

Scenario 162

DRUGS & WEAPONS IN KARACHI

TALIBAN IN DRUG TRADE [?]:

Afghanistan's most population used to assume that they cultivate poppy only for export. Today ... at least 15pc of the drugs produced in Afghanistan are consumed by them.

It used to be widely alleged by the western media that Afghan Taliban commanders generally lived in Pashtunabad village near Quetta in Pakistani province Balochistan, after being kicked out of Afghanistan in September 2001. In later years, Taliban commanders moved out of Pashtunabad — or Sohrab Goth in Karachi and started acquiring well built houses in Quetta city neighbourhoods like Kuchlak and posh localities of Karachi like Clifton.

Taliban members started building and buying flashy mansions; once, the stereotype Taliban leaders was mostly seen with an old, second-hand, beaten-up Toyota Corolla; then the younger lot, by contrast, preferred to drive new Toyota Land Cruisers or other luxury cars. The source of their sudden influx of wealth was no secret in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Helmand is Afghanistan's largest opium producing province; according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 154,000 hectares of land had opium poppies planted in year 2012. Ahmad Woror, the Director Narcotics Control in Helmand province of Afghanistan, once told the American magazine:

"The Taliban are more involved than ever in systematically promoting, financing, organizing, and protecting the drug trade. Drugs are ultimately providing the money, food, weapons, and suicide bombers to the insurgency and the good life to Taliban leaders in Quetta, Karachi, and across Afghanistan."

['Newsweek' dated 12th June 2013 is referred]

The drug trade, of course, has been an important part of Afghanistan's economy for a long time; local Taliban leaders have long benefited as well. But then the Taliban's central leadership decided to jump in that trade. Soon the drug

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trafficking became focal point and pervasive part of the Taliban mission raising many alarming questions – mainly that if Afghanistan appeared becoming the world's first open drug-market.

The western press alleged that Mulla Akhtar Mansoor and Mullah Dadullah Akhund, the known Taliban commanders, were already thriving drug dealers back in 1994, just when the Taliban movement was being launched. However, Mullah Omar—who led the Taliban and ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001 had outlawed opium production, trafficking selling or storing as being *haram*, and against Islamic injunctions.

But the poppy cultivation and thus the drug trafficking in Helmand and Kandahar continued very discreetly. According to a 2009 UNODC report on opium production, the 10% Ushr Tax used to be netted \$22 million to \$44 million a year; and the Taliban earned another \$70 million by providing protection to drug-laden convoys travelling through their territory.

Time passed quickly. During 2011-13, the Taliban's central leadership played a much more pivotal role in the Afghan narcotics industry; heroin and opium trade was encouraged. The farmers were prompted to plant poppies, lending them seed money, buying the crop of sticky opium paste from their fields, refining it into exportable opium and heroin, and finally transporting it to Pakistan and Iran.

In the past the Taliban had been only going after the 10% Ushr Tax and protection money, but then they started running the business from top to bottom. They systematically divided the areas they controlled into drug zones and assigned them to their powerful and favoured local commanders. In June 2013, they were earning \$200 million plus annually from the drug trade – and that was from Helmand areas only.

Why the shift? The 'Newsweek' cited above explains that:

"...for years, the Taliban relied partly on donations from sympathetic citizens in the Gulf states to fund their military operations.

Recently a lot of that Gulf money has dried up, as rich residents have turned their attention to other Sunni Islamic causes such as Palestine, Egypt, and Syria. This may have spurred the Taliban to look for other sources of funding."

Most of the country's opium was being produced in largely the Taliban-controlled areas of the south and southwest [98%] of Afghanistan. Taliban's insur-

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gency plan was going weaker while the drug money had helped to fund the movement at the local level for years. The leadership realized that since it couldn't stop it, then why not get involved and seize control of the trade in a systematic and well organized way.

In 2010, when Mullah Omar's deputy and brother-in-law was arrested by Pakistani forces in Karachi, his two top deputies, Mulla Akhtar Mansoor and Abdul Qayyum Zakir, planned vying for power; both come from historically competing southern tribes—the Ishaqzai and Alizai, respectively. Both tribes belonged to the most fertile opium-producing areas of Helmand and Kandahar provinces as well as along the most lucrative drug-smuggling routes.

During the planting season, the Taliban commanders often provide seeds, fertilizers, and advance payments and, of course, promise of protection. Despite a big push, Afghan government eradication efforts have largely been ineffective, with just 6pc of some 380,000 acres of poppies planted during 2013 could be destroyed; the *UNODC report* is referred.

The UNODC estimated that till 2010 there were about 500 heroin laboratories [*for conversion of opium into heroin*] operating in the country, and there were tens more then. Most of the labs were in the remote, no-go, Taliban-controlled areas of Nowzad and Baghran districts in northern Helmand province. Neither Afghan government nor US forces could access those areas. Only US Special Operations Forces could get there but drug control was not their priority nor was it included in their agenda.

The drug cartels do not tolerate competition thus most small smugglers quit the business when Taliban leadership jumped in. Bigger traffickers were tolerated when they cooperated with Taliban on their terms. Taliban also joined hands with Northern Alliance in the trade though having blood-tensions since decades.

Leading members of the Northern Alliance had long produced opium and refined heroin in northern provinces like Badakhshan - exporting both products north through Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan and then on to Russia and Europe. Later, in association with the Taliban, they were able to ship their harvest through Taliban-controlled areas in the south and into Iran and Pakistan; India became their largest buyer and stockist.

The Northern Alliance warlords, government officials, the police, and the Taliban ultimately reached an unwritten understanding that they were all part of one cooperative drug chain. Before the drugs reached Taliban areas, the shipments used to be escorted from the north by the warlords, Karzai government officials, and Afghan police. All shared the profits when Taliban couriers delivered the northern shipments to buyers across the borders in Iran, India and Pakistan.

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[The highest-quality heroin comes from the northern Afghanistan and is normally exported by Afghan forces. Although the north produces only a fraction of the drugs that come from the south, the opium is of better quality because of the cooler climate and more abundant rains.]

During 2010-13, given the newfound drug wealth in hand, the Quetta Shura [*Taliban's governing body*] decided to set up a monitoring mechanism to ensure that the revenues are shared from top to bottom. As a result, the Shura established an Economic Commission [EC] during ending 2012 to keep and scrutinize the whole income. Then 70pc of the drug profits were earmarked for the EC to spend on food, weapons, explosives, and medical care for the insurgency, while 30pc were supposed to go directly to the field fighters wherever they were sent.

For field-fighter Taliban, it was not a fair split, as the frontline guerrillas were doing most of the work, taking the biggest risks, and bearing the brunt of casualties and suffering. Local commanders complained that they were being ripped off most of their due share. Some held that:

"...top leaders collect and pocket about 80pc of the drug revenues from five southern provinces. This is holy money for the jihad, so no one should take more than their fair share."

Some Taliban supporters, following the ultra-orthodox Islam, expressed doubts about their leadership's heavy involvement in narcotics. Pro-Taliban cleric Maulvi Jan Mohammad Haqqani once told the western media that:

"It is a great pity the Taliban are dealing with drugs that are expressly prohibited in Islam. The Taliban should not be involved in drugs, as it is hurting the positive image we are building."

But the others held the opinion that:

"Fighting the enemy with drug and kidnapping money is the same as fighting with infidel American money."

Ignore the both - these were lonely voices; let us move ahead.

During 2013-14; in Afghanistan the Taliban increasingly went focused on the drug trade than on fighting the enemy. Their definition of *jihad* was perhaps changed in new circumstances. The Taliban fighters in the field were found using all of their energy protecting poppy fields, their drug interests, and convoys from government forces. During these years, more than ever the Taliban were

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constantly fighting poppy-eradication teams; spending most of their time supervising and protecting their drug business.

During 2015; the Taliban in Afghanistan staged resurgence, capturing and briefly holding the northern *city of Kunduz*. It was the first time the group had held a major urban centre since the withdrawal of most American forces in 2014.

[Why Kunduz was such a prized target for the Taliban. It's about drugs and the Taliban kept an overwhelming dependence on drug trafficking as a source of funds.]

The above views were confirmed later by Ed Follis, the US Drug Enforcement Agency's Attaché in Afghanistan, in his interview on 'PRI's The World Radio' dated 15th October 2015:

"[Kunduz] is one of the principle export areas in the north — it's a staging locale for the vast majority of heroin products that are trans-shipped to Russia. That's [the trade route] they need. And this has recurred with other narco-terrorist organisations around the globe.

The Afghan Taliban are dependent on opiate trafficking for about 95pc of its income. And without that source of funds they would be highly localised, and they would revert back to their original organised crime portfolio: human trafficking, arms trafficking, kidnapping for hire and so on."

Ed Follis also argued that it all depended upon the changing priorities of the US-led coalition. *The shift from the original goal of pursuing Al Qaeda towards a goal of creating democracy in Afghanistan was poorly planned.* Nation building required much more than removing the Taliban. Follis said:

"The re-construction of Afghanistan started not just after the Taliban, but after 30 years of the absence of any government. It was pure anarchy or occupation for all of that time."

Mainstream western media started worrying that the Taliban were brewing profits from the drug trade since 2010. No; it has been the practice woven in the Afghan social fabric since decades. Thom Shanker's opinion had appeared in *The New York Times*, far back on 23rd December 2008:

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"United Nations figures show that Afghan insurgents [Taliban] reap at least \$100 million a year from the drug trade, although some estimates put the figure at five times as much".

See the American magazine 'Foreign Policy' dated 1st April 2011:

"Yet, the Taliban receive only a small portion of the benefits generated by the drug trade. Indeed, they take 2 to 12 percent of a \$4 billion industry; farmers, traffickers, smugglers, and corrupt officials collectively earn much more."

One could also ponder upon the suggestion ['the guardian' dated 25th June 2014 is referred] forwarded by William Patey, the British ambassador to Afghanistan from 2010 to 2012:

"...if we cannot deal effectively with supply, then the only alternative would seem to be to try to limit the demand for illicit drugs by making a supply of them available from a legally regulated market".

Why to blame only the Taliban for the drug trade? See the state of affairs after election of the new President Ashraf Ghani in 2014. Referring to *Mathilde Simon's* essay which appeared in 'Foreign Policy Journal' of America on 27th November 2015, is worth consideration.

"...the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs writes: there are credible allegations that many central, provincial, and district level government officials directly engage in and benefit from the drug trade.

Rampant corruption is a main obstacle in fighting against illicit drugs and implementing programs."

Another aspect: Canadian celebrity writer Michel Chossudovsky's research script [*First published in 2005, updated in January 2015*], titled as:

The Spoils of War: Afghanistan's Multibillion Dollar Heroin Trade

[Washington's Hidden Agenda: Restore the Drug Trade]

available at www.globalresearch.ca analysed the real facts involved.

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"In 2014 the Afghan opium cultivation has once again hit a record high, according to the UNODC's 2014 Afghan Opium Survey.

In the course of the last four years, there has been a surge in Afghan opium production. The Vienna based UN Office reveals that poppy cultivation in 2012 extended over an area of more than 154,000 hectares, an increase of 18% area over of 2011.

A UNODC spokesperson confirmed in 2013 that opium production is heading towards record levels."

According to the 2012 Afghanistan Opium Survey released in November 2012 by the UNODC, the opium production for an area of cultivation of 154,000 hectares was in excess of 6000 tons.

Before 2010, a global conversion rate of about 10 kg of opium to 1 kg of heroin was used to estimate world heroin production. Since 2011, UNODC estimates that a large proportion of the Afghan opium harvest is not processed into heroin or morphine but remains available on the drug market as opium. Chossudovsky finally concluded that:

"...revenues derived from global trade in heroin constitute a multi-billion dollar bonanza for financial institutions and organized crime.

The article first published in May 2005 provides a background on the history of the Afghan opium trade which continues to this date to be protected by US - NATO occupation forces on behalf of powerful financial interests."

Opium cultivation in Afghanistan went upwards manifold in recent years; produced around 90pc of the heroin consumed worldwide. According to the United Nations, *in 2014, poppy cultivation reached its highest level since the 1930s and the trend would continue in the coming years.*

Many programs aiming at eradicating opium cultivation and focusing on providing alternatives to farmers have badly failed due to the high level of corruption permeated in the Afghan system.

As the drug trade flourished with the time in Afghanistan, farmers cultivating opium were taken into a vicious cycle affecting all parts of Afghan society, politics and economy. Most western literature regarding the drug trade in Afghanistan stated that stopping the cultivation of opium would defuse the conflict by reducing the Taliban's funding.

Yet, this statement was only partly true.

DRUG BUSINESS IN KARACHI:

On 24th November 2012; the Deputy Superintendent of Police in a district of Karachi, Zameer Abbasi, was out making the rounds during night hours. He received a cell-call about a small explosion at a nearby building. When he arrived at the scene, smoke was pouring from a third-floor apartment window.

DSP Abbasi rushed to the flat. Inside, red chemical had been sprayed across the white walls. It was a laboratory: conical flasks connected by rubber tubing, sacks and boxes labelled with the names of chemicals, a small centrifuge were there. A silvery blue powder was spilled across the bathroom floor, and blood-red footprints crisscrossed the living room. *"It looked like some kind of chemical reaction had happened,"* he couldn't guess it exactly.

From 2000 to 2010, Karachi's population grew more than 80pc. Over the past decade, millions of Pakistanis had fled the fighting and terrorism in Pakistan's northwest to settle in Karachi. But the flood of migrants in search of jobs and opportunity had also brought countless menace, hazards and nuisance to Karachi.

Gangs tied to political parties have long operated in the poorer parts of the city, running extortion rings and land-grab schemes and it was in the knowledge of all. Karachi's glamour and business both had lost.

Then Pakistani Taliban militants started gaining foothold in the mega-city, carving out territory in neighbourhoods like Manghopir and running criminal and smuggling rackets. Soon they expanded their activity like robbing banks, kidnapping and extortion; also administered their norms of justice.

From restless Balochistan province, a war economy driven by a decade of conflict in Afghanistan had opened Karachi and its ports to narcotics and weapons smuggling. Pitched fire-fights that went on for days between gangs, or between gangs and the police, were not uncommon for the media and public but the ruling joint regime of the PPP, ANP and MQM kept on smiling at such situations.

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Karachi had become the world's most dangerous mega-city, with a homicide rate of 12.3 per 100,000 residents. The city had 1,723 reported murders in 2011— and more than 2,000 in 2012. Then added to that explosive situation were drug gangs often with links to Afghanistan and some linked to Iran also. They brought with them a new commodity that was increasingly making its way from Karachi's ports to the wider world – methamphetamine, a lethal and fatal chemical used in heroin formation.

Taimur Khan wrote in 'Foreign Policy' of 3rd September 2013:

"Opiates had always been Karachi's drug of choice. With 90pc of the world's heroin production from across Afghanistan, Pakistani drug barons have reaped the benefits of proximity.

Despite a ban on opium production in 1955, Iran saw heroin resurgence in subsequent decades, becoming a major regional production centre.

But after the mullahs came to power in 1979, the drug trade shifted east. Heroin was produced en masse in Afghanistan and Pakistan to fund the mujahideen fighting the Soviets."

The drugs primarily travelled to the world's market through Karachi port and on to Europe.

But as the global appetite for heroin declined, producers and smugglers turned to methamphetamine, demand for which was soaring in nearby East Asia. Iran emerged as the biggest producer of methamphetamine in the region, but Pakistan appeared to be the natural transit route to eastern markets like Malaysia and Australia; their links were also showing up in places in all continents around.

[The production of methamphetamine is a complex and combustible process, requiring proper laboratory and various chemical ingredients — the most notable is ephedrine or its close cousin, pseudo-ephedrine. These precursors have legitimate uses in cough, cold, and allergy medications, acting as a decongestant.]

In April 2011, Karachi port officials discovered 540 pounds of ephedrine hidden in packets of spice mix bound for Australia. That same year, officials in Tehran reported the seizure of 1,170 pounds of ephedrine coming from Pakistan. In June 2012, a group of men with more than 1,750 pounds of

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methamphetamine was stopped at Karachi's airport; those seizures were just the tip of an iceberg.

Pakistan, like most countries, notifies INCB its need for ephedrine as annual legitimate requirements. In 2007, Pakistan reported a legitimate requirement of 11 tons of pseudo-ephedrine to the INCB. In 2010, it reported 53 tons — nearly three times the amount that most countries produce, making Pakistan the world's fourth largest consumer of pseudo-ephedrine. That means, the drug trade had corrupted the highest hierarchy in the government, too.

In September 2012, the then PM Yousuf Raza Gilani's son, Ali Musa, himself an MNA, was arrested for increase in ephedrine quotas for two pharmaceutical companies. One of these firms, Berlex Lab International, which was granted a license to procure some 14,300 pounds of ephedrine, claimed it sold its tablets to a company called Can Pharmaceutical.

However, an APP report had cited:

"Investigators discovered the address for the company was a residential house in Multan, and nobody answered the door. The owner of the company didn't answer his phone."

{One could go through Scenario 103, titled as 2MNAs + Federal Minister In Court in the book 'The Living History of Pakistan' Vol-I: pp 1677-90 [2015] GHP Surrey UK – the famous EPHEDRINE CASE to find out the missing lots.}

In year 2010, Pakistani officials reported four seizures of smuggled ephedrine, totalling 585 pounds in Balochistan, as well as more than 14 tons of diverted cold medicine. Matt Nice, of the INCB's Secretariat in Vienna, said that those seizures of ephedrine originating in Pakistan suggested that a significant portion of legitimate cold medicine got diverted to the black market. INCB noted that:

"If the declared annual requirement is so high that 500 kilograms can go missing in Pakistan, then that means you have something that's probably already been infiltrated."

Citing the investigation of the said Gilani Case, the scam worked like this:

- You register yourself as a pharmaceutical company.
- Then you register yourself for a chemical like ephedrine.

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- Then you get a quota for ephedrine on an export order.
- Then you say, 'Can I have this converted to local consumption because my export order has fallen through?'
- Then you falsify your distribution documents AND have it smuggled anywhere on X 10,000 times more profit.

At all steps along this path, it's mandatory to bribe the concerned officials and bureaucrats to get documents signed and deflect attention.

Corruption had a long and disgusting history in Pakistan, but drugs added an extra layer of societal corrosion. On paper, evidence suggested that the ephedrine trade was already having a deleterious impact on a country that didn't need any more problems. Drug use, particularly of opiates and cannabis, was already high in Pakistan, with 1 percent of the population using heroin and 4.1 million people to be drug-dependent.

Just as the transport of massive amounts of heroin through Pakistan inevitably created a local market too, and millions of addicts, the new focus on methamphetamine has led to a lucrative trade on Karachi's streets.

'Crystal' is the code name of drugs known in whole Karachi; originated from Lyari; PPP's stronghold since Z A Bhutto's 1970s but crime-ridden and a dense network of slums housing some one million people. It's basically a no-go zone for law enforcement. Police always [till 2015 at least] needed to ask permission or negotiate entrance with the district's crime boss: *Uzair Jan Baloch*, head of the [later banned] People's Aman Committee, a gang cum political party cum charitable organization.

When police attempted an operation in Lyari in April 2012, Baloch's men held them at bay for days under a hail of bullets until the police retreated. In late July the same year, an elite police ranger unit raided Baloch's mansion; he had disappeared.

In Manghopir, a violent, impoverished slum in Karachi's north, the drug users could be easily spotted. In 2013, crystal's price was Rs:500-800 per gram; or \$5 to \$8/gm - more expensive than heroin. Most of the young men tweaking in the streets were foot soldiers for Baloch's gangsters:

"The [Lyari] gangsters hire the kids, get them addicted to crystal, and then make them do crimes when they are high so they have no fear. Then they pay them with more crystal."

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'GEO News TV' of Pakistan told on 20th September 2013 that the police and Rangers continued the targeted search operation in different areas of the metropolis, Karachi, as many as 159 accused were arrested while arms and drugs were also recovered. According to Sindh Rangers' spokesman, Rangers conducted raids at 13 different places then to apprehended more the said criminals.

Areas where the Rangers conducted raids included Federal B Area, Rangarpara, Ali Barohi Goth, Lines Area, Disco Bakery, Zia Colony, Haryana Colony, Godra, Musa Colony, Quaidabad, Tariq bin Zyad Society, Zia-ul-Haq Colony and North Nazimabad.

On the other hand, West Zone police arrested 58 culprits during 24 hours out of which 26 were the absconders and proclaimed offenders required by the Karachi police in earlier cases [*might be they were let loose intentionally by some rogue policemen just for few bugs*]. Drugs and weapons were also seized from their possession, too.

East Zone police also conducted raids and apprehended 55 accused including three extortionists, seven proclaimed offenders, 22 fugitives and three suspects during the earlier day. Arms, motorcycle, liquor, drugs and stolen electric wires were recovered from their possession.

South Zone police, during the last 24 hours, arrested 21 persons including 11 fugitives while ammunition, drugs and liquor were also seized from their possession; no details about weapons were released.

Till ending 2013, about 1.2 million drug addicts, the majority of whom were heroin users, were living a miserable way in Karachi; police was helpless to combat drugs on the streets. ANF's more than 1,500 troops held staggering quantities of hash and heroin: 9,863 pounds of hash apprehended on 1st May 2013 in Killa Abdullah, 613 pounds of heroin on 26th April in Karachi. And on 26th July the ANF seized some 117 pounds of ephedrine, 95 pounds of ephedrine mixed with vanilla powder, and, bizarrely, 1,272 bottles of ephedrine mixed with jam.

After indictment of PM Gilani's son and PML[N]'s Hanif Abbasi in ephedrine cases, the genuine pharmaceutical companies in Karachi went afraid to apply for new quotas. But nothing was going to happen to the culprits – as they had strong political backing, the labs and traffickers were their own teams, laws of evidence were 150 years old and courts were in their pockets. The most insiders held:

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"...there is such easy money to be made [by diverting ephedrine] that it will remain politician's game - it's like bootlegging."

One year before Ali Musa Gilani was charged in Islamabad, another young Pakistani man was arrested for his alleged role in selling ephedrine on the global black market. Shiraz Malik, then 34, was taken into custody in 2012 after landing at Prague's airport on a flight from Dubai. He was running on-line Shama Medical Store in Karachi's *Hijrat Colony* and had shipped numerous consignments of opium and ephedrine to Mexico. Under 'company information' the site reads:

"...we are abal to provide u any kind of medicion and any kind of row material all our tha world, and we also doing drop shipping all or tha world."

[One could see the spellings and grammar in the phrase]

Shama Medical Store and Shama Hospital's 4-storeyed building is still there off 56th Street of *Hijrat Colony* Karachi but it looks like abandoned since long – however, the business is still active from that address; local police officially denied having heard of that address.

There could be hundreds of such like dens in Karachi.

THE DUBIOUS WEAPONRY TRADE:

Weapons reach traders and public in Karachi mostly by sea and road both. In northern Afghanistan, the weaponry comes as Iranian and Russian assistance for the Northern coalition and from there through the Taliban it travels downwards. Saudi Arabia finances much of the effort for the Taliban side, while a tax revenue, *Usher and Zakat*, from the production and sale of drugs also contribute heavily to Taliban coffers, an amount estimated at \$200 million from this alone. In addition, Taliban get tax from transporters, on heroin production, and border administration etc.

Much of the Taliban funds, tax collections and contributions are banked in Pakistan. Much of the hard weaponry snatched, under the table buying or stolen by Afghan Taliban, used to be frequently shifted across the border from Afghanistan and sold in Karachi.

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It is estimated that before departure from Afghanistan in ending 2014, around \$6-8 billion worth of weaponry was left and dumped by the US and NATO forces in various parts of the country. Most of its part was sold on its way to Karachi and '*purposefully declared looted or stolen*' on 2000 km long highway. Certain Pakistani factions of Taliban got weapons from the international black market to fight with Shiites and Rangers in Karachi often funded from a criminalised economy.

Weapons in Karachi were not just for fighting the gang wars in or around Lyari or Golimaar or Sohrab Goth but were also required by and for the drug mafia who used to move like small armies, with anti aircraft guns often kept in their vehicles openly. This drug mafia had largely been co-opted by the Pakistani Taliban, war-lords of Sohrab Goth and Lyari in Karachi in return for paying substantial amounts to the "kitty", with the Taliban's Quetta Shura allegedly dominating.

Another route that had steadily grown with time was the Central Asian route both in terms of narcotics as well as weapons. The level of cooperation between the drug and arms traffickers was worth study here, as also the fact that there were very few ethnic barriers in the trade.

[In January 2000, an attack on Batken in Kyrgyzstan, by trained 'fundamentalists', later known as Taliban, was launched by Namagani of Uzbekistan.

It was to dominate the main land route of narcotics into Osh and from there onwards to China , Russia and Europe.]

It is worth noting that the price for an AK-47 in Russia was around \$400-1000 till 2011 leading to conclusion that trade in weapons has been taking place in both directions - re-cycling of weapons with new material being pushed in for Karachiites and being sold off individually or in lots at some point in time to the criminal gangs. The rise of Central Asian mafias of drugs and weaponry was indeed possible through the vitality of the 'Afghan links' well beyond its borders.

Some trade of drugs and weaponry continued for years through Pak-Afghan borders under the Taliban's control. Weapons were endlessly being bought, traded or gifted to the various sister concerns of religious outfits and *pashtuns* in Karachi and Quetta to launch vast attacks on Shiite community on suitable occasions.

The large sized and most well equipped Afghan Taliban camps were along the Pak-Afghan border, like Khost, Kandahar and Helmond, to make out

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mujahideen from the Egyptian, Arabs, Sudanese and Punjabis lots; also termed as the staging camps for Al Queda in the American literature. The whole show was being financed by Usama Bin Laden - the largest group was '*Harkat ul Ansar*'.

Pakistan's support to *mujahideen* during Gen Ziaul Haq regime [1977-88] was miss-used by certain shrewd local Afghan leadership. As the operation against Russians gathered force, the legitimacy to the cause was provided by certain groups in the name of religion [Islam] – while the main beneficiary was America and it remains so till today.

Thus the operation was not only financed by Saudi, Iranian and American currencies, but also by narcotics trafficking, especially in heroin, and weaponry trafficking; new, used and redundant.

Since long the weapons and drugs are shipped and traded in Karachi by a variety of actors. Estimates vary, but most agree that up to 80pc of the weaponry businesses were being controlled by certain gangs which were connected with major stake-holder political parties in the city. The weaponry kept on moving into the cities around as well as into the hands of diverse ethnic and sectarian groups that were armed by the so-called democratic political and politico-religious parties - having formed a coalition against the Pak-Army and Rangers.

The fact remains that personal profit of many actors in that illegal trade was significant. Much of the narco-money obviously was the property of political actors whose cooperation was necessary at all levels of the arms and drugs traffic. As a TV commentator put it:

"Karachi is silently and visibly being kidnapped by narco-barons. They can influence and buy anyone at any level in any department. The judiciary, the civil administration and the police cooperate and coordinate with those narco-traders or their nominees and weapon dealers just in routine."

In Karachi, the religious parties, who had been fundamental to the *jehad*, started imparting armed training in their own seminaries. This gave birth to another class of suicide bombers in the city while the bombs and suicidal jackets were allegedly arranged and supplied by the Taliban. Ethnic and sectarian groups with the support of religious parties on their back and sitting governments of PPP and PML[N] respectively went more active in criminal activities like extortion, killing and kidnapping.

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At the lowermost levels were the *Pashtun* trucker mafia who operated into the city frequently, of course, having their own pressure group as transporters. For some in Karachi, the drugs and illicit arms business were no more a crime since 2001 because the state actors and politicians were sponsoring them in the name of democracy; of course, at the lowermost levels the local police and small traders used to run their circles in cooperation with each other.

See the news clips around – the said recoveries of weapons and arrests would be just for the press and media to make out news thus eyewash; next day all culprits would be on bail and doing the same 'jobs' again.

On 18th July 2011; Federal Interior Minister of Pakistan Rehman Malik told media that weapons recovered during raids by law enforcement agencies in parts of Karachi were being smuggled in from Israel. Hinting at the involvement of foreign hands behind the unrest in Karachi, he said:

"Israeli-made weapons were being used by miscreants in the port city. Over 200 persons have been arrested in connection with the recent wave of violence and Israeli-made weapons including AK-45, have been recovered from them. It proves that foreign hands are behind the unrest in Karachi."

The minister said investigation was being conducted to ascertain who were supporting these people and supplying the weapons. He said the media would be given access to question the suspect on why they were killing innocent people.

On 23rd September 2013; Rangers recovered explosives, grenades and other weapons from fruit crates on a truck in the Old Sabzi Mandi Sakhya Ground area of Karachi. The raid was launched on the hideout of Peoples *Amn* Committee [Darvesh Group] and recovered a truck which contained automatic weapons and huge quantity of narcotics hidden in apple crates. Two accused were also taken into custody from the spot.

The targeted operation in Karachi began on 5th September that year, and since then more than 300 suspects were arrested within two weeks.

The Rangers were leading the operation which was being conducted across the city – not just in the political strongholds of one party. Separately, the police have conducted 975 raids and arrested 1,232 criminals. Till then they had not raided the 'no-go' areas, including Sohrab Goth and Manghopir. These areas were ungoverned territories where law-enforcers had no writ.

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On 28th March 2014; Karachi Police and CIA apprehended 93 outlaws in raids and encounters while 18 weapons and drugs were also recovered. Karachi Police and CIA nabbed 24 absconders, 5 proclaimed offenders and 16 persons carrying illegal weapons in 107 raids conducted in different areas of the metropolis along with three encounters. Eight accused of murder, two of armed robbery, 2 of kidnapping for ransom, 7 drug peddlers and 29 involved in other crimes were also arrested.

On 4th December 2014; Pakistan Railways seized illegal weapons, explosive material and drugs at Lahore Railways Station which, according to ARY News TV, were transported from Karachi to Lahore by a media team just to "expose" the inabilities of the public utility.

An FIR against the railways officials along with the sender and receiver involved in the transportation was duly registered and they were arrested. Controversy prevailed during a press conference that whether it was just a joke to show inability of the Railways or an actual illegal act on part of the local TV team.

ARY TV team claimed that the Railways Police failed to seize the weapons and drugs until the reporter of the TV channel arrived at Lahore Railway Station Platform Number 2 and brought it to the TV screen.

The TV channel claimed that the whole episode badly exposed the Railways authorities which could let anyone transport anything through the public utility – the whole show was arranged to convey a lesson for PML[N]'s Railways Minister Saad Rafique who was making tall claims those days about the performance of the Railways department.

On 11th July 2015; Police apprehended as many as 13 drug dealers in wounded condition during a raid in Korangi and Liaqatabad areas of Karachi and also claimed of confiscating weapons from their possession.

On 22nd November 2015: Sindh Rangers arrested six terrorists of a banned outfit and recovered weapons during a crackdown in Karachi; the paramilitary troops responded to an intelligence report and conducted raid in Baldia's Ittehad Town.

On 16th January 2016: two drug dealers were shot in police encounter in Pirabad area of Karachi while police discovered huge amounts of drugs and weapons during the operation.

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The Counter Terrorism Department [CTD] of police conducted a raid near Nishtar Road area of Karachi and arrested three suspects. The suspects confessed to have killed a policeman in addition to other crimes including selling and renting out weapons. Meanwhile, during the raids in different parts of the city, Rangers captured 11 drug dealers and seized huge amounts of drugs and weapons from the suspects.

On 4th April 2016: a huge catch of weapons was recovered from Sakhi Hassan graveyard of Karachi; the catch included guns, pistols and 200 rounds. According to police, the sophisticated weapons were concealed by banned outfits in the graveyard.

NATO WEAPONS DUMP IN KARACHI:

On 5th October 2016; a huge cache of NATO weapons and ammunition was recovered by police during a raid on an empty house in the Azizabad area of the metropolis. Police seized a large number of weapons including anti-aircraft guns, SMGs, LMGs, sniper rifles, hand grenades and rocket launchers hidden in the water tank of an empty house. Bullet-proof jackets and helmets were also recovered during the raid.

The raid was conducted after the police was tipped off by a political [most probably the MQM's] worker already in police custody. It was the "*biggest recovery of arms and ammunition in the history of Karachi*".

Karachi's police chief, however, told that:

"In the light of disclosures made by a detained suspect, big-wigs of a political party [MQM] provided help in procuring these arms and ammunition.

These arms were supposed to be used by the elements residing in London particularly with cooperation of RAW [Indian intelligence agency] for terror activities in the metropolis but it was foiled through timely action by security institutions.

These weapons were hidden for terror acts to be perpetrated by terrorists of a political party based in South Africa."

All the recovered weapons were shifted to the office of Sindh Inspector General of Police. As per press release issued by Sindh Police, recovered

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weapons included 11 anti-aircraft guns, 17 grenade launchers, 39 LMGs, 9 RPG-7, 82 SMGs, 11 7-MM, one M-16, 32 China rifles 7.62, 10 G-3, 5 sniper rifles, 2 repeaters, 9 short SMGs and 245 magazines of SMGs and G-3. The police also claimed seizing 200 hand grenades, 2000 rifle grenades, 140 bullet-proof jackets and huge quantity of ammunition.

During his press conference, the Sindh AIG police informed the media that forensic tests will be conducted to determine whether the weapons had been used in the past to conduct terrorist activities in the metropolis. The police were looking into how long the house had been vacant and who it belonged to.

Referring to the 'Dawn' dated 5th October 2016:

"Then [on 11th March 2015] a number of party workers, including member of MQM's Rabita Committee Amir Khan, were detained during the raid. Huge cache of arms seized near Nine Zero in Azizabad while London elements with cooperation of RAW planning killings through network of political party based in South Africa [or else where around]."

In March 2015, a large cache of ammunition was recovered by Rangers during a raid at MQM headquarters, Nine Zero. Rangers' spokesperson Col Tahir told that the ammunition stolen from NATO containers was also seized during that search operation.

[Now see here the 'Dawn' dated 5th September 2013;

The US embassy in Islamabad refuted media reports suggesting 19,000 shipping containers belonging to the US and International Security Assistance Force [ISAF] had been stolen from Karachi ports.

The head of the Sindh Rangers paramilitary force, Maj Gen Rizwan Akhtar, told the Supreme Court last week that about 19,000 containers had gone missing a few years ago and that a shipload of arms and ammunition had been brought to Karachi and their whereabouts were never ascertained. Local media reports suggested the containers carrying weapons may have belonged to NATO forces in Afghanistan.

The US Embassy held that:

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"While the US routinely uses Karachi ports for both diplomatic and military shipments, neither the US nor ISAF has ever shipped weapons or ammunition via Karachi ports.

We have engaged the appropriate Pakistani authorities on this topic. We have underscored that the US is able to account for all shipments that have arrived in and transited Karachi ports."]

On 13th March 2015; the US government again refuted the allegation; see below.

[WASHINGTON: The US State Department has said that the United States and the International Security Assistance Force [ISAF] had never used the Karachi port to transport weapons and explosives.

A Rangers spokesman told reporters in Karachi this week that they found weapons and ammunition stolen from NATO containers when they raided the MQM headquarters, Nine Zero, on Wednesday. The State Department, however, has sent out two tweets, rejecting the claim.

"For general information: The United States and ISAF have never used the Karachi port to transport weapons / explosives, said the first tweet.

In the second tweet, the State Department rejected the suggestion that weapons or explosives found at Nine Zero could have come from NATO containers.

Since there exists a strict and effective system for transporting weapons around the world, such incidents are impossible, it said".

Published in Dawn, March 13th, 2015]

A point to ponder was that it was the official stance of the US government in White House. One doesn't know that what was actually packed in ISAF containers and with the connivance of whom – corruption at high level has been quite rampant in US also. The CIA's role is also known to the whole world which is over and above the US administration sitting in Washington or the Congress or the Senate.

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This was something Karachi people were talking about; look at its port, which remained under the control of criminals patronized by both PPP and the MQM. How many NATO containers had gone missing since 9/11 – follow the press news not the official stance of the US government. Some of them contained weapons that had ended up with terrorists; such weapons were there in caches all over the city.

The arms could be the ones stolen or secretly sold or gifted away [people could guess the countries like India, Iran, US or Israel] from NATO supplies, declared lost long ago.

Referring to the 'China Post' dated 9th October 2016:

“Even by the violent standards of Karachi, the size of the arms haul uncovered in a raid [on 5th October] is astonishing. The authorities say the haul — seized from a storage facility in an abandoned house in the Azizabad locality — is the city's biggest weapons' seizure. Among the big guns recovered are anti-aircraft guns, grenade launchers and an assortment of other ordnance better suited to the battle-field.

The location of the house where the weapons were recovered is close to Nine-Zero, the sealed MQM headquarters. Police say the weapons were to be used for acts of terrorism on Muharram 9 by elements in London in cahoots with RAW.”

The owner of the property was apparently coerced by “*political elements*” to let them use the house as a weapons dump. Despite the well-earned reputation of the MQM for violence, the fact that such heavy weaponry — including anti-aircraft guns — was recovered from this congested locality raises many questions.

- *How did such a large cache of weapons end up in one place, without the knowledge of the law-enforcement agencies, particularly the intelligence units?*
- *Many of the arms recovered were “military grade”; how did they remain undetected?*
- *Why the authorities didn't release information about the origin of the weapons and the elements responsible for building up this armoury.*

The arms haul dictated how precarious peace in the metropolis really was. Had the weapons been used as intended, the consequences could have been drastic. The level of violence in Karachi — be it of the ethnic, sectar-

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ian or criminal variety — were hoped to come down considerably as more such seizures were being tipped from various corners.

That kind of ammunition and arms were enough to hijack the city. And that's just one house, wonder how many such houses in Karachi could have hidden arms for MQM or some other outfit. Rangers were urged to investigate the arrested ones properly to recover every single illegal gun from the surroundings.

Some people raised fingers that the police and Rangers were not efficient enough. How could such amount of weapon or ammo reach inside the city in the first place; and no one was taking responsibility. It was caught from HQ of MQM which meant that political establishment was involved with attacks inside the metropolis city.