

Seeds of terror: how heroin is bankrolling the Taliban and al Qaeda. By Gretchen Peters. Oxford: Oneworld Publications. 2009. 300pp. Pb.: £12.99. ISBN 978 1 85168 723 7.

Opium: uncovering the politics of the poppy. By Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy. London: I. B. Tauris. 2009. 248pp. £19.50. ISBN 978 1 84511 973 7.

Although the books under review were both published in 2009, they continue to be highly relevant at a time when instability in Afghanistan is increasing and the country is slowly turning into a failed state due to drug-related crime, corruption and violence. From albeit different perspectives, both books address opium and its derivative heroin, and the wide-ranging geopolitical impact these drugs continue to have in the twenty-first century.

Seeds of terror is based on journalist Gretchen Peters's travels to Afghanistan and the wider region. The book is a reporter's account, containing interviews with different stakeholders such as Taleban fighters and drug traffickers, but also those trying to counter the illegal opium economy such as law enforcement and intelligence agents. It is a rather personal account, which gradually reveals how this vast shadow economy is deeply entrenched in the everyday life and politics of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and how it continues to fuel insurgency and terrorism.

Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy's *Opium: uncovering the politics of the poppy* provides more of an academic account of the history of opium and its consequences for the main producing countries around the world and draws extensively on previous publications by the author. The book is at its most interesting in the parts devoted to the question of how to deal with opium in Afghanistan, exploring ways in which the Taleban insurgency and the illegal opium economy are increasingly intertwined.

The linkages between the illegal opium economy and the operations of insurgent and terrorist networks are indisputably made in both books. Indeed, the United Nations estimates that the Taleban insurgency annually derives around US\$ 125 million from the opium trade. However, there is an underlying danger that the way Peters portrays the nexus between drugs, terror and insurgency in her book could reinforce the repressive and aggressive policies and the type of accompanying political rhetoric that have shaped the failed and destructive 'war on drugs' in the past decades. While this link is of real concern, overstating the connection between the illegal opium economy and these groups is hazardous: insurgent and terrorist groups tend to be highly pragmatic entities, tapping into any kind of funding source that is available to them, whether it is credit card fraud, arms trade, human trafficking, kidnapping or protection rackets.

Within this same context, Chouvy and Peters both draw attention to the phenomenon of 'narco-terrorism'; an ill-denominated concept that reinforces the problematic notion that the 'war on drugs' and the 'war on terror' are actually two sides of the same coin. While Chouvy states that there is no serious evidence for narco-terrorism in Afghanistan, Peters embraces the concept: 'Fuelled by drug money and joined at the hip with Al-Qaeda, the Taleban turned Afghanistan into the world's first fully fledged narco-terror state'. She devotes a whole chapter to this issue and argues that counter-narcotics efforts should be strategically embedded within the military counter-insurgency policy in Afghanistan. Chouvy is much more careful about merging both these policies: 'Fighting an alleged "narco-terrorist" threat implies fighting the consequences, rather than the causes, of two phenomena that have nothing to do with each other—one being a means of coping with economic difficulties; the other being a violent way to register political—and sometimes economic—claims'.

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In addition to Chouvy's thorough historic account of opium and its main producing countries, and the thought-provoking encounters from which Peters draws her information, what both books offer in terms of concrete solutions to the alarming situation in Afghanistan and how they address the negative spill-over effects of the illegal opium industry in terms of fuelling insurgency and terrorism is very different. Chouvy's answer lies in implementing the rule of law and promoting reconstruction and the broad economic and political development of the country. When it comes to the illicit opium production in Afghanistan, he argues that poppy farmers need alternative sources of income, but also access to land and credit. Peters offers no concrete solutions but argues that any plan to rid Afghanistan from its opium problem will fail until the Afghan government and international community can come up with an effective farm support network for legal alternatives.

The problem with both these options is that they are long-term efforts. Their positive impact will only reach Afghanistan's poppy farmers in fifteen to 30 years. Both authors also discuss the short-term solution of licensing poppy cultivation for the legal production of essential medicines such as morphine and codeine. Chouvy dismisses this option arguing that prices paid to farmers would not be high enough and warns that diversion towards illicit channels could be widespread on the basis of similar experiences in India. Peters concurs on the risk of diversion and adds the problematic security situation into the equation. She is also unsure of the level of interest from international pharmaceutical companies for an Afghan brand of morphine.

Despite these criticisms, at present the option of poppy licensing is the only short-term solution on the table. Dismissing its potential benefits in terms of boosting the rural economy and decreasing the insurgency's funding base before a thorough investigation takes place, is a wasted opportunity. We simply cannot wait another 20 years before the tables start to turn on Afghanistan's illegal opium economy. The current situation could not be worse with the full 100 per cent of Afghanistan's opium now destined for the illegal market, and a substantial part of it funding the coffers of the Taleban insurgency.

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Washington rules: America's path to permanent war. By Andrew J. Bacevich. New York: Henry Holt. 2010. 286pp. £17.99. ISBN 978 0 80509 141 0.

In his latest book, Andrew Bacevich offers an absorbing and convincing, if not especially original, critique of the excesses of American power and global strategy in the post-Second World War era. Fiercely critical of the methods and objectives of American power during this time, Bacevich's analysis focuses on how the United States acquired a position of such prominence and how the so-called 'Washington rules' that perpetuate this have been upheld by every administration—Republican or Democrat—from Truman to Obama. Ultimately, Bacevich concludes that America must 'com[e] home' (p. 229) and only employ military force as a last resort if its most vital interests are threatened.

Bacevich pursues themes that will be familiar to readers of his other books. In particular, he covers similar ground to 2008's *The limits of power* (Metropolitan), but this time the work is tighter and more convincing. Bacevich provides a trenchant critique of the existence of an untouchable bipartisan consensus that unquestioningly upholds the US position as the world's dominant superpower. For him, America's military posture has never just