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Drug Trafficking Briefing

Production

Opiates

The Golden Triangle: The Golden Triangle is the collective name for the 950,000 square kilometre mountainous region on the borders of the Democratic Republic of Laos, Thailand and Myanmar. This extensive region is home to the second largest area of Opiate cultivation in the world. A combination of weak governance, corruption and conflict within Myanmar has allowed for the region to survive as a major area of drug cultivation for over 90 years.

The Golden Crescent: The Golden Crescent refers to the other major source of global Opiate production, a region which spans across Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. Afghanistan (and to a lesser extent, Pakistan) produce the opiates, while Iran serves as a consumer and the beginning of the distribution network to Russia and Western Europe. Annually the Golden Crescent produces around 8,000 tonnes of Opiates, and supplies over 9.5 million drug users worldwide.

Cocaine

Cocaine production occurs primarily in South America, with Columbia serving as the focal point for global production. Peru and Bolivia also contribute substantially to the production of Cocaine, and across the Andean region it is estimated that there is capacity for over 600 tonnes of yearly production.

Methamphetamines

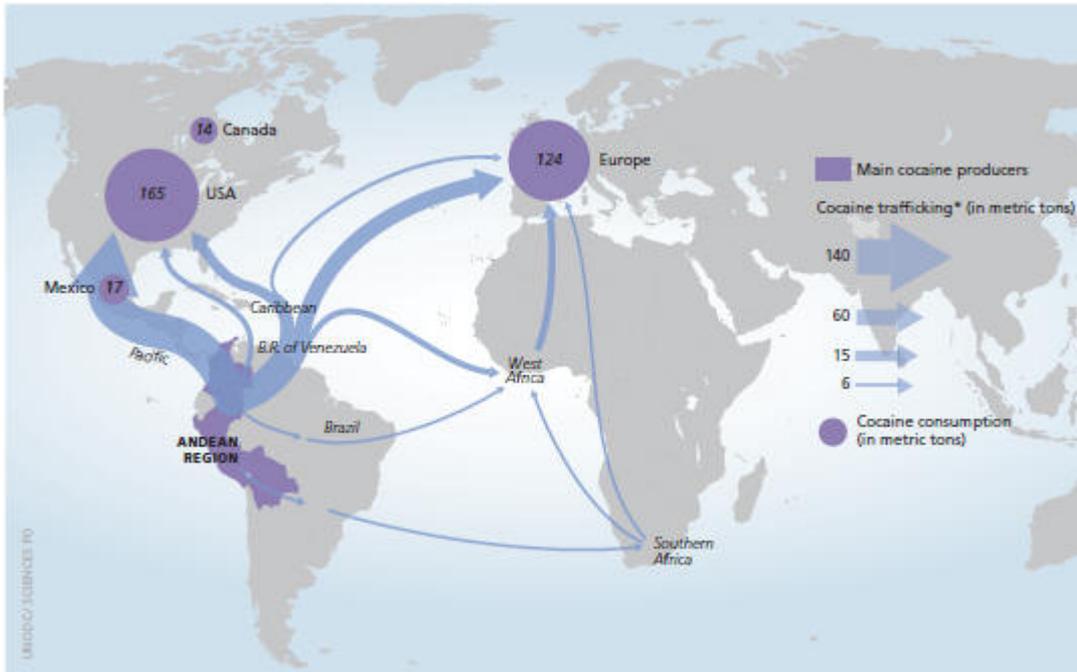
As Methamphetamines do not require large areas for cultivation, and can be produced out of commercially available medicines, the production of methamphetamines is much more globally distributed than cocaine or opiates. Nevertheless in recent years the scale of production has shifted upwards, with methamphetamines being increasingly mass produced, especially in Mexico and throughout Asia.

Distribution

The Americas

The cocaine produced in Peru, Bolivia and Columbia is smuggled northwards through El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico toward the large markets of Canada and the United States. In 2005 Mexico began a large-scale war on drug cartels in an effort to eliminate their influence over the country, and to return the rule of law. This war on organised crime has led to over 10,000 murders per year, both in gang wars, and targeted executions from drug cartels against police officers and government officials.

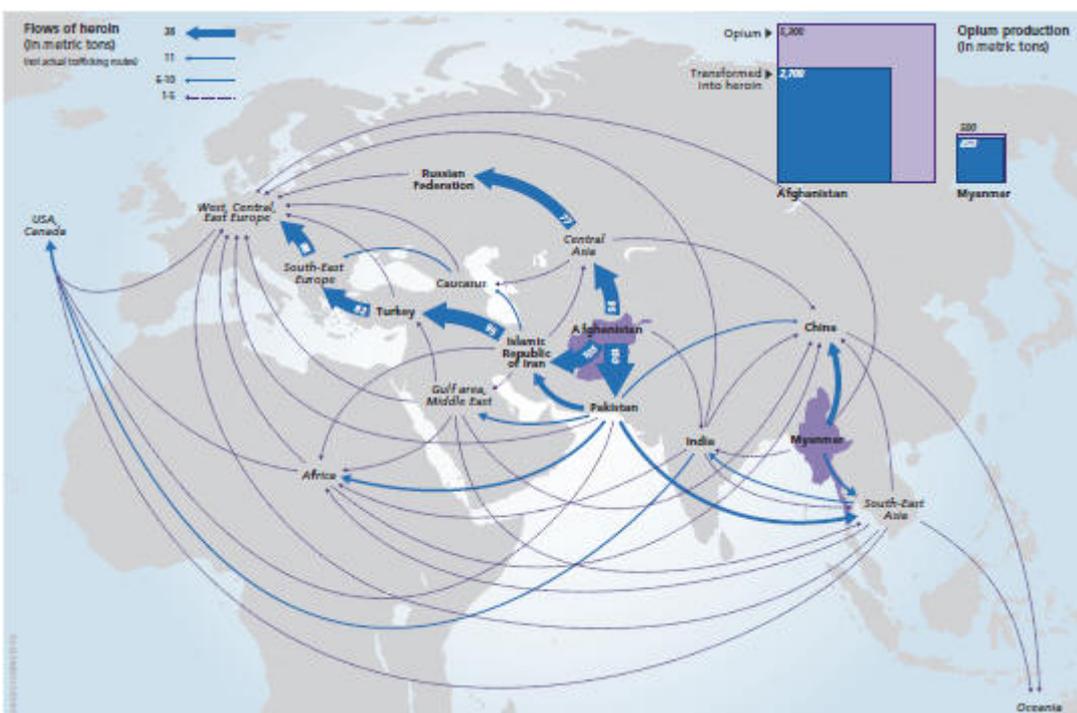
Map of Global Cocaine Trade



Central Asia

Central Asia serves as the main transit route for opiates produced in the Golden Crescent to be sold in Russia. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are all part of this distribution network. Trafficking through this region is a recent phenomena, only taking form after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and has been influenced by the emergence of new states with large borders to police. In particular the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan is a major route for narcotics: at over 1,000 km in length, many smugglers are able to cross the Amu Darya river undetected.

Map of Asian, European and African Opiates Trade



The Balkans

Opiates from the Golden Crescent toward Europe mostly pass through the Balkan route, which starts on the relatively porous Iran-Afghanistan border, and continues through Turkey and into the various Balkan states of South Eastern Europe. A recently emerging alternative skips Turkey and instead goes through the Caucuses and the Black Sea and across to Bulgaria. This route acts as the major path for heroin and other such opiates into the lucrative European market.

Maritime and Air Routes

The air and maritime routes used differ depending on the patterns of production and the destination of the narcotics, however there are certain major paths that narcotics trafficking tends toward. Opiates out of the Golden Crescent are trafficked south through Pakistan, and from there are taken either by individual smugglers, cargo planes or ships to North America and other major consuming nations. Cocaine smuggling out of South America tends to go by maritime routes through the Caribbean and from there is exported to Western Europe, while opiates from the Golden Crescent tend to enter the US through either Hawaii or California.

Consumption

It is estimated by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime that between 155 and 250 million people worldwide consume illicit drugs at least once a year. While this population is distributed across the globe, the largest markets for Cocaine and Opiates are Russia, Western Europe and North America. These large markets away from the main drug producing regions of the world create a strong incentive for the creation of complex transnational trafficking and distribution networks.

The health effects of drug consumption are extremely negative and differ by narcotic. Cocaine use exposes the user to the risk of death by overdose, and increases the chances of developing a mental illness. The drug is highly addictive and long term use can lead to heart attacks, strokes, respiratory failure and high blood pressure resulting in haemorrhaging. Heroin can lead to infection of blood vessels, chronic pneumonia, kidney disease, seizures and overdose. Use of methamphetamines is also highly addictive, and leads to intense psychotic behaviour.