

- within the reach of small groups.
- The drugs appear to be sold and re-sold *en route*, with national groups controlling each link of the supply chain and very little Afghan presence in Russian markets.
- Arrest figures do not exclude the possibility that the drugs pass from Tajik hands to those of other groups and back to Tajik groups again, with Tajik nationals present in 26 per cent of major heroin seizures in Russia in 2004/2005.
- Heroin use rose steeply in Central Asia in the 1990s, indicating much of the drugs did not reach their highest value destination.

2.5 Tracking trafficking

The two examples discussed above highlight two extremes of a spectrum: on the one hand, the highly organized groups active in shipping multi-million dollar consignments of cocaine from Colombia to the USA; on the other, the many, uncoordinated players who, responding to market incentives, move heroin from Afghanistan to Russia. It appears that the two regions are vaguely converging, however – cocaine trafficking has become less organized since the days of the Medellin and Cali cartels, and the heroin trade, at least in the North of Afghanistan, is growing increasingly and is getting more organized. The potential for large organized crime groups emerging in Central Asia appears to be great, given the profits involved.

Similar analyses could be done for the movement of cocaine from Colombia to Europe, or the movement of heroin via the Balkan route, or any of a number of other trafficking patterns. The key limitation is the lack of standardised data. UNODC needs greater input from Member States to its individual seizures database, including detailed information on the nationalities of traffickers and the techniques employed. On this basis, important analysis of the world drug trafficking situation could be completed for the benefit of all.

Indeed, such an analysis need not be limited to drugs. Similar databases can be developed for trafficked persons, or firearms, or any other smuggled commodity to produce a standardised and quantified barometer of transnational criminal activity as a supplement to existing intelligence-based assessments. Issues for which there are currently no accurate global figures, such as human trafficking, are difficult to discuss without this basic data.

Determining the degree of organization is important in formulating policy. Despite the claim that there may be as many as 400 “baby cartels” operating in Colombia today, they are clearly not all of the same importance. If all were equal, each would be responsible for moving just 1.25 mt of cocaine every year, but individual seizures are made that are more than ten times that

amount. There are clearly some major players running the cocaine market, and their removal from the scene could represent a pivotal setback for cocaine trafficking. Further, the process of combining the produce of nearly 70,000 farm families distributed among 23 provinces is highly reliant on the organization skills and field presence of the insurgent and paramilitary groups. If this link in the supply chain were disrupted, it could also be devastating for the cocaine market.

On the other hand, it would be difficult to imagine a similar scenario working in the de-centralised markets of Afghanistan and Central Asia. Here, the consolidation process from farmers to traffickers works by a sophisticated market network of traders and bazaars. While the drugs appear to come under the control of a limited number of players at the top of the Afghan market, this concentration does not appear to be fully exploited today, and consolidated loads appear to be broken down again in order to accommodate the realities of disorganized trafficking. Even removing the top Afghan drug lords may not prevent the decentralised traders from carrying on the cross-border trade with their equally decentralised trafficker counterparts. Drugs percolate through Central Asia, changing hands several times, indicating the flow is not centrally planned. There is no “head” of Central Asian trafficking to decapitate. Rather, detailed information is required about the market mechanisms that siphon heroin from Afghanistan to Russia. The incentives and deterrents informing this market must be studied and interventions created on this basis.

Much more could be done with this data if it were more complete. As with any international undertaking of this scale, the international efforts to combat drug trafficking need to be monitored in an objective, standardised way if lessons are to be learned from successes and failures. The myriad individual interdiction experiences of law enforcement agencies around the world need to be pooled for centralised analysis. This can be teamed with data on issues like prices and drug usage, existing but under-developed data sources, to create powerful models for probing the world of illicit markets.

One example of transnational information sharing and a coordinated approach to drug issues is the efforts being undertaken under the aegis of the “Paris Pact”.⁶⁸ West and Central Asian and European countries affected by heroin trafficking from Afghanistan are now working together, with the support of UNODC, to coordinate their efforts to improve the quality of data and information, standardize data collection methods, and strengthen their respective analytical capacities in the field of counternarcotics. Efforts of this sort are essential to ensure a better understanding of drug trafficking flows, as well as to develop effective responses to transnational drug markets.