Caspian Sea and Turkmen Border Initiatives

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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.

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# Caspian Sea and Turkmen Border Initiatives - A regional role for Turkmenistan

## Outline Action Plan

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**Caspian Sea and Turkmen Border Initiatives – A regional role for Turkmenistan**

**Introduction**

Trafficking of Afghan-sourced opiates across the Caspian Sea has received little attention until recently. It is believed that all major seaports have been used for this traffic and increasing seizures are being reported along a route that crosses the Caspian Sea, proceeding overland to the Black Sea into Europe. Turkmenistan, as one of the six countries bordering the Caspian Sea, is affected by record Afghan opiates production but has taken a leading role in addressing the issue under President Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov and at the Paris Pact Expert Round Table meeting held in Turkmenbashi in September 2007 agreed to take a leading role in the Caspian Sea Initiative (CSI). The Turkmen Border Initiative (TBI) was agreed in February 2008 between the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Government of Turkmenistan to address the threat of drug trafficking in the region encompassed by Turkmenistan’s borders with Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Caspian Sea and Turkmen Border Initiatives have been further developed by the Government of Turkmenistan and UNODC in order to facilitate the implementation of counter narcotics enforcement priority actions in the region.

The **Caspian Sea Initiative** aims to engage the countries sharing borders with the Caspian Sea to cooperate in regional and international counter narcotics efforts, with specific emphasis on strengthening analytical capacities, sharing intelligence, and cross-border cooperation with specific emphasis on maritime trade. Also, the Caspian Sea Initiative and UNODC will cooperate with and support the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia (UNRCCA), based in Ashgabat. The latter is a Central Asian initiative with the UN Department of Political Affairs hosted by the Turkmenistan Government, launched on 11 December 2007. The centre will take into consideration the multiple threats faced by Central Asia including international terrorism and extremism, drug trafficking, organized crime and environmental degradation.

While much work has been done to strengthen fixed border checkpoints (BCPs) on Turkmenistan’s borders with Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, there is still a great need to combine cross-border cooperation, intelligence and mobility to address effectively the highly organized and armed trafficking groups operating in this area. The **Turkmen Border Initiative** outline action plan consists of the following: (i) strengthening drugs/crime investigation capacity (including the establishment of a Drug Control Agency); (ii) increased interception through the deployment of Mobile Team units inside the country and alongside the borders; and (iii) interagency and cross-border cooperation, with specific focus on Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

This paper outlines an action plan for Turkmenistan and other CSI-area governments to support these initiatives as well as the technical cooperation activities UNODC will provide.

**Background**

Turkmenistan, geographically the second largest state in Central Asia (491,200 sq km), is bordered by Afghanistan (805km), the Islamic Republic of Iran (1,179 km), Kazakhstan (425
km), Uzbekistan (1,814 km) and the Caspian Sea (601 km). Such a location makes it an important transit area from South-West Asia to the Caucasus, the Russian Federation and Europe. Moreover, for traffickers the country has the advantage of ports on the Caspian Sea.

According to UNODC estimates, around 20% of the opiates produced in Afghanistan are trafficked through the northern route. However, due to increasing cultivation in Afghanistan since 2001, the volumes and related pressure on the Central Asian borders has risen dramatically. UNODC estimates that in 2006, 123 tonnes of Afghan opiates were trafficked through Central Asia, whereas in 2007, this increased by no less than 32% to 163 tonnes. Heroin seizures are occurring in increasing quantities and on little utilized routes, either due to the relocation of laboratories and/or the possibility that heroin traffickers on the Northern Route may be better organized than before. While opium poppy cultivation and opiate production in Afghanistan declined slightly in 2008 compared to 2006 and 2007, opiates production and trafficking still poses a serious threat to safety and security in the region. In particular, the southern and western provinces of Afghanistan have direct internal routes to the Central Asian states and the Islamic Republic of Iran, worsening the overall illicit drug trafficking situation in the region. Strengthened law enforcement in eastern Turkey appears to be pushing traffickers to use routes through the Caspian and Black Seas to reach traditional European markets.

The Government of Turkmenistan considers its borders with Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran as amongst the main problems for drug transit in/through Turkmenistan. Seizure history in Turkmenistan indicates likely heavy illicit traffic in drugs and precursors through the country. Between 1997 and 2000 approximately 60 tonnes of drugs were seized, including 3 tonnes of heroin and more than eight tonnes of opium. A sizeable portion of heroin produced in the Afghan province of Badghis is smuggled across the Turkmenistan border. During 1998, 41 tons of acetic anhydride was seized in different operations by the Russian Border Guards then guarding Turkmenistan’s southern borders. According to seizure information provided by the Government, in 2002 Turkmen law enforcement officers seized 1,320 kilograms of drugs, including 96 kilograms of opium, 56 kilograms of heroin and 1,138 kilograms of hashish. In 2004, law enforcement officers seized a total of about 1,274 kilograms of illegal narcotics; and during six months of 2005 – a total of 548 kilograms of drugs. During 2006 and 2007 drug seizures of over 3 tonnes were reported - in which opium had the biggest share at 2,655 kilograms and 2,283 kilograms respectively. In one incident in March 2006, Turkmen border guards seized more than one ton of drugs on the Iranian border, including 830 kilograms of opium and 203 kilograms of hashish.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Sub-Regional Drug Control Cooperation of 1996 embraces the five Central Asian republics, Azerbaijan, the Russian Federation, the Aga Khan Development Network and UNODC. A number of important cooperation initiatives, such as the Central Asian Regional Information and Coordination Centre (CARICC), controlled deliveries and computer-based training, have been subsequently developed and supported under the framework of the MOU. Turkmenistan has acceded to all UN drug and crime conventions, as well as most of the terrorism-related conventions. The country was the first to ratify the CARICC framework agreement and – as previously noted - hosts the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia.

UNODCs support to the initiatives builds upon the current UNODC and the Government of Turkmenistan’s partnership developed under UNODC national border control projects TUK/42 and TKM/I78, which focused – with other donors - on the Imam Nazar and
Sherherebad border crossing points on the Afghan border. UNODC’s assistance to the Government began with a project in the late 1990’s to support establishment of the State Drug Control Commission under the Cabinet Ministers.

The Caspian Sea Initiative

UNODC has facilitated the development of the CSI through the Paris Pact process. The Government of Turkmenistan will take a leading role in the CSI by hosting the initiative and providing material support. UNODC will use appropriate projects, mentioned below, to support the CSI objectives. A first step in implementing the CSI, the First International Meeting on Illicit Drug Trafficking at Sea Ports with the participation of Caspian Sea States and International Organizations was conducted within the framework of the Paris Pact Initiative and was held on 24-26 June 2008 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. The meeting brought together 87 senior experts on counter narcotics enforcement and drug demand reduction, as well as diplomats from 13 countries and 8 international organizations. The meeting identified the four objectives/pillars of the CSI and detailed the activities to be taken under each objective.

Objectives

1) Regional Data Collection and Analysis: the enhancement of data collection and analytical capacities through the establishment of a Coordination and Analysis Unit at UNODC’s Turkmenistan office. The office, which combines the resources of UNODC and the Government of Turkmenistan, aims to strengthen data collection and analysis in coordination with the Paris Pact National Strategic Analysts based in UNODC offices in Islamabad, Kabul, Moscow, Tashkent and Tehran. This information will be shared with all CSI countries and will serve as a stop-gap until CSI countries establish their own information systems and/or join CARICC.

2) Container Control: The focus of the UNODC Container Control Programme is to assist law enforcement agencies to identify and inspect high-risk containers. Improved control capacities will prevent the use of sea containers for illicit purposes such as the trafficking of drugs, weapons, explosives, human beings or terrorist acts. Inter-agency units will be given access to information sharing mechanisms such as the I24/7 and ContainerComm to allow information sharing on a national, regional and international level. Additionally, UNODC hopes to include container tracking systems technical equipment in the programme. A UNODC pilot Container Control Project in Turkmenbashi is already underway and coordinates activities with the EC-funded BOMCA/CADAP Drug Profiling Unit (DPU) at the port.

3) Intelligence Sharing: Strategic/operational intelligence sharing will be enhanced through the organization of regular operational meetings of senior law enforcement officers. CARICC, DPUs and the National Intelligence Analysis Centres established under UNODC’s RER/F23 project will also promote this objective.

4) Support to the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia (UNRCCA): Through promotion of the counter narcotics enforcement agenda within the work of the Centre, information sharing between the Centre and CSI/UNODC CAUs will be enhanced.
Caspian Sea Initiative Action Plan

1) Establish the Coordination and Analysis Unit in Ashgabat;
2) Launch the Container Control Project in the Turkmenbashi seaport;
3) Place Turkmen Drug Liaison Officer in CARICC;
4) Formalize CARICC;
5) Install a second phase of intelligence analysis software in selected agencies and provide training under the UNODC RER/F23 project; and
6) Develop the working relationship between CSI/UNODC and UNRCCA

The Turkmen Border Initiative

The Turkmen Border Initiative (TBI) was developed to support Turkmenistan’s national strategy to strengthen the capacity of its border law enforcement agencies and in particular to build more effective border cooperation with the Governments of Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to combat trafficking in drugs and precursors, as well as other related organized crime activities. This initiative complements other efforts in the region to strengthen national control measures in each Central Asian State. The primary activities are therefore similar to those promoted by the Yellow Paper’s regional border security plan but are specific to Turkmenistan.

Following the 2008 meeting between President Berdymuhamedov and the UNODC Executive Director, Mr. Antonio Maria Costa, the Government of Turkmenistan has taken measures to build its own capacity in counter narcotics enforcement and border security in support of the TBI. Aspects that still need to be addressed include institution building, improved internal and regional coordination, development of strong analytical and strategic capacities as well as intelligence gathering and sharing. Taking the example of the successful establishment of Drug Control Agencies (DCA) in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and the resulting cooperation between the two, the Government of Turkmenistan has established a self-funded Drug Control Agency along similar lines. The Agency will form the core of the Government’s efforts to implement the TBI. The Government is funding other aspects of the TBI whilst UNODC is assisting by (i) establishing a Border Liaison Office (BLO) under the TKM/I78 project at the Imam Nazar BCP with Afghanistan and (ii) strengthening the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan land border at Farab, which compliments infrastructural development undertaken by the US Government.

The Turkmen Border Initiative action plan therefore consists primarily of the following three elements: (i) strengthened drugs/crime investigation capacity (including through the establishment and work of a State Drug Control Agency in Turkmenistan); (ii) increased interception through Mobile Team units inside the country and alongside the borders; and (iii) interagency and cross-border cooperation, with specific focus on Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

A. Strengthening drugs/crime investigation capacity

Most Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries lack centralized operational drug control agencies and in many cases have not institutionalized modern investigatory and intelligence-led methodologies. The establishment of dedicated drug control agencies has been successful in the region as a means to address these issues. The State Drug Control Service
(SDCS), set up and managed as an operational law enforcement structure, will be responsible for all the major drug control activities in the country. In particular, the SDCS’ functions will be the following:

1. Coordination and organization of the competent authorities regarding the legal trade of drugs, prevention and treatment of addiction to drugs;
2. Coordination of activities by all law enforcement agencies;
3. Conducting investigations into serious/major drug-related crimes;
4. Operating mobile drug interdiction teams throughout the country;
5. Signing and implementing bilateral and multilateral administrative, legal and/or law enforcement instruments;
6. Coordination and control of drug demand reduction, treatment, awareness and HIV/AIDS activities; and
7. Coordination and where required, control of licit drug, precursors and substances contained drug’s importation, transit, export, trafficking and distribution in the country.

Once operational, the new agency, currently in its developmental phase, will serve as the focal point for communication, analysis and exchange of operational information on cross-border crime, as well as in organizing and supporting joint operations within Turkmenistan. The establishment of an effective Drug Control Agency also serves to stimulate the criminal justice system’s move towards a more professional and specialized response to organized crime. This should also result in an enhanced capacity for Turkmenistan in developing and maintaining an accessible and accountable domestic criminal justice system in accordance with international standards and norms.

B. Increasing national interception capacities

The green border between Turkmenistan and its neighbouring countries represents an additional challenge in effectively combating trafficking in drugs, precursor chemicals, weapons and humans. Mobile law enforcement interdiction teams (MOBITs), operating on the basis of intelligence and profiles are considered to be one of the most efficient tools to combat organized and/or transnational crime that is not detected at fixed BCPs. One of the objectives of the newly established SDCS is to develop and manage MOBITs under the TBI. These teams may be organized along lines similar to those operated by the DCA and MoI of Tajikistan and the separate MOBIT project in Kyrgyzstan, coordinated by that country’s DCA. MOBITs will operate with the support of intelligence and information collected by parent agencies, BLOs and CARICC. The establishment of MOBITs is in line with Paris Pact expert round table recommendations for the region and consistent with the yellow paper strategy.

The development of MOBITs will involve the following:

a. Identifying the most important and high-risk border areas (green) to be strengthened and where MOBITs can be based, through an analysis of seizures and other information/intelligence including satellite imagery;
b. Establishment of Standard Operating Procedures for MOBITs;
c. Provision of training and equipment to each team;
d. Development of mentoring systems to monitor teams’ operational capacity and performance;
e. Improved intelligence collection mechanism designed to allow these teams using advanced technology including GPS, video and still cameras to identify and record priority risk areas; and

f. Provide parent agencies with more extensive information database to conduct more detailed analysis and profiling (to be provided under UNODC project RER/F23).

MOBITs will be able to operate in response to specific intelligence and should operate in conjunction with other law enforcement agencies. The teams can also provide 24-hour road control (checkpoints) on a random basis and centrally developed training will include: profiling techniques; vehicle and personal search techniques; drug and precursor identification and testing and suspect handling. Under a separate training component, and in view of the diverse working conditions and circumstances along the border, the teams will be taught basic defence skills and methods of establishing and operating secure vehicle checkpoints.

C. Interagency and cross-border cooperation

While cooperation between capitals within the region has been growing, cooperation at the working level across borders has been mostly non-existent. Interagency cooperation needs to be strengthened and institutionalized through an emphasis on operational cooperation especially at BCPs. Under the TBI, formal cross-border cooperation between Turkmenistan and its neighbouring countries, giving priority to Afghanistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran will be enhanced through joint multi-agency meetings and training and study tours which will also support the establishment of BLOs. As a first step in October 2008, UNODC facilitated the first meeting between Turkmen and Afghan border authorities at the Serhetabat checkpoint and an agreement to develop modalities for further practical cross-border cooperation was obtained. The agreement embodied the following points: (i) a BLO should be established on each side of a fixed BCP in order to promote cross-border cooperation and information exchange; (ii) Each BLO should consist of representatives from the law enforcement bodies concerned; (iii) BLOs should maintain contacts with their counterparts across the border on a regular basis to solve problems that may arise and to address routine issues including: discussions of strategies, drug trends and seizures, exchange of information and intelligence, and establishing a system for operational cooperation, including joint operations. These concepts are based on UNODC’s successful BLO programme in Southeast Asia under its MOU with the countries of that region.

This component also pays special attention to the national law enforcement agencies’ capacities for collecting, storing, analyzing and sharing drug and organized crime related information and intelligence through the work of BLOs.
Annex I - Maps

Map 1: Likely drug trafficking routes to and through Turkmenistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran

Two out of six primary transit countries of Afghan opiates share borders with the Caspian Sea: the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkmenistan. Afghan opiates are partly consumed in these countries and partly smuggled to other consuming markets.
Turkmenistan, geographically the second largest state in Central Asia, borders Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Its geographic location and its long borders on the Caspian Sea makes it an important primary transit country of Afghan opiates.