

## India's Security Problem Narco terrorism: Cross border analysis

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**Abstract:** Trafficking of narcotics by terrorist groups as a quid pro quo for the funds which are utilized to create terror in the form of assassination, extortion, hijacking, bombing, kidnapping and the general disruption of the government to divert attention from illicit drug operations can be described as “narco-terrorism”. In other words, narco-terrorism is “terrorism conducted to further the aims of drug traffickers”. Narcotic traffic which was started as an organized cross border crime has now emerged as a global threat because of its diabolic alliance with terrorist groups.

**Key Words:** Narcotics, drug, criminal networks, narco-terrorism, Trafficking.

### INTRODUCTION:

The terrorist attack on the Air Force base in Pathankot had cautioned security agencies in India about a possible nexus between Pakistani terror groups, local drug cartels and Indian officials. Security agencies suspect that the terrorists, who came in from Pakistan, took the help of drug smugglers to enter India through routes tried and tested by traffickers. There was a strong suspicion that the arms and ammunition used by the Pakistani terrorists were part of a drug consignment which was concealed by smugglers, and the group of terrorists entered separately using the same route. The drug trafficking scenario in India is largely attributed to various external and internal factors. One of the prime external factors happens to be India's close proximity to the major opium producing regions of South West and South East Asia known as the 'Golden Crescent' and the 'Golden Triangle', respectively. The geographical location of India as such, makes it vulnerable to transit, trafficking and consumption of Opium derivatives in various forms along the known trafficking routes. The major internal factors were also responsible for this.

Since 1980s India was an important transit route as well as a destination for heroin and hashish produced in the 'Golden Triangle' and the 'Golden Crescent'. Though various psychotropic and pharmaceutical preparations and precursor chemicals are produced domestically as well as other parts of the world but it poses through Indian Territory. The two-way illegal flow of these drugs and chemicals not only violates India's borders, but also poses a significant threat to national security. The close relations between drug traffickers organised criminal networks and terrorists are sufficient to prove that India faces major security problem. The prime reason is that money generated through drug trade has been frequently raised to fund various insurgent and terrorist movements. For example, in Jammu and Kashmir it has been estimated that money generated from the illegal sale of narcotics account 15 per cent of the finances for the militant groups to carry their violent activities. Similarly, well known sikh militant groups in Punjab and Northeast insurgent groups like the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) [NSCN (IM)] also to channellise drugs in India to aid their operations<sup>1</sup>.

Besides, criminal syndicates engaged in drug trafficking like the Dawood Ibrahim gang have themselves resorted to terrorist acts in the past (the 1993 terrorist attacks in Mumbai) or have become deeply engaged in the business/logistics end of terrorism. Further, drug trafficking facilitates other organised criminal enterprises such as human trafficking and gun running, all of which use the same networks and routes to smuggle people, arms and contraband. To cite an example, the explosives used in the 1993 Mumbai terrorist attacks were smuggled into India using the same routes through which drugs and other contraband items were trafficked by the Dawood gang. Even today, terrorist groups use these routes to source weapons and explosives across the borders<sup>2</sup>.

### GOLDEN CRESCENT:

The closeness of the India-Pakistan border to the 'Golden Crescent' has made it vulnerable to the trafficking of heroin and hashish. There are other factors also which contribute to the inflow of heroin through the

borders. First, the traditional Balkan route via Iran during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) has been closed and those drugs come in through another route to India. Second, the involvement of smugglers along the border region and criminal networks in the mid-1980s has further facilitated the smuggling of drugs. Third, Sikh militancy in the mid-1980s and the Kashmir militancy in the late 1980s also contributed to increasing trafficking of drugs as these militants indulged in those activities to finance their activities. Lastly, the existence of traditional smuggling routes and a porous border have provided a favourable conditions for drug trafficking.

Heroin and hashish mostly comes to India through the border states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir. Earlier, drugs were smuggled through the Thar Desert. The cause of drug trafficking in the first place was that opium produced in Malwa was smuggled to Karachi and then to China during the colonial days. Second, since the desert is vast, barren and poorly guarded, it provided enough space for the smugglers for the illicit drugs. Later on, it could be retrieved and transported to different parts of the country.

In India heroin was smuggled through the border towns of Sahiwal, Rahimyar Khan, Sukkur and Khokhrapar in Pakistan and from there the consignments crossed the border to various receiving towns such as Churu, Sikar, Kishangarh, Ramgarh, Barmer, Jaisalmer, and Anupgarh in Rajasthan from where they were subsequently transported to Delhi and Mumbai. Heroin and hashish are smuggled from across the border on camel backs and once the consignment reaches the collection center, it is transported to other major cities by vehicles. Heroin continues to be smuggled through these routes in Rajasthan. In addition, the Thar Express plying between Khokhrapar and Munabao has been reported to have become a major carrier of drugs from Pakistan since its inauguration in 2005<sup>1</sup>.

Punjab has become a major route for drug trafficking with the rise of the Sikh militancy in the state. During the 1980s, the most favoured route for trafficking was the Lahore-Fazilka-Bhatinda-Delhi route. Another frequently used route was the Attari-Wagah route. This route is still being exploited for trafficking drugs. The Samjhauta Express has alleged to have become a major carrier of illicit drugs from across the border. As a result, Amritsar has emerged as a major center for heroin trade in Punjab. Border towns of Ajnala and Gurdaspur have also become prominent heroin collection centers. Agricultural land across the fence, good network of roads and rails right up to the borders and several river line stretches along the border, all facilitate trafficking of drugs in these sectors. Since at present militancy is not on rise but Punjab continues to be a transit point as well as destination for the heroin manufactured in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. Heroin smuggled in through Punjab and Rajasthan are shipped to Mumbai and Tamil Nadu from where it is trafficked to international markets with the rise of militancy in the state of Jammu and Kashmir there has been an increase in heroin trafficking through the state since 1995. Heroin was mainly smuggled into the state through Ranbirsingh Pura, Samba and Akhnoor. Lately, most of the heroin which reaches the mainland is being routed through the Jammu sector.<sup>3</sup>

### **NARCO TERRORISM:**

Trafficking of narcotics by terrorist groups as a quid pro quo for the funds which are utilized to create terror in the form of assassination, extortion, hijacking, bombing, kidnapping and the general disruption of the government to divert attention from illicit drug operations can be described as “narco-terrorism”. In other words, narco-terrorism is “terrorism conducted to further the aims of drug traffickers”. Narcotic traffic which was started as an organized cross border crime has now emerged as a global threat because of its diabolic alliance with terrorist groups. Globalisation has expanded international trade and consequently, the range of organized criminal activities has been broadened and diversified. Today, an international network links narco-terrorist groups and individual role players exist. Colombia is the best example where one can easily see narcotic-induced terrorism as well as international arms trade network.<sup>4</sup>

In Asia/Pacific region, narco-terrorism is linked with political terrorism. India is also not free from narco-terrorism. The incidents of narco-terrorism are assuming gigantic proportions in India. As stated above, Golden Crescent is the largest producer of illicit opium. Afghanistan and Pakistan alone share the major part of illicit opium production in the world. This is definitely a matter of serious concern to India, because these drugs are the major source for funding Pak-sponsored terrorism in India. Sponsoring terrorism is an expensive affair; and the money does not come through proper channels. The market value of narcotic drugs is much higher than any consumer products in the world. It fetches voluminous amounts and that too in hard cash. For instance, heroin from the Golden Crescent costs approximately one lakh rupees in South Asia and fetches nearly one crore in the

US market. The volume of money these drugs generate in the West is out of proportion, since enormous money has been involved in illegal drug trade, terrorists has successfully established links with drug traffickers to meet expenses for 'operation terrorism'.<sup>5</sup>

The assumption that the drug trafficking funds are used for terrorist activities is based on the following facts:

1-The economy of narcotic-producing countries is too dependent on the illegal drug trade. Unless they have an alternate economy, the illegal narcotic trade would continue irrespective of stringent legislation.

2-In Afghanistan (notorious for terrorism), poppy cultivation is done in 18 out of 31 provinces in an organized form under the Taliban- controlled administration.

3-Narcotic drugs are the most lucrative business that generates quick money without paper work. The transactions are done in hard cash without any documentation for legal action.

4-The drugs passes through numerous legal and illegal financial institutions and petty business enterprises.

5-Large amount of money required for terrorism, it is difficult to acquire through and legal sources hence it is sought from illegal sources *viz.* drug syndicates and underworld dons.

6-Drugs have attracted criminals and smugglers and give them an opportunity to fulfill their political aspiration of political power and thereby make an easy entry into politics. Criminalisation of politics is the result of such unholy nexus.

7-In Pakistan also drug syndicate runs a parallel economy. The purpose of the political and military establishments is to destabilize India. Government of Pakistan, in collaboration with the ISI uses proceeds of illegal narcotic drugs and arm trade to fund terrorism in India. India has become a soft target. Pakistan aims to weaken India's political and economic will through illegal narcotic trade, to disturb the local money market and make a dent in the Indian economy. The economic liberalization introduced in India also opens a plenty of opportunities to Pakistan based drug syndicates.<sup>1</sup>

It is submitted that the politico-economic condition of Pakistan is the fallout of the unfulfilled commitments made by the political leaders to the people of Pakistan. Growth of narcotic drug addicts and illegal narcotic syndicates is a manifestation of the growing frustration in Pakistan's socio-economic and political system. Indian strategists and analysts must take note of these negative trends while thinking about the safety of the nation.

The Golden Crescent of South – West Asia and the Golden Triangle of South-East Asia are the world's principal opium poppy-growing areas. They account for the lion share of world's illicit production of opium and heroin. Due to the geographical position between them, India continues to be affected by constantly increasing illegal transit/traffic of heroin. The United States remains a minor market of Indian heroin, whether produced in or transmitted through India. Though heroin produced in India is trafficked into many international locations, but the largest producer of heroin are, Burma, Afghanistan and Colombia. Brown sugar- the most common drug produced in India has only a limited market outside the region. Since India is wedged between the Golden Crescent and the Golden Triangle, the proximity has traditionally been viewed as a source of vulnerability, since it has made India both a destination and a transit route for opiates produced in these regions. Besides, Nepal is a traditional source of cannabis, both herbal (marijuana) and resinous (hashish). In the early eighties, Punjab became affected with narco-terrorism, particularly smuggling of narcotic drugs and arms from across the border. Since India has been used by the drug traffickers as a transit country, there has been an increase in drug abuse due to the spill-over effect. However, the level of drug addiction in India is not so of serious magnitude as seen in some of the western countries.<sup>6</sup>

India has land borders of 3323 km with Pakistan, 1751 km with Nepal; 1643 km with Myanmar and 4361km with Bangladesh. Heroin and hashish produced in Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle areas are transited through the territory of India have become a destination for foreign countries<sup>7</sup>.

Sincerely, India being a transit country, it has also become a destination for heroin and hashish produced in Nepal, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Although the border is closely monitored and tensions remain high between India and Pakistan, opiates continue to enter India overland from Pakistan. Sea and air routes are also used to bring heroin from southern Pakistan. NCB has identified the established heroin trade through porous borders in

Punjab and Kashmir besides adjoining Rajasthan and Gujarat *en-route* to Europe and the USA *via* air and sea routes. An unknown percentage of this heroin remains in India, and the rest gets transmitted to international destinations, especially from New Delhi and Mumbai by carriers travelling on commercial airliners<sup>216</sup>. Little data is available on heroin and hashish smuggling by sea, although both are believed to occur. The reports available indicate an increasing trend in the seizure of smuggled goods from Delhi, Mumbai and Goa including airports of these cities. However, the data does not indicate that the airports of these cities have become hub for the smugglers<sup>8</sup>.

Drug trafficking in India usually involves nationals from India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. Nigerian traffickers are also present in India, particularly in Delhi. In addition, West African traffickers reside in India and primarily sell hashish to other Africans and Indians.<sup>9</sup> There are only two authorized border crossings on India's northeastern border with Myanmar but the borders are porous. This region is a home to a number of insurgent groups; who facilitate cross-border drug traffic. Ethnic Tamilians are also involved in trafficking between India and Independent Island off the southern coast of India. Heroin destined for Sri Lankans is regularly seized in Gulf of Myanmar between India and Sri Lanka. The Liberation Tigers of Sri Lanka receives funding from drug trafficking, although no direct nexus between drug trafficking has been confirmed. It is found that nearly all Asian terrorist groups are involved in trafficking of narcotics.

The policy of globalization inaugurated in 1991, featuring a privatization program; and the membership of WTO in April 1994, made it easier for drug trafficking rings to penetrate the country whose geographical position made it vulnerable to their activities.<sup>10</sup> Since the borders were opened, legal imports rushed into the country, making it less attractive to smuggle gold and electronic equipment and the syndicates started concentrating more on drugs trafficking. Mumbai City is no longer simply an important transit point for drugs. Laboratories refining Pakistani morphine base into heroin are springing up alongside the plants that have long been producing methaqualone (Mandrax). These activities are nurtured by black money generated by the parallel economy. Many laboratories have been bought by criminal organizations to manufacture mandrax for the African market, especially Nigeria, Mozambique and South Africa.<sup>11</sup>

The fact that 70 per cent of the drugs are transported over land makes the land borders corridors, through which drugs are trafficked into the country. Their vulnerability can be assessed by the fact that 70 per cent of the heroin and 40 per cent of opium that are being trafficked are seized from states along the borders.<sup>12</sup> Easy availability of drugs in the border areas makes their abuse rampant among the local populace as is evident from drug consumption trends and patterns in Manipur, Mizoram, Punjab and Rajasthan. Besides border districts, consumption of narcotics and synthetic drugs is widely prevalent in the rest of the country as well creating huge demands.

## CONCLUSION:

Considering India to be a transit hub as well as a destination for drug trafficking, the emphasis has been largely on ensuring the security of the borders by preventing the easy ingress and egress of the drug trafficker along with their consignments through the borders. In this respect, the most important measure undertaken by India was the construction of border fences. Border fences were erected first along the borders with Pakistan. This process began in the mid-1980s, when large numbers of terrorists as well as huge quantities of drug from Pakistan began to enter India. In later years, fences were built along the India- Bangladesh border in order to prevent illegal migration. These fences also acted as a barrier to the free movement of drug traffickers. The positive feature of the construction of such fences is that it has reduced the inflow of drugs from across the borders.

Strengthen surveillance system along the borders by deploying adequate numbers of border guarding personnel. Another measure undertaken to ensure security of the borders is to regular patrolling and electronic surveillance is carried out for detecting suspicious movements along the borders as well as to gather intelligence to effectively deal with drug trafficking. In addition to border guards, various central bodies such as the Customs, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, the Narcotics Control Bureau, and the Central Bureau of Narcotics as well as state organisations such as state police, state excise and state forest are there to prevent drug consignments along the borders. India has also entered into bilateral and multilateral agreements with several countries including neighbours. Bilateral agreements have been signed with Afghanistan (1990), Bangladesh (2006), Bhutan (2009), Myanmar (1993), and Pakistan (2011). These agreements have been instrumental in establishing a

mechanism for mutual exchange of information, of operational and technical experience, cooperation for joint investigations and other assistance 'to identify, suppress and prevent criminal activities of the international syndicates engaged in the illicit traffick of narcotics drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals'.

Besides these measures, there are several other bilateral institutional mechanisms, which facilitate interactions between India and its neighbours to discuss the problem of drug trafficking. These interactions are held at national, sectoral and local levels on annual, bi-annual and quarterly basis involving the Home Ministers and Home Secretaries, the heads of apex Drug Law Enforcement agencies and Director Generals of the Border Guarding Forces of India and its neighbours. For instance, in February 2011, the Drug Law enforcement officials of India and Bhutan discussed avenues to strengthen cooperation for combating drug trafficking. Similarly, during the 18th sectoral level talks between India and Myanmar in 2011, specific problems associated with drug trafficking were discussed. The Director Generals level talks between BSF and BGB (Border Guard Bangladesh) in 2010 also was an important in combating drug trafficking across the borders.

As for multilateral agreements with neighbours, India is a signatory to the SAARC Convention on Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic substances, 1993. The convention provides for regular meetings of Home Ministers and Home Secretaries of the member countries as well as for interactions among the members of SAARC Conference on Cooperation in police matters. India has also signed the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in Combating International Terrorism, Transnational Organised Crime and Illicit Drug Trafficking in 2009. It provided a legal framework to all the member countries to counter drug trafficking and organised crime. India is also a party to the Pentalateral Cooperation on Drug Control, which focuses on the prevention of illicit trade of precursor and other chemicals used for the manufacture of heroin.<sup>13</sup> India has been enduring the scourge of drug trafficking for three decades. The country's proximity to two of the world's largest illicit opium growing areas as well as various external and internal factors have contributed to it becoming a transit, source and a destination for drugs.

The trends and patterns of drug trafficking in the country demonstrates that there is a gradual shift from traditional/natural drugs towards synthetic drugs that are being trafficked and consumed in the country. In the 1980s, a large quantity of heroin and hashish was smuggled in from the source areas into the country through various borders. Though these drugs are trafficked, in fewer quantities, the share of synthetic drugs such as ATS and codeine based pharmaceutical preparations has gone up. Various studies and newspaper reports indicate that drug consumption and trafficking are in fact showing an increasing trend. To deal with the problem of drug trafficking and to protect the country's borders against such infringements, India has employed a mix of measures. On the one hand, it has enacted stringent antidrug laws, co-opted various voluntary organisations and sought to strengthen the physical security of its borders by various means and on the other hand it has been seeking the cooperation of its neighbours and other countries through several bilateral and multilateral agreements. These efforts have only been partially successful in dealing with the problem.

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