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Securing Central Asia's Borders with Afghanistan



Outline Action Plan
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Outline Action Plan

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Securing Central Asia's Borders with Afghanistan

Outline Action Plan

This paper outlines a strategy to bolster security along Central Asia's borders with Afghanistan through strengthening narcotic interdiction efforts in the region. In particular, it looks at developing and coordinating intelligence using both conventional and non-conventional means, strengthening overall interdiction capacities through the development of cross border liaison mechanisms between Central Asia and Afghanistan, and developing operating standards for the "green border" in this sensitive region.

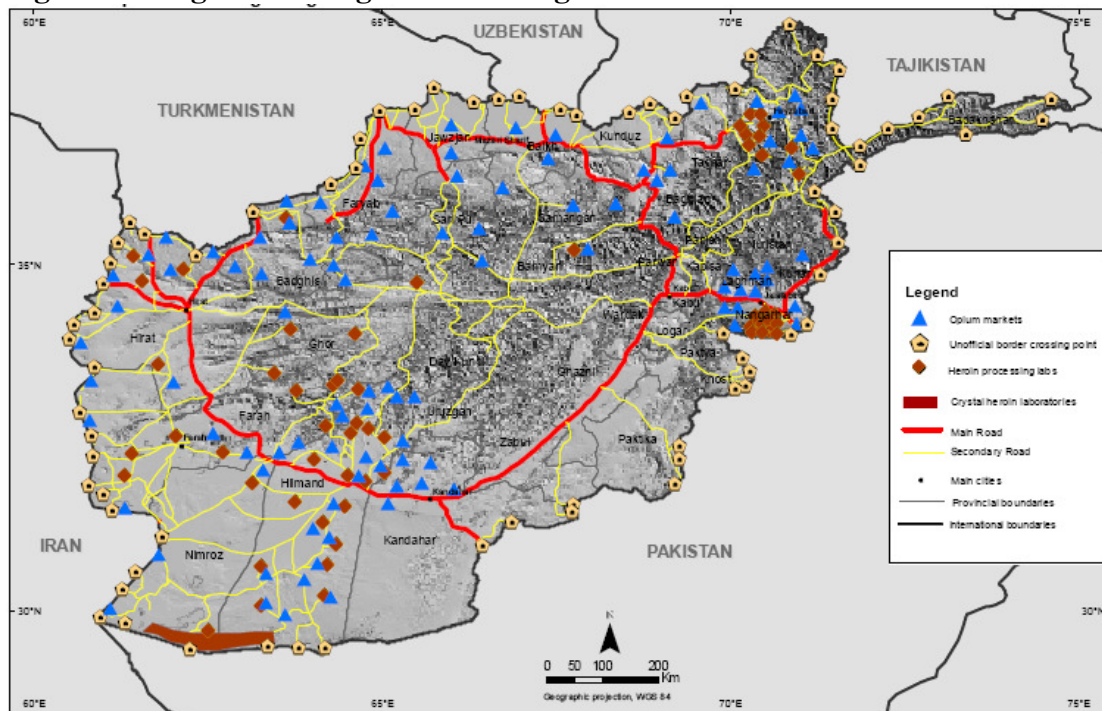
It takes into account gaps in existing mechanisms and proposes to synchronize efforts on both side of the Afghan border.

Introduction

As a bastion of moderate Islamism and straddling key land routes between East Asia and Europe, Central Asia presents itself as a key strategic region from a security perspective. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan form the frontline of this traffic with long, ill-protected borders with Afghanistan totaling 2387 km.

In 2007, opium cultivation in Afghanistan rose to 193,000 hectares, a 17 percent increase over 2006. An unprecedented 8,200 tons of opium can be harvested, making Afghanistan virtually the sole supplier to the world's deadliest drug accounting for 93 percent of global opiates market.

Figure I: Drug Trafficking Trends in Afghanistan



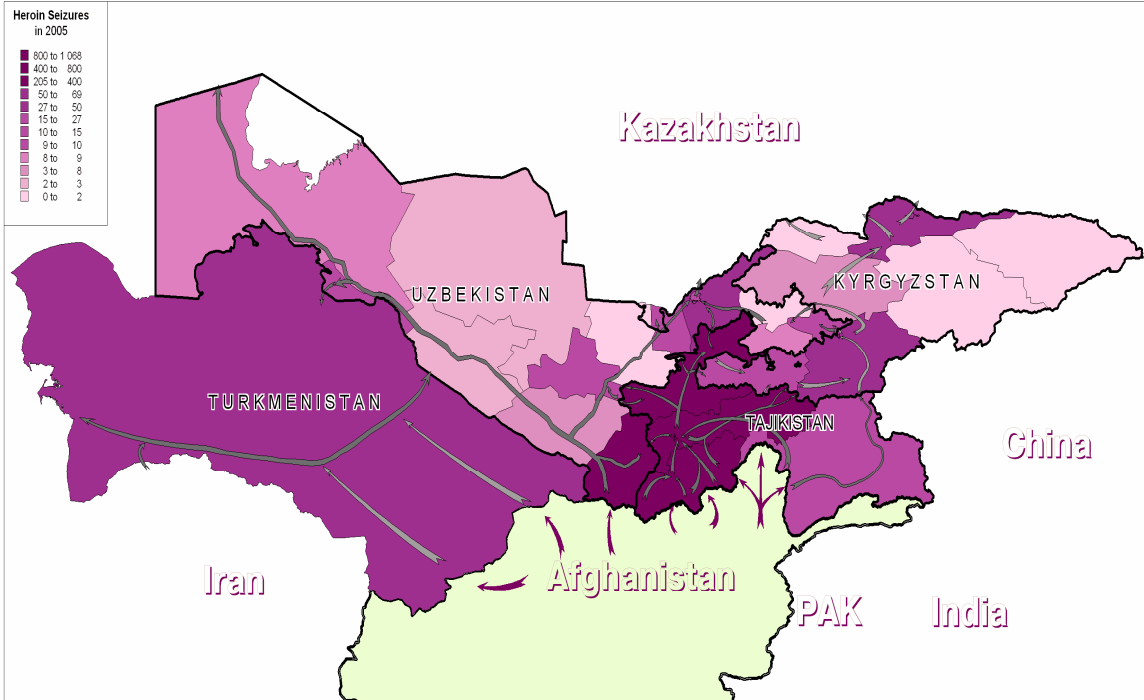
Source: Government of Afghanistan - National monitoring system implemented by UNODC
Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Mirroring the record crop in Afghanistan, the total volumes of opiates smuggled through the so called “Northern Route” through Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, soared with not less than 70% from 720mt (2003) to the current 1,230mt. Today, 21 % of all heroin smuggled from Afghanistan transits the “Northern Route” to the Russian Federation and Europe in 2006 with undetermined amounts also trafficked to Western China (Xinjiang Province). With excess production in Afghanistan, going far beyond the world demand for opiates, an increasing amount of drugs are absorbed locally along the routes.

Central Asia’s borders present a unique opportunity for intercepting trade, foremost illicit drug trafficking but equally secondary activities such as the trafficking of precursor chemicals and weapons. Currently, the risk of detection for smugglers is not high through most of the Central Asian-Afghan crossings. Furthermore, irregular crossings of the Afghan border are present various smuggling options.

Nevertheless, Opiates seizures in heroin equivalent in Central Asia have increased four times during the last decade and in 2006 amounted to 4.2 tons. It is estimated that about a quarter of the trafficked drugs stay in the transit countries and are used for domestic consumption, while the remainder is transported to the lucrative retail markets of Russia, Western Europe and, to some extent, the United States.

Figure II: Heroin Seizures in Central Asia



Strengthened border interdiction capacities in this area will bring additional benefits not just for drug control but also in regard to improved security against terrorism, smuggling of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), small arms, human beings, and various other illegal activities. Finally, Central Asia’s borders with China and the Islamic Republic of Iran are also briefly examined as similar initiatives will have to be introduced with these countries if the interdiction capacities in Central Asia are to be maximized.

Background

Structural factors contributing to the high level of opiates transiting the region are many. First the region’s geographical location placed in the corridor between Afghanistan and the major markets of Russia and Western Europe makes Central Asia a natural transit route. In addition, poverty and limited avenues for economic advancement leaves many vulnerable to criminal activity. Corruption, which many Central Asians feel are more widespread since the fall of the Soviet Union, hinders good governance and facilitates illegal activities including drug trafficking. Tensions caused by destabilizing elements of the society (paramilitary groups mobilized along ethnic or religious lines) also impacts in the Central Asia countries’ ability to cooperate on improving border security. Labour migration sets vast numbers of people in motion amid legal uncertainties and provides ready-made channels for the clandestine transport of illegal substances.

Figure III: Rail and Road links between Central Asia and Afghanistan



But the most immediate factor affecting the opiate transit in Central Asia – which can be tackled – is the capacity of Central Asian states’ law enforcement bodies to interdict trafficking. Law enforcement agencies in Central Asia are hampered by a widespread lack of resources, training and equipment.

Need for strengthened law enforcement capacity

Combating illicit drug trafficking requires well-organized systems of information collection, processing and analysis, as well as the exchange of the final information product among agencies involved at national and regional levels. Unfortunately, major deficiencies in intelligence collection and sharing continue to hamper effective policing of Central Asia’s border’s with Afghanistan including: a lack of understanding of the value of information in assisting effective law enforcement; a lack of planned, structured, systematic information gathering procedures within national law enforcement agencies, a lack of analytical capacity

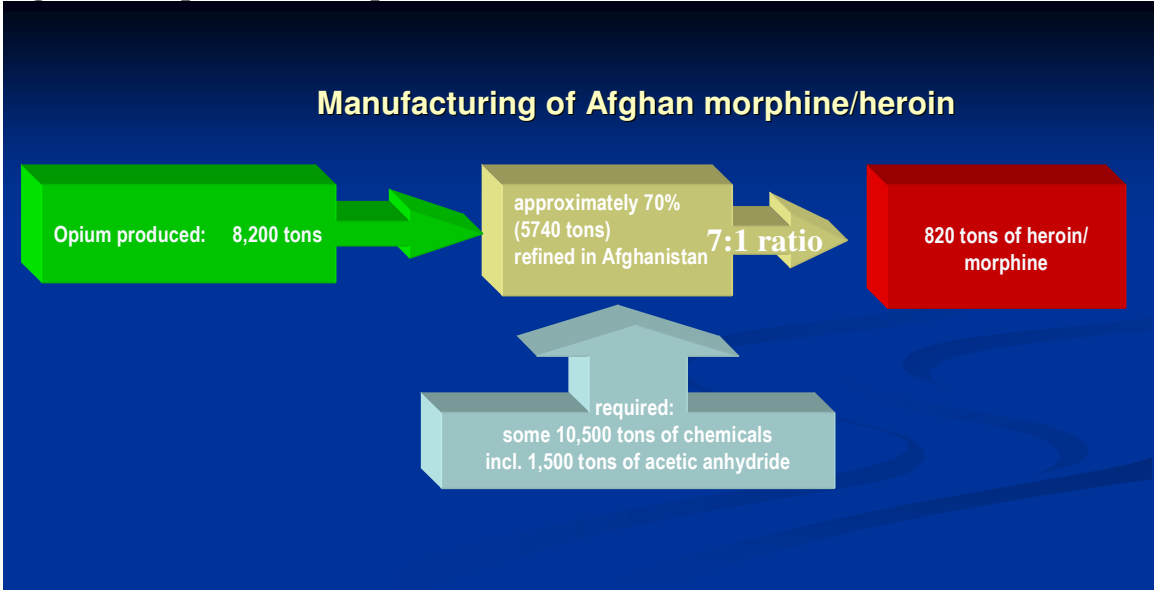
and skills; and a lack of inter-agency cooperation and consequent sharing of law enforcement related information. As a result, agency and government policy makers have difficulty designing strategies to counter drug trafficking because they lack accurate information about traffickers' activities, the individuals and organizations behind the trafficking, their modus operandi, routes, nationalities, and other essential data upon which to base a plan of action.

In addition to the lack of intelligence capacity, poorly trained and ill-equipped police and border personnel hamper effective interdiction along Central Asia's border with Afghanistan. The establishment of dedicated law enforcement groups, equipped with an adequate enforcement mandate, resources, and the capacity to move quickly along a long and rugged border, will be a prerequisite to effectively turning intelligence into successful interdictions.

Reverse flow of precursor chemicals

In addition to the trafficking of opiates out of Afghanistan, the trafficking of precursor chemicals into Afghanistan is similarly problematic. Over the last decade, heroin processing facilities sourcing Afghan opium have become more concentrated geographically. Traditionally, processing took place outside Afghanistan, notably in Pakistan, Iran and Turkey. In recent years, however, the trend has been for laboratories to move upstream along smuggling routes and Afghanistan itself is now a major centre not just for opium production but also its conversion.

Figure IV: Opium and the production of heroin



Recent surveys and analysis estimate that more than 70 percent of Afghan opium is subsequently converted into heroin within Afghanistan. At current production levels, this requires the availability of an estimated 1,500 tons of acetic anhydride and about 9,000 of other chemicals and precursors into the country every year. Afghanistan has neither the local production capacity nor local licit use for acetic anhydride. Seizures of the substance in the areas where heroin is actually manufactured has been minimal and no seizures of acetic anhydride have been reported in Central Asia in recent years in large part due to a lack of intelligence available on trafficking in the region as well as inadequate training and equipment of border guards.

Link with terrorist activities

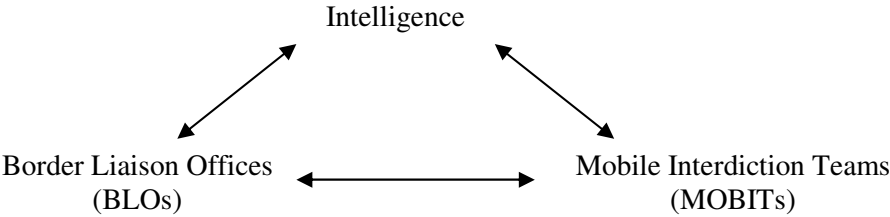
Worryingly, terrorist groups are often directly linked to criminal activities including drug trafficking and arms smuggling. Since the terrorist attacks in New York on September 11th, 2001, interdiction efforts aimed at sources of terrorist income have made financing terrorism more difficult. As a consequence, reliance on the drug trade or other criminal proceeds as a source of funding has increased. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), for example, is known to use drug profits to support its activities and recent fighting between the IMU and local forces in Waziristan, Pakistan attest to the IMU’s continuing vitality.

In summary, Central Asia is a key strategic region from a security perspective with Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan forming the frontline of this traffic with long, ill-protected borders with Afghanistan. With 93 percent of global opium production now concentrated in Afghanistan, Central Asia’s borders present a unique opportunity for effective interception. Securing Central Asia’s borders with Afghanistan requires improved intelligence gathering and analytical capacity to pinpoint the exact routes and methods used in drug trafficking and related criminal activity. Crucially, this intelligence must be coupled with the capacity to turn this into effective interdiction requiring well-equipped, dedicated police and border guards where possible using a joint multi-national approach.

Outline Action Plan

The strengthening of the fixed border crossing points between Afghanistan and Central Asia is currently supported by multiple donors notably European Commission and OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe)-funded programmes, as well as bilateral donors including France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, United Kingdom and the United States. The support provided by these donors has led to improvements in the management of individual checkpoints within the region and UNODC continues to support such activities through providing a neutral coordination mechanism for the work and programmes of other organizations in order to achieve full synergy and harmonization of border management, drug control and related assistance actions in Central Asia. The official and non-official groups and entities such as the Border Management in Central Asia (BOMCA) and the Foreign Anti-Narcotic Community (FANC) of Central Asia are widely consulted and used for the best possible coordination of activities, with a view to avoiding duplication.

Acknowledging the work undertaken by others while underlying the need for continued consultation and coordination (i.e. the Paris Pact but also within appropriate technical border settings), this outline action plan has been designed using a three pillar concept focusing on intelligence, border liaison offices and mobile interdiction teams. Each aspect compliments the other forming a continuum that creates increasingly effective interventions in counter-narcotic interdiction efforts.



The highlighted areas are also fields in which UNODC, through its Regional Office in Central Asia (ROCA), can offer a unique service as a neutral international mediator with a high level of technical expertise. The action plan also complements existing UNODC initiatives and merges ongoing or planned activities into a regional concept to be applied in conjunction with authorities in Afghanistan.

I. Intelligence analysis and sharing

There is a need to further develop and improve criminal intelligence collection and information management capacities, and establish mechanisms for exchange, receipt and dissemination of information between the drug control bodies operating at, or along, Central Asia's borders with Afghanistan. It is evident that Central Asian law enforcement agencies need increased assistance in communication, analysis and exchange of operational information on cross-border crime, as well as in organisation and the coordination of joint operations. Assistance provided in those areas should largely improve the efficient activity of and cooperation among competent authorities in the region in preventing and combating trans-border drug-trafficking and international drug related crime. Furthermore, intelligence derived from the analysis of information received needs to be disseminated to key units where this information can be translated into law enforcement interventions.

With particular reference to the analytical capabilities of border control agencies, both national centres and decentralised field offices will have to be developed. These offices will be introduced to intelligence-led policing tools such as strategic criminal intelligence analysis (risk assessments, profiling, etc), basic/advanced telephone analysis and informant handling. Furthermore, and of utmost importance for the Mobile Interdiction Teams, an encrypted program for protection of electronic information exchange needs to be identified and installed.

In addition to these standard analytical tools employed by law enforcement agencies elsewhere in the world, the use of satellite imagery will also be examined as a tool for identifying uncontrolled border crossings. Given the inhospitable terrain between Afghanistan and Central Asia, as well as the long stretches of uninhabited land between border crossing points, the identification of such border crossings will be essential to direct the work of Mobile Interdiction Teams (MOBITs – see below). Remote identification from a central office also ensures that possible protection of traffickers by corrupt local officials is circumvented.

The work of these offices will be monitored through a “Competence Center” (CC). The CC will be a mechanism to monitor and keep track of the analytical work and developments in target countries. The purpose of the CC is to monitor developments of analysis units, intelligence systems and daily analytical work, identify problems and unify common data classifications. In doing so, it will contribute to promoting a similar level of professional knowledge/capacity of the analytical units. The CC will be a way to promote “professional self-sustainability,” to enable analysts and data administrators to be less dependent on international data technical support.

Supporting Central Asian Regional Information Coordination Centre (CARICC) is also an important part of this strategy. It will be crucial to have the process of crime analysis and intelligence led policing methodologies fully implemented, accepted and used by the drug

law enforcement agencies at a field level in order to support CARICC and systems installed and utilised should be compatible with the regional centre.

The following course of action will be pursued:

- a. Developing the capacity of the respective national drug intelligence units of each country into a full national multi-agency criminal intelligence resource.
- b. Building up systems and/or strengthening the capacities of each Central Asian country in information/intelligence and data collection, collating, processing, analysis and exchange, at national and regional level.
- c. Creating and maintaining databases in drug trafficking and other related forms of organized crime.
- d. Establishing CARICC as the regional focal point for communication, analysis and exchange of operational information in 'real time' on cross-border crime, as well as a centre for the organization and coordination of joint operations.

II. Border Liaison Offices

UNODC's neutral role in the region and beyond offers a further unique opportunity for the organisation to act as an international mediator in promoting cross-border cooperation between Central Asian and Afghan officials through the establishment of Border Liaison Offices (BLOs) in identified high-risk areas, not only on the Afghan border but at key internal Central Asian border crossings and potentially at the Central Asian borders with China and Iran. Such BLOs are essential to increase the capabilities of border guards, customs and law enforcement bodies posted in these areas through promoting cross-border communication, cooperation and coordination for improved information sharing systems.

Each BLO should consist of representatives of the law enforcement bodies concerned and should maintain contacts with their counterparts across the border on a regular basis to solve problems that may arise and to address routine issues. These will include: discussions of strategies, drug trends and seizures, exchange of information and criminal intelligence, and establishing systems for operational cooperation, including joint operations.

The establishment of BLOs will require close coordination with the concerned authorities and as well as intervention at the highest level as in the Central Asian Republics border control falls mainly under the Ministry of State Security with border crossing points being considered as national strategic points with only limited access granted. A comprehensive plan of action will be pursued involving the following courses of action:

- a. Identifying the most important and high-risk border areas (checkpoints) to be strengthened and where the BLOs can be established through an analysis of seizures and other information/intelligence;
- b. Conducting National Commander Seminars for commanders, senior officers and team leaders of drug law enforcement agencies situated in the selected high risk border areas in order to raise awareness of the background and objectives of BLOs, as well as of the need to improve both national and cross-border cooperation;
- c. Identifying ways of improving existing cross-border cooperation and improving skills and knowledge in the areas of risk assessment, profiling and selection of people, vehicles and cargo;

- d. Conducting assessment missions to these areas and checkpoints in order to finalize a needs assessment for infrastructure support and other assistance, including provision of equipment, training and advisory services/expertise requirements.

III. Securing green Borders - Mobile Interdiction Teams

Traffickers are deploying more vigilant, effective and aggressive methods in their operations, and related organized crime and corruption are adding to the political-socio-economic problems in the region. This is enforced by the fact that the border between Central Asia and Afghanistan represents a porous portal for drug, precursor chemicals, currency and also human trafficking. Mobile law enforcement is currently recognized as one of the most efficient ways to combat organized and trans-national crime. In order to address this and also to improve national interdiction results and investigative capacity there is a need to establish border enforcement teams, where possible using a joint multi-agency approach. Such an activity is in line with Paris Pact recommendations to establish inter-agency mobile control capacities comprising of Drug Control Agency (where they exist) and National Security Agency officers, Ministry of Interior personnel, Border Guards and Customs. To be effective, such teams would ideally be used in an investigative capacity acting upon intelligence analysis of information from parent agencies and their successful implementation would result in increases in seizures of Afghan opium and heroin and interdiction of precursor chemical destined for Afghanistan. Furthermore, MOBITs will build the capacities of local law enforcement agencies to mount successful drugs and precursor chemical interdiction operations and will present an opportunity to monitor the judicial process of apprehended suspects.

The development of such teams will involve the following:

- a. Identifying the most important and high-risk border areas (green) to be strengthened and where MOBITs can be established 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. Developing 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 deployed with teams to identify and record priority risk areas; and
- f. Parent agencies provided with more extensive information database to conduct more detailed analysis and profiling

The established MOBITs will be able to operate in response to specific intelligence information and in such circumstances, are likely to operate in conjunction with other law enforcement agencies. The teams can also provide 24-hour road control (checkpoints) on a random basis both on the border perimeter roads and along roads leading off the border perimeter roads to the interior of their respective countries. The teams will be trained centrally and the syllabus will include: suspect 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 Afghan-Central Asian border, the teams will be taught basic defensive skills and methods of establishing and operating secure vehicle checkpoints.

Further thoughts: Central Asia's borders with China and Iran

While opiates from Afghanistan are primarily destined for lucrative markets in Russia and Europe, since 2005 there are evidences that Afghan produced opiates have been trafficked to China in increasing amounts. In 2005, seizures in China accounted for 15 percent of total global heroin seizures and 8 percent of global opiate seizures. Although the bulk of opiates destined for the Chinese market continue to originate in the 'Golden Triangle', primarily Myanmar, declining production in this region (from 44 percent of the global supply in 1996 to 5 percent of global supply in 2006) has forced buyers to look to opium originating in Afghanistan. In addition to the Sino-Afghan border (mere 76 km) borders of the Central Asian republics, Tajikistan in particular, should be monitored closely as the estimated 1.7 million opiate users in China (2004) suggest that these routes will be increasingly important drug corridor. While opiate demand from China on the whole is relatively stable, evidence suggests that drug use is on the rise in Western China. Furthermore, due to its large licit chemical industry and the subsequent diversion of those chemicals that contributes to drug production in Myanmar, China may also be a significant source of precursors trafficked into Afghanistan and here again the Northern route may be playing a key part.

In addition, Central Asia's geopolitical links with Iran presents another area requiring further monitoring. Recent "opening" of Turkmenistan may present concrete opportunity for strengthening interdiction with a focus to the Turkmen-Iranian border which is a key in view of its location on route to the major market in Europe. Therefore, the potential exists to extend the strategies envisaged in this document beyond the immediate border between Central Asia and Afghanistan to further border control activities to be piloted on Central Asia's border with China and Iran.

Summary of UNODC projects – Northern borders Afghanistan/Central Asia

