

# THE TIMES

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## **A better solution for the opium problem We must follow the Poppy for Medicine model in Afghanistan**

Sir, It is dangerously premature to declare that the tide has turned in the fight against opium production in Afghanistan ([“UN report hails progress in war against opium trade in Afghanistan”](#), Aug 27).

The small decrease in this year’s crop is due largely to the effects of severe drought throughout much of the country. Many farmers whose crops failed will now be forced to plant even more poppy in the coming season in order to pay off their debts. Moreover, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report shows that the consolidation of poppy cultivation is in the seven southern provinces of Afghanistan which form the Taleban’s heartlands. With the drug trade and the Taleban feeding off each other, both the international community’s counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics strategies in the country seem doomed to failure. Given the mutually supportive relationship between drugs and terror, there is an urgent need to include counter-narcotics policy as part of a development and counter-insurgency strategy.

In this regard, the Senlis Council’s Poppy for Medicine model would offer a new solution to the opium-terror nexus in Afghanistan. Under the council’s proposal, poppy cultivation would be licensed among Afghan rural communities for the local production of legal medicines such as morphine. This would help rural Afghans to earn a competitive wage as part of the legal economy, and win over hearts and minds that are currently lost to the Taleban.

As long as the international community fails to embrace such a scheme, neither the heroin on our streets nor the Nato bodybags in Afghanistan will recede from sight.

Jorrit Kamminga  
Senior policy analyst  
The Senlis Council