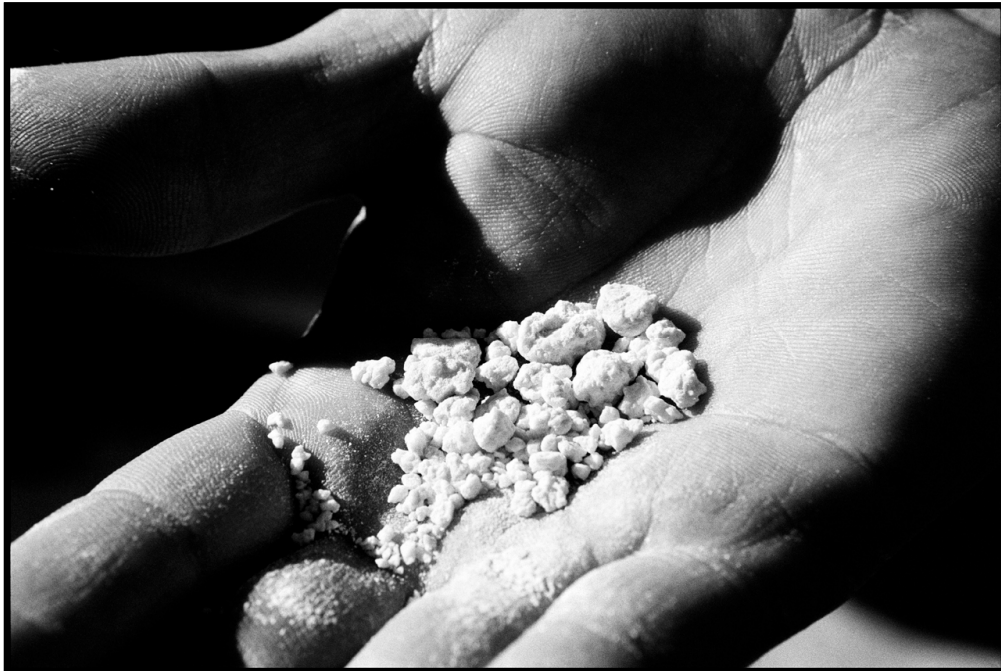




UNITED NATIONS
Office on Drugs and Crime

Targeting Precursors used in Heroin Manufacture



Outline Action Plan
May 2007

Targeting Precursors used in Heroin Manufacture Outline Action Plan

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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 is also meant to provide a skeleton framework for the launching of well-targeted, time-bound operations focussing on the illicit trafficking of acetic anhydride in Afghanistan and in neighbouring countries in 2007.

This paper has been developed as background material for the Paris Pact Expert Round Table on Precursors used in Heroin Manufacture to be held at the United Nations Office in Vienna on 29 and 30 May 2007. It is a 'work-in-progress document', which will be reviewed at the above mentioned meeting in Vienna.

This document was jointly drafted by the Europe, West and Central Asia Section and the Regional Office for Central Asia during April and May 2007. 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.

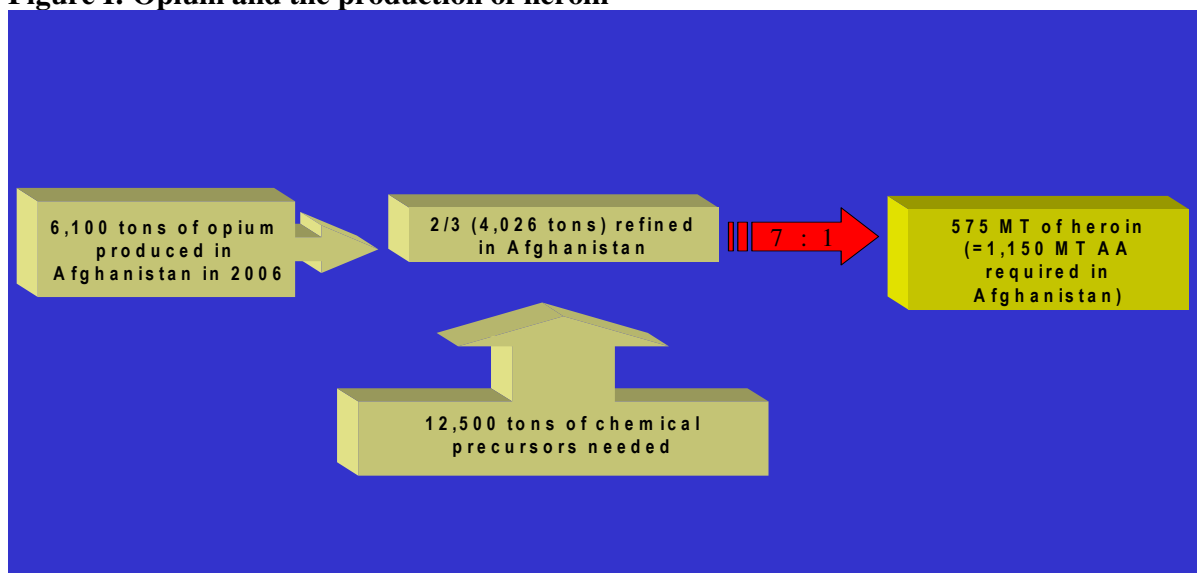
Background

Afghanistan is the world's leading producer of opium, accounting for more than 90 per cent of the global supply. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that in 2006 the country produced around 6,100 metric tons of opium, the highest production level ever reached in its history.

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, there has been increased 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 1,150 tonnes of acetic anhydride, as well as 12,500 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 illicit market.

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) and Turkmenistan (238 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. Since 2001, Afghanistan started reporting limited and mostly small seizures of acetic anhydride but of the countries bordering Afghanistan only China has continued to report large seizures of the substance.

These falling seizures are a cause of concern as there has been 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, South and West Asia (India) and East Asia. UNODC precursor projects in the region¹ initially focused on

¹ The Islamic Republic of Iran has not received direct assistance through such projects.

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.

As a result of a meeting in Dubai in April 2006, the control of precursor chemicals is now one of the six UNODC regional priority areas for coordination. Linkages between national, regional and international precursor chemical operations and projects are now being 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 operation. 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 tons of sulphuric acid, 36 kg of heroin, 82 kg. of opium, as well as 1677 kg of cannabis. Maps in annex I show the strategic border crossing points of Operation Transshipment.

The Russian Federation, as well as Central Asian countries are implementing 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 current the Operation Transshipment is just one example.

Another example of a multinational law enforcement initiative is the so-called Operation Containment. This initiative, which was established in 2002 under the leadership of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), involves countries in Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Europe and Russia. Operation Containment achieved results in 2005 and 2006 in terms of seizures of precursor chemicals and heroin, as well as the dismantling of clandestine laboratories.

At the forthcoming meeting in Vienna, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, as well as other countries in the region, will also have the opportunity to present their recent activities targeting trafficking of acetic anhydride. Over the past three years, the Paris Pact Initiative has repeatedly called for Afghanistan and neighbouring countries to step up precursor control actions. This paper should also provide a preliminary framework for increased actions in those countries, particularly in two

main areas: (i) in the area of licit trade regulation and monitoring; (ii) in conducting specialized enforcement efforts against the diversion of precursors.

Outline Action Plan

The capacity to control and, where necessary, interdict precursor chemicals in the respective countries of Central and West Asia needs to be assessed in order to ensure proper interventions to prevent the flow of precursor chemicals into Afghanistan for use in illicit manufacture. This regional effort is to focus on information collection and sharing, risk profiling and analysis, and joint precursor control operations. A special focus also needs to be placed on the possible mis-use of international trade facilitation agreements such as the TIR Convention (Transports Internationaux Routiers – Customer Convention on the International Transport of Goods) and the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA) to ensure that traffickers are not taking advantage of such mechanisms to facilitate diversions and smuggling.

In accordance with the targets set by the UNODC regional strategy for West and Central Asia devised in Dubai during April 2006, several activities were identified to assist with the effective implementation and coordination of existing precursor projects.

For the initiation and coordination of enforcement activities to intercept consignments of smuggled chemicals *en route* to Afghanistan the following activities were identified:

- i) Facilitation of operational action through project support (as was provided to Operation Transshipment) and introducing basic operational modalities, such as backtracking investigations;
- ii) Establish full operational cooperation and information exchange among UNODC project/field experts in various countries/region, and with INCB's Project Cohesion and its Task Force;
- iii) Strengthen capacities of selected strategic border checkpoints by providing training, equipment, and sniffer dogs for the identification and detection of precursors, especially acetic anhydride;
- iv) Build capacity for joint operations and backtracking investigations along key borders;
- v) Develop national and regional capacity for information collection, exchange and analysis;
- vi) Identification of all key precursor substances used for opium processing in Afghanistan, and of their origin/sources, including neighbouring countries and;
- vii) Follow-up on/monitoring of the implementation of recommendations made at the respective Paris Pact Round Tables relative to precursor control through networking and information exchange with experts/authorities operational within the region;

The possibility to include the seven above mentioned activities as part of a regional legal framework of cooperation should be seriously considered by each and every country in the region.

For the regulation and monitoring of licit trade in precursor chemicals the following activities were identified:

- i) Assessment of domestic controls for precursors in source countries within the region, and identification of weaknesses in existing monitoring/control schemes;
- ii) Development of adequate legislation, where necessary, to ensure proper domestic control in key countries (Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran); and
- iii) Bilateral agreements between source countries within the region, transit countries bordering Afghanistan, and Afghanistan.

The following sections propose an operational framework through which these targets can be met.

I. Initiation and coordination of enforcement activities to intercept consignments of smuggled chemicals *en route* to Afghanistan

Given the importance of preventing the smuggling of precursor chemicals into Afghanistan, the primary objective of this segment is to initiate and coordinate enforcement activities aimed at intercepting such consignments *en route* to Afghanistan. While these activities should ideally be intelligence driven, the intelligence capacities of the Governments in the region are still being developed (e.g. CARICC and the AFG/IRA/PAK information exchange mechanism) and intelligence driven operations are therefore currently limited. The focus of operational activities therefore relies on a traditional proactive law enforcement approach based on:

- i) strengthening interdiction efforts at sensitive border crossing points (BCPs) based on risk indicators;
- ii) launching of backtracking investigations; and
- iii) conducting controlled deliveries.

Based on the INCB's global analysis of precursor trafficking and information gathered through Project Cohesion, operations will focus on the identification and seizure of consignments of acetic anhydride and other chemicals being smuggled to Afghanistan. The emphasis will be on road transport, but attention should also be given to the seaports on the Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf as well as to rail crossings between Central Asia and China and Russia. Activities will target freight transiting the region *en route* to Afghanistan, particularly TIR and ATTA shipments, as such consignments are normally not subjected to an examination within the region and provide traffickers with a perfect modus operandi for moving consignments undetected and undisturbed.

The focus of operational activities will therefore be to educate key law enforcement officers on methods used to identify and intercept smuggled consignments of chemicals.

In planning operations, UNODC, through its precursor and other projects in the region, will be responsible for identifying the strategic border crossings and the officers from those crossings to be trained.

Each participating Government will be expected to establish National Contact Points (NCPs) responsible for the following tasks:

- i) Receiving reports from involved offices;
- ii) Reviewing data on suspicious consignments and transferring such information to other border crossings and;
- iii) Issuing daily reports containing data on all activities and results to the OCU.

For each operation, participants will be responsible for the identification of an Operation Control Unit (OCU). Once CARICC is operational it will be able to fulfil this role, but until such time an office/organisation must be identified that is capable of carrying out the following tasks:

- i) Coordination of international communication;
- ii) Receiving information from NCPs;
- iii) Passing information between NCPs, including the information and intelligence exchange;
- iv) Coordination of cross border action and;

- i) Providing situation reports (sitreps) to all NCPs on searches and seizures effected.

Prior to the launching of specific operations, basic training will be provided at international training facilities (e.g. Turkey and Russia), using both computer-based training (CBT) as well as practical exercises. Such training will then be re-enforced with actual operations at selected border crossings within Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Trainers from Paris Pact countries with experience in precursor interdiction will also provide on-site guidance during operations. Important transit and source countries for the region including India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the United Arab Emirates, may also be requested to participate in such operations. UNODC, together with the international training facilities, will be responsible for coordinating the training.

Operations will normally be conducted in three phases:

- (1) a planning/briefing session;
- (2) a training/operational segment; and
- (3) a debriefing.

During operations, participants will focus on the following operative measures:

- (i) Targeting of specific declared consignments based on the risk analysis;
- (ii) Targeting of specific recipients based on regionally available intelligence;
- (iii) Establishing suspicion through information/intelligence;
- (iv) Launching of backtracking investigations in the event of seizures; and
- (v) Conducting controlled deliveries in the event of seizures.

Customs, Police and Border Guards will share responsibilities under the operation. With Customs and Borders Guards, conducting initial searches and Police providing intelligence to identify suspicious consignments as well as conducting follow-up investigations into any interceptions and, if necessary, organising controlled deliveries.

Operations will be guided by risk indicators and intelligence gathering resulting in intelligence led searches on TIR/ATTA consignments and the development of specific risk profiles and will serve as models for trainees, showing the practical implementation of anti-trafficking techniques, specifically those aimed at precursor chemicals. The use of test kits and other specialised equipment/techniques is to be encouraged with a view to standardizing this as an operating procedure for the authorities concerned.

Upon completion of each operation, a thorough assessment of activities in the form of a debriefing will be conducted in order to evaluate the usefulness of the activities including both the training and the operation, identify strengths and weaknesses and finally, on the bases of lessons learned, provided feed back that can be utilised in planning further activities focussing on the practical implementation of UNODC and other projects.

II. Regulation and monitoring of licit trade in precursor chemicals

A secondary strategic objective consists of supporting Afghanistan, China, Iran and Pakistan in appropriate actions concerning the regulation and monitoring of licit trade in precursor chemicals. National operations to examine and test mechanisms and procedures already in place in Central Asia should also be considered to ensure that existing systems are not relying totally on obsolete regulatory procedures but are dynamic and can adapt to changing trends and patterns in the local chemical trade.

While the assessment of domestic controls for precursors as well as the identification of weaknesses in existing monitoring/control schemes has normally been carried out by consultants, an operational approach may also be adopted to conduct these activities. In particular, operations based on the analysis of trade patterns of precursor chemicals can be conducted in China, Iran and Pakistan as well as the Central Asian states to monitor and assess the procedures for monitoring the manufacture, importation and domestic distribution of controlled chemicals.

Various benefits can be achieved from such an approach, but primarily the objective would be to encourage countries to develop systems involving physical checks of chemical consignments and operators handling them and to move from a system relying totally on permits and authorisations to one where industry is engaged as an equal partner in the chemical control initiatives. Such approaches have worked well in parts of Asia, North America, Europe and the Americas. Furthermore, the engagement of industry has proven especially successful in preventing the diversion of non-controlled chemicals and can provide valuable intelligence for law enforcement activities in a region where such substances are frequently diverted for use in the illicit manufacture of heroin.

The development of adequate legislation to ensure proper domestic control would be a logical progression from such operations. Lawmakers would then have first hand information on what are the strengths and weaknesses in their own systems and legislation would be developed on actual needs rather than as a “cut and paste” from laws and regulations in place in other countries. In addition, based on the findings of a thorough analysis of national trade patterns, bilateral agreements between source countries within the region, transit countries bordering Afghanistan, and with Afghanistan could then be reached.

Furthermore, governments may consider establishing a partnership with the acetic anhydride industry with the aim of jointly suppressing the diversion of acetic anhydride and conducting awareness raising campaigns, adopting a Code of Conduct, as well as ensuring the implementation of an end-user certificate.

III. Expected outcomes

Based on the objectives and activities spelled out in section I and section II of this document, the following outcomes should be achieved by the end of 2009:

- i) Operational action supported and backtracking investigations in place;
- ii) Significant increase in seizures of chemical precursors through joint operations along key borders and through backtracking investigations;
- iii) Identification of source countries and potential routes for key precursors such as acetic anhydride being smuggled into/through the region;
- iv) Inventory of all precursors used in the illicit manufacture of heroin in Afghanistan;
- v) Establishment of a network for the exchange of operational information/intelligence among experts/authorities throughout the region;

- vi) Database on precursors entering Afghanistan;
- vii) Identification of weaknesses in existing monitoring/control schemes;
- viii) Updated legislation for domestic control in key countries, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, China etc. and;
- ix) Bilateral agreements in place between source countries within the region, transit countries bordering Afghanistan, and Afghanistan.