Drug Trade and Terror Nexus between Pakistan and Afghanistan

The globalization of drug trade has not only impacted the economies of States but has also increased the cross-border terrorism and criminal activities making it a big concern for the international community. The drug trade is characterized as an organized crime involving multiple partners of production, distribution, money launderers and the consumers. As stated by Sardar (2016), it has raised an important concern on the international arena posing a menace to the Governments’ integrity along with a risk of weakening the economies of developing and developed countries. The international nature of organized crime is manifested more in the international sphere of illegal drug trafficking than in any other type of organized crime. The extent of this activity sums to about US $400 to 600 billion yearly according to the estimates (Sardar, 2016).

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Pakistan is located at the one of buzziest drug trading passageways of the world. The landlocked Afghanistan has been using Pakistan as a transit trade route for drug smuggling; where the latter serves as a beneficial route over the sea (Gwadar seaport), all the way through Iran and Turkey towards Central Asia to Russia and Europe through different route (UNODC, 2010). This trade was possible due to the signing of the Afghan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA) between the two countries on 2nd March 1965. The drugs are created in Afghanistan as well as in Pakistan, as the latter has pharmaceutical industries and pharmacies spread throughout which remain largely unregulated (UNODC, 2010). However, recent years have seen that the illegal trade has brought its own share of the problems for Pakistan as it had suffered cross border terrorism on many instances hence recognizing the nexus between drug trade and terrorism. The aim of this essay is to show the relationship between the drug trade and the increasing cross border terrorist activities that has resulted in repercussions for both states, as well as the concern for nuclear terrorism on global scale.

Drug trade is not a new phenomenon between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but the drug Terror nexus or narco-terrorism has become a buzzword after the 9/11. In order to emphasize the aspect of terrorism, the term narco-terrorism was defined by the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) as being characterized by the involvement of individuals or associated groups in taxing, giving protection or in helping and supporting drug trafficking activities with the purpose of expanding or funding terrorist activities (Björnehed, 2004). This definition by the DEA brings attention to the reality that several terrorist organizations exploit drug trade with
the intention of receiving revenues. Hence it is obvious that the organizations involved in narco-terrorism are associated with carrying out both drug trafficking and terrorist activities alongside each other. As found by Bjornehed(2004), the terrorist organization namely Taliban has been active in the drug trafficking business to garner profit for funding their operation. Taliban has heavily exploited the drug trade which was recognized by the US that had post 9/11 gone to war with them. The nexus of drug trade and terrorism had huge implication on both States of Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, in case of Pakistan it did not only affect the country internally and externally but also raised the threat of nuclear terrorism among the international community.

Secondly, the drug-terror nexus has negatively affected both countries in terms of their social institutions such as the family -life, society and community behavior. According to a survey conducted by UNODC, in Pakistan, the family of drug users is also economically impacted by the drug abuse problems where the severe impact is observed in non-joint family arrangement. The drug abuse can often lead to other socio-economic issues such as domestic violence, unemployment, hunger and illiteracy among children (UNODC, 2014). Likewise in Afghanistan, the use of drugs has left a devastating impact on the society by increasing the ratio of organized crimes and prostitution. Some drug users are themselves carrying out criminal activities like robberies creating social disorders (UNODC, 2014).

Finally, the narco-terrorism has also raised the concern among the international community about the control and command of nuclear arsenals in Pakistan. Even though the nuclear acceleration in Pakistan has been justified by their nuclear doctrine of deterrence, the globalization of advanced technology, and the availability of the black market for drug trade might provide an opportunity to the terrorist organizations to acquire nuclear weapons. As said by Khalid and Kayani (2017), the American intelligence agencies have reported al-Qaeda’s interest in pursuing nuclear, biological, chemical and radiological weapons; And this group of organization has been actively involved in terrorist activities both within Pakistan and outside in the neighboring countries.

To conclude, the drug terror nexus between Afghanistan and Pakistan has not only affected both countries internally by destroying their socio-political institutions but also has repercussions on global scale. With the increasing activities of terrorist organizations active within both countries have put in danger the integrity of the governments as well as the safety
of the nuclear arsenals in Pakistan. Number of measures have been taken in Pakistan against the narco-terrorism, however the results have not been as effective. For example, *The Anti-narcotics Policy* was developed in 2010 to address the existent drug situation in Pakistan but critical approaches were required to effectively address the drug issue in the areas of medicine drugs, prevention of drug addiction, handling of drug dependence, and prevention of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) along with care, check and assessment etc.


