

Forum: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Issue: Discussing strategies and measures to combat drug trafficking, production, and its co-related challenges in the region of the Golden Triangle

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Introduction:



The Golden Triangle is made up of parts of 3 countries: Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand, forming a triangle on the map, hence the name the Golden Triangle. The Golden Triangle area got its name five decades ago for its central role in heroin

production and trafficking in these 3 countries. This region has been known for the production of opium since the early 20th century.

Many socio-economic and geopolitical issues have emerged in this region as a result of illegal drug trafficking and manufacturing. Trafficking operations escalate conflicts, promote criminal networks, and pose major health risks to the public because of drug addiction.

Various strategies have been adopted by governments and international organizations to tackle these issues, including law enforcement, crop substitution initiatives, and international collaboration to counter drug trafficking networks. However, the problems still exist, and the Golden Triangle continues to be a crucial location in the global struggle against the trafficking of illicit drugs.

Definition of Key Terms:

1. **Golden triangle:** is the name given to the region at the confluence of the Ruak and Mekong Rivers in Myanmar, Thailand and Laos.
2. **Drug Trafficking:** global illicit trade involving the cultivation, manufacture, distribution and sale of substances which are subject to drug prohibition laws.
3. **Methamphetamine:** a synthetic drug with more rapid and lasting effects than amphetamine, used illegally as a stimulant.
4. **International organized crime:** planned and coordinated criminal behaviour and conduct by people working together on a continuing basis
5. **Ethnic groups:** a community or population made up of people who share a common cultural background or descent.

Background Information

As we know the Golden Triangle is located at the meeting of 3 countries, Myanmar, Thailand and Laos. The Area of the Golden Triangle is around 350,000 Km².

The Geography of the area is a key factor in what shaped its history and made it the place we know it today. The region of the Golden Triangle is filled with mountains and extensive rivers, with key ones being the Mekong and Ruak rivers. These geographical features have made it an ideal place for trading, proximity to water allowed for easy transportation of goods and people in the past would exchange normal goods.

All of this changed as the region attracted different parties because of its rich resources and geographical location that made it ideal for trade. The arrival of colonial powers forced opium farmers into producing on a large scale and for the global market.

Europe colonized the area of the Golden Triangle in the late 19th century. Their plans were to exploit the land and resources in the area and they built a lot of infrastructure such as towns and ports. However as different colonial powers got greedier, conflicts arose in the form of proxy wars and board disputes (We later get the 3 clear distinct countries that make up the Golden Triangle).

During the late 19th and early 20th Opium and drug trade slowly became a more and more appealing option for farmers struggling to make ends meet, however, this led to social issues like addiction. Profits from the Opium trade led to fueling corruption in parts of the region. And Western powers made money from this trade and economic success.

In the present day European colonialism isn't a major influence but same the issues around the drug trade have persisted due to problems like poverty.

Current Situation

Methamphetamine alone made up \$61 billion of the predicted \$71 billion in revenue from drug manufacturing and trafficking in the area last year alone, this is four times as much as it was six years ago. Methamphetamine production and trafficking have become one of the main sources of funding for international organized crime, as well as the armed ethnic groups that collaborate with them to gain control of

independent territories in Myanmar. This has led to increased conflict and insecurity throughout the nation and along its borders with Thailand.

As the supply of Methamphetamine has increased the price has decreased significantly making it more accessible for potential different uses as well as drug users. Given that eighty per cent of Thai prisoners are serving sentences relating to methamphetamine-related offences, it is clear that rising drug trafficking and falling drug prices have made the nation's criminal justice system and associated human rights issues more pressing and serious.

The Golden Triangle of Laos, Myanmar and Thailand has become one of the most important drug trafficking hubs in the world due to a combination of factors. The region's inhospitable topography, characterized by its ruggedness and remoteness, makes it difficult for law enforcement to control and manage illegal operations. This adds to the region's significance in the international drug trade by creating an environment conducive to the trafficking of illicit drugs and the cultivation of opiate crops.

The economic hardship of the region is a major factor in forcing communities to resort to illicit activities to survive. This cycle of addiction is perpetuated by pervasive poverty and a lack of opportunities for other forms of income. Communities that lack economic diversification suffer from increased poverty and are more susceptible to the high-risk, high-reward illegal drug market.

Myanmar:

In Myanmar, the drug economy is further complicated by the ongoing internal conflicts and conflicts. Armed groups involved in these conflicts often use the drug economy as a means of financing themselves, further exacerbating the problem. Drug trafficking and war go hand in hand, and any solution to the former will almost certainly have an impact on the latter. And the Military takeover has actually resulted in an increase of the opium trade, this is partly due to the fact that citizens and farmers once involved in legal and filling activities are going back to farming drugs as they try to make ends meet. There has also been a huge surge in synthetic drugs produced by organized crime networks. They have migrated to other parts of the region because they can

operate with less punishment and consequences. They have started to invest in big drug-producing facilities in those regions.

Thailand:

After removing the marijuana plant as a narcotic last year, Thailand became the first nation in Asia to decriminalize cannabis, prompting an upsurge of cannabis cafés and shops in well-known tourist locations including Bangkok, Chiang Mai, and Pattaya.

However, Thailand has encountered difficulties because of its proximity to the Golden Triangle, while not being a major producer. It has historically struggled with drug trafficking, acting as a hub for illegal narcotics like heroin and methamphetamine coming from nearby Laos and Myanmar. To stop the flow of drugs across its borders, the nation has put strict law enforcement measures in place, including border controls and interception attempts. Furthermore, Thailand has engaged in cooperative efforts to destroy trafficking networks with neighbouring nations and international organizations. It is still important to address these issues, which calls for persistent measures to stop cross-border drug trafficking.

Laos:

In recent years drug prices in Laos have plummeted significantly, causing it to be more readily available. Many people say that “meth is now cheaper than beer”

In 1998, Laos had eradicated opium cultivation entirely, However, in 2005 opium cultivation had come back. In recent years, since then there has been a renewed focus on addressing this issue. According to the UNODC in 2019, Laos had an estimated 1,900 hectares of opium poppy cultivation and was producing around 53 metric tons of opium. It’s important to note while these aren’t the worst statistics we have seen from Laos they still highlight how severe the issue is.

Now, Laos is well-known for being a centre of manufacturing, which causes social problems and strains law enforcement. Instability is worsened by connections

between the drug trade and internal conflicts in Myanmar which is a significant worldwide producer and Thailand, which is a transit route.

Overall the Golden Triangle is a place where there is a weak government and inadequate law enforcement, which allows illegal drug networks to operate freely. In remote locations, poor infrastructure makes it difficult to put a halt to illicit activities, promotes economic development, and supports efforts to find alternate sources of income. Governments find it more challenging to combat the international drug traffic, which is driven by the world's opiate demand, due to the region's porous borders. Every now and again, historical and political factors obstruct regional cooperation and hinder concerted efforts to tackle the drug trade. The problems are increased by environmental factors such as deforestation. To solve this issue you would have to target the root causes of the Golden Triangle's continued status as a hub for criminal activity such as poverty and education, while also enhancing governance, promoting economic expansion, and encouraging regional collaboration.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Laos

“In the past 12 months, Bokeo province(Province in Laos) police arrested 393 drug smugglers, seized 23 million meth pills, 866 kilograms of crystal ice and 60 kilograms of heroin”(benarnews.org). Located in the Golden Triangle, Laos faces difficulties related to drug trafficking, particularly as a transit route and a location for the manufacturing of methamphetamine and opium. While Laos wants to reduce these criminal activities happening in the Golden Triangle economic zone, however, it is quoted that they feel “powerless” to stop the crime. This “powerless” feeling is due to the Laos needing to require permission from officials at a Casino, owned by the Hong Kong-based Group, this business is exploited by engaging in drug trafficking. Laos is involved in international trafficking networks due in part to its porous borders, which facilitate the

movement of illegal narcotics. Nonetheless, Laos has taken initiatives to stop trafficking and cultivation, isolated areas encourage covert labs, particularly for methamphetamine. The government engages in law enforcement, eradication programmes, and cooperation with foreign agencies and countries. An example includes just last year when Laos, Thai and Myanmar law enforcement officials met to discuss anti-narcotics cooperation. It is still vital to understand that socioeconomic variables such as deprivation and restricted prospects in rural regions sustain the dependence on drug-related pursuits. Resolving these issues is still essential to preventing Laos from participating in the drug trade in the Golden Triangle.

Myanmar

Due to its recent rise in methamphetamine manufacturing and historical importance as a major producer of opium, Myanmar plays a key part in the drug trafficking associated with the Golden Triangle. Situated in this area, the isolated Shan and Kachin States of Myanmar enable extensive opium poppy growing. Significant amounts of methamphetamine are produced in its covert labs and are traded both locally and internationally. Compounded by permeable borders and well-ingrained networks of organized crime, Myanmar is an important transit hub for a range of illegal drugs. Despite government initiatives, such as international partnerships and eradication campaigns, the fight against drug trafficking is still difficult and continues to pose problems for the region's social, economic, and legal systems.

Thailand

The government of Thailand has for a long time recognised the severity of the illicit drug trade in the Golden Triangle. Noting that Thailand has made progress in combatting this issue. The Thai government has collaborated with the UNODC to combat drug trafficking and also implemented strict specific laws including;

1. Dismantling secret/abandoned laboratories,
2. Intercepting chemicals essential for producing drugs,
3. Collaboration between countries such as China, Laos, and Myanmar.

All these efforts create global standards for other countries to follow, in order for an international eradication of this issue. However, the issue of border control still remains a crucial one. Due to the proximity of these countries, an expansion in the drug industry in one of them correlates to an expansion in all their drug industries.

China

This past decade has been one in which Chinese officials have recognised and become concerned about the flow of drugs into China. China and drug trafficking in the Golden Triangle have a complicated relationship. Although the region's proximity to its borders presents issues, China actively combats drug-related activity. To stop drug smuggling and block trafficking routes, it uses border controls, stringent law enforcement measures, and international cooperation. China encourages collaboration within the region by offering resources and intelligence to stop the manufacture and trafficking of drugs. It also funds economic development initiatives in surrounding nations in an effort to address the underlying reasons for drug cultivation. Despite these initiatives, China continues to face difficulties in effectively reducing the supply of illegal drugs from the Golden Triangle due to its porous borders and thriving drug trade.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- **UN Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001):** This resolution focuses on fighting terrorism and its financing, which frequently leverages money from drug trafficking, but it does not directly target the Golden Triangle. It calls on member nations to step up their efforts to stop and prevent terrorism financing, which has an indirect impact on drug-trafficking zones such as the Golden Triangle.
- **Resolution A/RES/58/4 of the UN General Assembly (2003):** To lessen the supply and demand for illegal drugs, this resolution recognises the dangers that illicit substances bring and asks for increased international collaboration to combat drug trafficking and related problems.
- **Resolution A/RES/64/182 of the UN General Assembly (2009):** This resolution emphasizes the need for a comprehensive, coordinated, and balanced response

to drug-related issues and strongly emphasizes bolstering international collaboration against the global drug problem.

- **Special Session of the UN General Assembly on the Global Drug Problem (2016):** The UNGASS brought member nations together to debate global drug-related concerns, even though it did not result in a resolution. It sought to evaluate the successes and difficulties in combating the global drug problem, emphasizing the need for a more all-encompassing and balanced strategy. Concerning the Golden Triangle, the UN has additionally sponsored several regional projects and alliances aimed at tackling drug trafficking and associated issues. To reduce the production of illicit crops, these activities frequently combine law enforcement, border control measures, international collaboration, support for alternative livelihoods, and development programmes.

Possible Solutions

Enhanced Law Enforcement:

- Tightening border security to stop drug shipments
- Increased intelligence sharing and surveillance between national law enforcement organizations
- Utilizing sting and undercover operations to target drug trafficking networks

International Cooperation:

- Forming task groups and cooperating agreements with nations impacted by drug trafficking in the area
- Exchanging data and assets to monitor and disrupt international drug trafficking organizations
- Targeting the manufacture and trafficking of drugs through cooperative operations and coordinated actions

Community Development Programs:

- Funding initiatives for economic growth and providing drug-producing communities with alternatives to their current means of subsistence
- Encouraging healthy farming practices and offering instruction for substitute crops to lessen reliance on medication production

Providing Rehabilitation programs:

- Help people who have been victims of drug abuse. helping them adapt and be reintegrated into society.
- Educating other people on the impacts of Drugs on the region and pointing people to alternative methods to making ends meet.

Border Collaboration:

- If Myanmar, Thailand and Laos work together they can strengthen border regulations and security to decrease the amount of drug trade.
- Working together about the common issue of economic well-being for individuals who depend on the drug trade. These 3 countries could come up with a combined strategy for providing alternative jobs.

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