but of the countries bordering Afghanistan only China continued to report large seizures of the substance.

The declining seizures during the period of 2001-2007 were a cause of concern as there was no corresponding drop in the quality or availability of heroin, which would have been expected if falling seizures were due to fewer diversions and a decreased availability of acetic anhydride. This, as well as the monitoring of international licit trade serves to further strengthen the initial views that acetic anhydride is smuggled to the areas where the illicit manufacture of heroin takes place and highlights the necessity of both preventing the chemicals from reaching the laboratories and conducting backtracking investigations to identify actual sources of the seized substance.

### **A coordinated approach against the diversion of precursors**

UNODC is ideally placed to lead a coordinated approach through its network of field offices and its ability to promote regional frameworks and deliver comprehensive packages of targeted technical assistance.

Precursor control projects have been a cornerstone of UNODC's supply reduction initiatives in Asia for many years, with projects currently operating in Afghanistan, Central Asia and South and West Asia (India). UNODC precursor projects in the region<sup>1</sup> initially focused on strengthening the licit regulatory regimes in Afghanistan's neighbours to ensure that these countries were not targeted by traffickers in attempts to divert the substance from international trade. Those projects have, however, largely operated in isolation with little being done to harmonise efforts to ensure a uniform strategy throughout the greater region.

Since 2006, the control of precursor chemicals is one of the key UNODC regional priority areas for coordination. Linkages between national, regional and international precursor chemical operations and projects have been sought, not only amongst its offices in the region, but equally with other Paris Pact partners, third party initiatives, and with potential source or transit countries from Europe to Asia.

Synergies with other operations and activities aimed at combating the diversion of precursors is considered an essential priority also by Paris Pact partners in order to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of all interventions.

Many Paris Pact partners and international organizations are involved in this important area of action. The International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), for instance, has been leading an international initiative targeting precursor chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of cocaine and heroin: Project Cohesion. This global initiative aims at assisting countries in addressing the diversion of acetic anhydride and potassium permanganate by providing a platform from which time-bound regional operations can be launched, investigations into seizures and stopped shipments can be coordinated and licit trade monitored.

In July 2006, in the framework of Project Cohesion and in collaboration with UNODC and several Paris Pact partners, Central Asian countries launched Operation Transshipment, an anti-trafficking initiative. This operation was conducted at selected strategic border crossing points in each of the five Central Asian countries. The strategic border crossing points were identified on the basis of a threat assessment conducted by national authorities in collaboration with UNODC earlier in 2006. This operation provided practical field training to the operational law enforcement officers involved. In addition, while no seizures of acetic anhydride were made at any of the targeted border crossing points in Central Asia during the 10 day time frame of the operation, the total amount of seizures included three tonnes of sulphuric acid, 36 kilograms of heroin, 82 kilograms of opium, as well as 1677 kilograms of cannabis.

The Russian Federation, as well as Central Asian countries are implementing other precursor control actions, increasing its regional law enforcement cooperation and joint operations within the framework of the Moscow-based Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and participates increasingly in international operations, of which Operation Transshipment is just one example. CSTO members as well as other countries have been participating in Operation Channel since 2003. This operation is run annually by anti-narcotic units of the CSTO countries to counteract drug threats originated from the territory of Afghanistan.

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<sup>1</sup> The Islamic Republic of Iran has not received direct assistance through such projects.

## Operation TARCET

Following the Paris Pact Expert Round Table on Precursors used in Heroin Manufacture held at the United Nations in Vienna on 29 and 30 May 2007, which endorsed the Red Paper as a viable action plan for precursor interdiction in the region, UNODC convened the Operation TARCET<sup>2</sup> Planning Session in Vienna from 3-5 October 2008. The purpose of the meeting was to:

- i) Enhance the capacity to control and interdict precursor chemicals in the respective countries of Central and West Asia;
- ii) Launch a regional effort to focus on information collection and sharing, risk profiling and analysis, and joint precursor control operations and;
- iii) To place special operational focus on the possible misuse of international trade facilitation agreements such as the TIR Convention (Transports Internationaux Routiers – Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods) and the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA).

In addition to UNODC, experts from 19 countries<sup>3</sup> and four international organizations/bodies<sup>4</sup> attended the meeting.

The proposal to launch a limited time-bound operation was unanimously accepted by the operational staff attending the meeting. Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan all agreed to participate in such an operation. Furthermore, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan also agreed that their participation was essential. Paris Pact partnerships for the operation were established between France/ Kyrgyzstan, Germany/ Tajikistan, Italy/ Iran, Russian Federation/ Uzbekistan, Turkey/ Turkmenistan, United Kingdom-United States/ Afghanistan and UNODC/ Pakistan.

During the early stages of 2008, national planning sessions were conducted involving relevant Government agencies, Paris Pact partners and UNODC in order to prepare a confidential operational plan for each country. The following points received specific attention:

- i) Identification of the agencies involved and their respective roles;
- ii) Identification of focal points and their functions during the planning phase;
- iii) Confirmation of identified intervention point(s) and identification of additional areas, if required;
- iv) Finalisation of the national action plan including:
  - a. Scope of training/assistance to be provided both on-site during the operation and, if required, at other training facilities;
  - b. Identification of the National Contact Point (NCP) and communication system for the operation;
  - c. Assistance required from international counterpart; and
  - d. Assistance required from UNODC.

Of particular importance was the agreement by the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC)<sup>5</sup> to serve as the Operational Coordination Unit for the

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<sup>2</sup> TARCET is an acronym to reflect the objectives i.e. the launching of a **T**argeted **A**nti-trafficking operation in the **R**egion that will enhance **C**ommunication, **E**xpertise and **T**raining.

<sup>3</sup> Afghanistan, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Spain, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom, United States and Uzbekistan.

<sup>4</sup> The European Commission, ICPO-Interpol, INCB and WCO.

operation. As such, CARICC would be responsible for the flow of communication and information exchange between participating authorities as well as with the international community (INCB and ICPO-Interpol). Furthermore, CARICC analysts would provide an analysis of the information received relating to the operation.

With UNODC having provided the framework and financial support for the launching of operational activities, Operation TARCET was launched throughout the region in mid-2008, commencing with Paris Pact partners providing ten days of intensive training in their respective countries and national authorities continuing with a ten-week self led operation.

The United Nations Security Council in its Resolution 1817, June 2008 “welcomed the launch, under the guidance of UNODC and the Project Cohesion Task Force, of Operation TARCET recognized the importance of Operation TARCET and urged Paris Pact partners to cooperate closely in a view to achieve its successful implementation”.

Upon completion of the operational phase, a debrief was convened by the UNODC Regional Office for Central Asia in cooperation with the UNODC Country Offices of Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan as well as the Paris Pact Initiative. The purpose of the meeting was to evaluate activities carried out, identify best practices and determine whether such activities should be continued. In addition to UNODC, experts from 15 countries<sup>6</sup> and two international organizations/bodies<sup>7</sup> attended the meeting.

Participants concluded that the operation had met its overall objectives, namely that a targeted anti-trafficking operation had been launched in the region which had led to the enhancement of communication, expertise and training. Furthermore, during the operational time-frame, the following seizures had been effected:

- i) Seizures of Acetic Anhydride:
  - a. 14 tonnes in Pakistan;
  - b. 5 tonnes in IR of Iran;
  - c. 500 kilograms in Afghanistan; and
  - d. 156 kilograms in Tajikistan.
- ii) Seizures of other chemicals
  - a. 6.8 tonnes of sulphuric acid in Kyrgyzstan;
  - b. 1.6 tonnes of acetic acid in Uzbekistan;
  - c. 16 tonnes of acetyl chloride in IR of Iran; and
  - d. 3 tonnes of diverse chemicals in Afghanistan.

Locations of the seizures are provided in figure II. For the countries surrounding Afghanistan, these seizures heralded a significant breakthrough as they were the first of this nature in the region since 2001.

In addition, the source countries of some of the consignments were identified and successful backtracking investigations were launched with the authorities concerned. This led to a further seizure of 12 tonnes of acetic anhydride in the Republic of Korea, the identification of four further diversions amounting to 36 tonnes of acetic anhydride and to the dismantling of the network responsible for the crime.

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<sup>5</sup> CARICC commenced activities in a Pilot Phase on 1 November 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Afghanistan, France, Germany, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom, United States and Uzbekistan.

<sup>7</sup> The European Commission and INCB.

Participants agreed that Operation TARCET had been a success and therefore a similar activity should be launched, but with altered tactics moving towards the use of mobile teams and that UNODC should continue to provide the framework, structure and funding for these activities through its precursor projects. In order to improve operational activities, the following points were identified:

- (i) China, India and UAE should participate in the next operation;
- (ii) There is a need for an information platform in the ‘Southern Cone’<sup>8</sup> as envisaged under the ‘Green Paper’ and agreed to at the Ministerial segment of the Triangular Initiative;
- (iii) Links with other initiatives such as Operation Channel (CSTO) should be established; and
- (iv) Expertise developed during operations should be retained.

**Figure II: Location of seizures during the Operation TARCET timeframe**



<sup>8</sup> Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan

## Action Plan – 2009-2011

This action plan builds upon the lessons learned during Operation TARCET. The operation was successful in so far as the first seizures of acetic anhydride since 2001 were effected in Afghanistan's neighbours. Furthermore, operational activities resulted in a better understanding of the trafficking situation in the region.

At the same time, as is to be expected with activities of this nature, weaknesses in regional intervention mechanisms were identified and further successes were hampered due to a lack of understanding as it relates to the actual chemicals used in the illicit manufacturing process.

The following Action Plan is aimed at empowering the law enforcement authorities in Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries to identify and intercept smuggled chemicals for the use in the illicit manufacture of heroin through the development of advanced investigative techniques.

The following activities will therefore enhance the operational response to the smuggling of precursors to Afghanistan:

- i) Enhanced **collection, analysis and dissemination of operational information in the region for target-oriented intervention actions** in order to develop strategic information on seizures of precursor and other chemicals available, that would enable the identification of routes and methods of diversion required for the launching of proactive and reactive investigations against international trafficking groups;
- ii) Enhanced **forensic information capacity in the region** which is necessary to improve the availability of strategic forensic information on heroin manufacture and trafficking, and the precursors actually used and to ensure the availability of standardized (comparable) information on basic heroin characteristics from source to destination countries. This in turn will lead to the increased use of forensic information for strategic drug control and crime prevention purposes<sup>9</sup> and improved inter-regional cooperation of forensic laboratories;
- iii) Application of **advanced investigative techniques**, including intelligence-led investigations and controlled deliveries, in the region which would see national authorities utilising strategic criminal intelligence analysis techniques such as risk assessments and profiling to plan and direct operational activities. This would lead to an increase in the number of cases investigated, prosecuted and adjudicated and platforms being established and operations launched to assist Governments in conducting interception operations and controlled deliveries;
- iv) Effective **Container Control programmes initiated at ports** (including rail and dry ports) in the region to enhance the overall capacity of the relevant authorities in their work against illicit use of the containerized trade supply chain for the trafficking of precursors (reverse direction). This would be realised through the establishment of specialised units equipped with search and safety equipment and staffed by trained law enforcement officials and would facilitate legal trade through increased cooperation and information exchange between law enforcement agencies and the private sector; and
- v) **Preventing misuse of the TIR Convention (1975) and the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA)** through ensuring that national legislation and

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<sup>9</sup> The proposed scientific initiative supports a number of on-going initiatives to map heroin routes from Afghanistan to Europe, for example, in the context of the Paris Pact Initiative.

regulations assessed and brought in line with the provisions of the TIR Convention and ATTA are in place. In addition, standard operating procedures introduced for the control of Carnets and international points of entry and/or clearing houses and front line officers trained and risk indicators developed to identify possible misuse of the TIR Convention and ATTA and national and/or regional operational activities to prevent such misuse conducted.

### **Expected Outcome**

As recognized in the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1817, June 2008, preventing the smuggling of precursor chemicals into Afghanistan is an essential tool in countering the illicit manufacture of heroin in the country. This reinforces the goals set out by the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS), the Paris Pact Initiative and the INCB led “Project Cohesion”. This programme is expected to provide a platform through which coordination, guidance and operational/technical assistance can be provided to Governments in identifying and intercepting consignments of smuggled chemicals en route to Afghanistan through its neighbours. To achieve this, technical assistance will be provided with the aim of ensuring regional cooperation and developing Governments’ own capacities to organise and launch intelligence-driven operations, a technique that is currently under utilized. The programme complements and links existing precursor control projects in the region and will result in a regional response to this phenomena based on a systematic analysis of both criminal and forensic information.