

STATE AND SOCIETAL RESPONSES TO NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

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Afghan opium-poppy production accounts for over 90% of global heroin production.¹ This production, initially limited to crude opium, increasingly features refined morphine and heroin, most of which is trafficked internationally for sale and consumption in Western countries. Central Asia has long been a feature of trafficking routes, specifically the “northern route,” which sees Afghan opiates and opiate derivatives moving mostly through Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan into the Russian Federation. While this route only accounted for five percent of global seizures in 2015,² Russian authorities have claimed that up to twenty percent of heroin seized in Russia is trafficked along this route as of 2015.³

This in mind, I propose research exploring the relationship between trafficking and state-stability issues in countries along the northern route. Broadly, I am interested in the relationship between drug trafficking, crime, insurgency,⁴ and the broader challenges which drug trafficking poses to Eurasian security.⁵ My goal in conducting such research is to contribute to an area traditionally lacking in scholarship with the exception of relatively recent work.⁶

Under the purview of this research, I intend to emphasize state and societal responses to issues to narcotics trafficking, paying special attention to the role of kinship, ethnicity, and religious affiliations as they relate to trafficking in Central Asia. This question will be assessed through 25-30 in-person interviews with representatives from the government, NGOs, and academics conducted over a six-week period during the summer of 2018. Further exploration will make use of in-country travel, local media analysis, and interrogation of locally available secondary sources. Research conducted in-country will supplement ongoing research being conducted at the University of Arkansas.

The Kyrgyz Republic will serve as the primary research for this project. This is due to logistical feasibility as well as the resources available through the Central Asia Studies Institute at the American University of Central Asia. This decision has also been informed by other academics working in Central Asia, many of whom confirm narcotics trafficking as a prescient issue in the Kyrgyz Republic.

¹Tom Bowman, “Afghan Governor Wants to Control Poppy Crop,” NPR, July 06, 2016, accessed 1 February 2017.

² United Nations, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2017*, Vienna, Austria: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2017.

³ United Nations, *World Drug Report 2017*.

⁴ Brad Nicholson and Arnie Hammari, “Obscured in the Margins: Crime, Terrorism, and Rule of Law,” *The Norwich Review of International and Transnational Crime* 1, no. 2 (October 2016): , accessed September 19, 2017. 24.

⁵ Svante E. Cornell and Niklas LP Swanström “The Eurasian drug trade: A challenge to regional security,” *Problems of Post-Communism* 53, no. 4 (2006): 10-28. 20.

⁶ Gulzat Botoeva, “The monetization of social celebrations in rural Kyrgyzstan: on the uses of hashish money,” *Central Asian Survey* 34, no. 4 (2015): 531-548.”

Interviews are regarded as the primary means by which research will be conducted. Regarding interviews, this research aims to conduct 25-30 semi-structured interviews with UNODC and OSCE representatives in Bishkek. Of further interest are government and law enforcement agencies if possible, as well as socially-focussed NGOs. Regarding the latter, I am interested in religiously affiliated organizations. The decision to focus on “elites,” was made on concerns of access and safety, considering drug trafficking remains a sensitive subject in the Kyrgyz Republic, especially those whose livelihoods depend on cultivation of hashish crops.⁷ Outside of NGO and government representatives, this research further intends to gain academic perspectives on the issue of narcotics trafficking, with a specific emphasis on those who study politics and policy affairs in the Kyrgyz Republic. Beyond the scope of officially conducted interviews this research anticipates gaining significant insight into state and societal responses to narcotics-linked issues through affiliation with graduate students at AUCA. The goal of this collaboration is two-fold: gauge insight from younger members of Kyrgyzstani society, and collaborate as academic peers with local graduate students.

The products of this research are intended to be three-fold. In the immediate term, this research will be used to support a series of reports and papers to be submitted for presentation through the Central Asia Studies Institute at AUCA, as well as the national conferences of US-based academic organizations such as the American Association of Geographers, the Central Eurasian Studies Society, and the Middle East Studies Association. These papers and reports are also designed to serve as the basis for several articles submitted for publication and peer-review in journals. Finally, this research is designed to serve as the fieldwork component of a Master’s of Science in Geography thesis at the University of Arkansas, completion anticipated Spring 2019. Each product will benefit from research conducted and context gained in Kyrgyzstan, especially through the collaboration, access, and resources provided by CASI at AUCA.

References:

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⁷ Botoeva, "Hashish Money."