

Opium poppy licensing in Turkey:

*A model to solve Afghanistan's
illegal opium economy?*



Research Paper

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January 2011

دارد راه خود سر هم به از به اشد به لند که چه قدر هو که وه

“No matter how tall the mountain is, there's a road to the top of it.”

(Afghan proverb in Dari)

The coin on the cover, dating from around 133 BC, was found in the ancient Greek town of Synnada, now occupied by the modern Turkish town of Şuhut in the province of Afyonkarahisar.

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Foreword

In the summer of 2005, the International Council on Security and Development (ICOS) launched a counter-narcotics policy proposal to licence Afghan opium poppy cultivation for the production of essential pain-killing medicines, such as morphine and codeine in Afghanistan. The proposal has since been fine-tuned and adapted to Afghanistan's rapidly changing security and development situation. ICOS calls for the implementation of a scientific pilot project which would evaluate whether Afghanistan's development and security could benefit in the short term from licensing poppy farmers to produce opium for the medicinal market; while at the same time turning the source of something 'bad' (the raw material for illegal drugs such as opium and heroin) into the source for something 'good' (essential analgesics such as codeine and morphine).

Although a poppy licensing scientific pilot project has yet to be implemented, the proposal has nevertheless received much attention and already caused positive spill-over effects by generating debate on the problematic situation and fate of the Afghan farming communities in Afghanistan. Moreover, the changes in the United States' counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan as announced in June 2009 may well lead to the implementation of a poppy licensing pilot project in the short to medium term. Such a step is urgently needed as the past nine years of international commitment to Afghanistan have not produced structural solutions to Afghanistan's illegal opium economy.

In the short term, the implementation of a poppy licensing system could be significant for Afghanistan's economic development process. It could help kick-start its rural economy in areas where few economic alternatives are available to poppy farmers. In other words, it could help bridge the existing gap between the situation today and the longer term scenario of having sufficient alternative livelihoods available to poppy farmers that produce both a sustainable and profitable income.

Of further significance, the implementation of poppy licensing in Afghanistan could be a game-changer for counter-narcotics policy in general. It would prove that it is possible to implement a positive approach that does not regard opium as the 'evil' illicit drug but endows poppy farmers with the possibility to turn opium poppy cultivation into a positive contribution to Afghan society and the world at large. As such, it could pave the way for more positive counter-narcotics policies around the world.

Policy change frequently comes one step at a time and it is often not clear which of the contributing factors proved to be decisive in reaching the so-called 'tipping point'.¹ A poppy licensing project in Afghanistan might well be the determining factor behind a systemic change of international counter-narcotics policy. The opportunity is there for the taking, waiting for strong political leadership to seize it.

¹ The term 'tipping point' is used here in the definition of Malcolm Gladwell: 'The name given to that one dramatic moment in an epidemic when everything can change all at once is the Tipping Point'. See: Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point. How little things can make a big difference* (London 2001), p. 9.

Introduction

To investigate the potential of poppy licensing for Afghanistan, it is useful to study the details of similar projects elsewhere. Two traditional producer countries, India and Turkey, currently have poppy licensing projects in place. In preparation for this research paper, a field research trip was undertaken to the poppy growing region of Afyon in Western Turkey. This field research trip, which took place in July 2009, combined meetings with the highest officials involved at the government level in Ankara with a visit to the processing factory in Bolvadin and a week-long visit to the poppy growing areas in the region of Afyon.

The visit to Turkey serves two purposes with regards to this research paper. Firstly, it sheds light on the details of a legal industry based on the licensing of poppy farmers to produce essential medicines. Secondly, it serves to illustrate the 'normality' of such an industry. The latter function is important. In Afghanistan, the opium poppy is still solely associated with illegal drug consumption, drug trafficking and crime. On the contrary, in Turkey (and also in India), opium poppies are regarded as both a traditional medicine and an essential part of a rich cooking tradition. As such, the poppy licensing industries in India and Turkey should be regarded less a direct example of how to implement a similar model in Afghanistan, but more as illustrations of an alternative, non-politicised way of looking at the opium poppy plant and its potential benefits.

To demonstrate how poppy licensing works in practice, Appendix I tells the story of the Turkish model through the use of photos taken during the field research trip to Turkey. The objective of this Appendix is to show both the agricultural and the culinary aspects of this industry.

Counter-narcotics policy

Counter-narcotics policy can traditionally be divided into demand and supply reduction strategies that should reinforce each other to address the global drug problem.² Demand strategies, often placed within a public health approach, focus on the prevention and treatment of drug abuse, and the rehabilitation and social reintegration of drug users. The objective is to decrease demand for illicit drugs, either by providing (young) people with information about

² In this research paper, the author will solely focus on illicit substances and will not take into account demand reduction strategies for licit substances such as alcohol or tobacco.

the negative effects of illicit drugs or by offering different treatment and rehabilitation interventions to help drug addicts stop taking illegal drugs.

Supply reduction is the other side of the coin of counter-narcotics policy. It consists *inter alia* of alternative economic development (e.g. providing alternative sources of income for poppy and coca farmers), crop eradication (the destruction of drug-producing crops) and other law enforcement policies such as interdiction targeting drug traffickers and others involved in the production chain of illegal drugs. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) uses the following definition for supply reduction:

“A broad term used for a range of activities designed to stop the production, manufacture and distribution of illicit drugs. Production can be curtailed through crop eradication or through large programmes of alternative development. Production (illicit manufacture) is attacked directly through the suppression of illicit laboratories and/or the control of precursor chemicals while distribution is reduced through police and customs, and in some countries by military operations.”³

Supply reduction strategies obviously aim to reduce supply with the side objective of raising the prices of illegal substances. Higher prices in turn should in theory lead to lower demand so both approaches in principle go hand in hand.

The combined application of demand and supply reduction strategies is known as the ‘balanced approach’ as confirmed at the level of the United Nations in 1998 in its Political Declaration.⁴ Although member states appear to agree on the need to implement a balanced approach, there is much disagreement on the general approach to drugs: While some countries favour a more repressive, moral or prohibitionist approach to illicit drugs, others support a more public health-based approach or advocate for the legalisation or regulation of some type of drugs. The many different stances and viewpoints between and within countries to make it impossible to discuss this issue in detail in this paper. What is important to note at this stage is that the field of counter-narcotics policy remains a highly politicised and extremely divided field of politics.

³ Ibidem, p. 69.

⁴ United Nations, *Political Declaration* [online]. Available at: <http://www.un.org/ga/20special/poldecla.htm>.

The concept of poppy licensing

Within the demand and supply reduction dichotomy of counter-narcotics policy, poppy licensing falls within the latter category. As a supply-reduction strategy it can be categorised as part of the family of so-called 'alternative development' or 'alternative livelihood strategies'. Such strategies aim to promote, introduce (or reintroduce) legal alternative crops which allow farmers to switch from opium cultivation towards activities within the legal economy. At the level of the United Nations, countries have agreed on the importance of this approach:

*"Alternative development is an important component of a balanced and comprehensive drug control strategy and is intended to create a supportive environment for the implementation of that strategy. It is intended to promote lawful and sustainable socio-economic options for those communities and population groups that have resorted to illicit cultivation as their only viable means of obtaining a livelihood, contributing in an integrated way to the eradication of poverty. However, cumulative efforts and methods of planning and implementation need further improvement to strengthen the existing processes and to implement new and innovative alternative development programmes."*⁵

The last part of this quotation, the mention of the need to implement new and innovative alternative development programmes, is of particular interest because it fits well with the notion of poppy licensing as a potential new element of alternative livelihood strategies in Afghanistan.

The licensing of opium poppy cultivation does not constitute a strategy to substitute a drug-producing crop by another; an 'alternative' crop. Instead, it uses the same crop, in this case the *papaver somniferum L.* or opium poppy, but puts it to different, legal uses. While using the same crop, it shifts cultivation, production and trade related to the crop from the illegal to the legal market. This 'alternative' model of 'alternative development' brings with it two major concerns. Firstly, proposing a licensing scheme to support the cultivation of such a highly stigmatised product as opium attracts more political opposition and criticism than for

⁵ United Nations, *Action Plan on International Cooperation on the Eradication of Illicit Drug Crops and on Alternative Development*, Resolution: A/RES/S-20/4 (8 September 1998).

example, a project proposal to shift from coca cultivation to organic coffee in Colombia or Peru, or to shift from opium poppy cultivation to pistachio nuts in Afghanistan.

Secondly, the use of raw materials (coca or opium) that are used for the production of illicit drugs, automatically demands more security and control mechanisms to prevent the raw material or end products from being diverted towards illegal channels. In practice, this means that poppy licensing in India and Turkey cannot exist without serious safeguards, for example in the form of hundreds of security officers controlling the projects.

If the involved risks are greater when countries substitute illegal cultivation with legal cultivation of the same crop, why would they simply not prefer to shift towards other alternative crops? There are four important reasons why countries may prefer to choose to (continue to) grow opium poppies or coca bushes, excluding the comparative advantages derived from factors strictly related to the illicit market, e.g. a higher market price because of the illegal or black market tax⁶, a guaranteed market for the farmer, and automatic marketing channels from the farm-gate to the market.

Firstly, other crops may not be available or are unable to grow in a given area. Compared to other crops, the opium poppy has a number of important comparative advantages. For example, it can grow on almost any kind of soil and⁷ the crop is relatively drought-resistant, requiring less water than many other crops.⁸ In addition, opium can be considered a low-weight, high-value product because it is non-perishable, converting the raw opium into a source of credit for the resource poor.⁹ Lastly, because of these comparative advantages, the opium poppy is a near-perfect crop for conflict or post-conflict areas where the rural infrastructure has been seriously damaged or destroyed by war. Afghanistan's security environment, its weak government institutions and a lack of rule of law make the country an ideal place to grow a crop that is both hardy and highly profitable.¹⁰

⁶ The 'black market tax' can be described as the higher price paid for an illegal commodity, because it includes the costs of all risks taken by the actors in the supply chain as they are breaking the law.

⁷ *Opium. Uncovering the Politics of the Poppy*, p. 125.

⁸ USAID, *Alternative Development Program for Northeast Afghanistan (Adp/N). Economic Analysis of Net Returns to Opium Poppy, Wheat and Vegetables* (Badakhshan, 2007), p. 10, [online]. Available at: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADL784.pdf.

⁹ David Mansfield, *Afghanistan: The Failure of Quid Pro Quo*. Paper prepared for the International Conference on Alternative Development in drug control and cooperation, Feldafing, January 7-12, 2002 (August 2001).

¹⁰ The World Bank, *Afghanistan – State Building, Sustaining Growth, and Reducing Poverty* (Washington 2005), p. 113.

Secondly, poppy cultivation is economically (and therefore politically) important. It is highly labour-intensive, especially during harvest time.¹¹ The estimates of the labour requirements for poppy cultivation in Afghanistan range from 300 to 486 person days per hectare.¹² It is an industry that depends to a large extent on itinerant wage labourers that travel from harvest to harvest.¹³ The demand for itinerant labour involves weeding and harvesting the opium poppy crop. As an example, the 2003-2004 growing season (131,000 hectares of opium poppy) was estimated to generate about 46 million labour days of which a third would have involved hired labour.¹⁴ This labour-intensity means that in some areas it is difficult to replace illegal poppy cultivation with other less labour-intensive economic activities. The history of poppy licensing in Turkey, detailed further below, is a clear example of this.

Thirdly, related to the previous argument, even within the legal economy, opium poppies can still provide farmers with a higher income than other crops as it is the raw material for medicines which often benefit from a high economic mark-up value. Especially in the face of growing HIV/AIDS and cancer epidemics in the world, there is more and more need for painkilling medicine such as morphine. Next to existing demand, there are vast unmet needs of morphine around the world where, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 80% has little to no access to essential analgesics.¹⁵

Fourthly, a country may have a strong (local) tradition of poppy cultivation sometimes going back thousands of years. If the opium poppy is well established in the cultural traditions of a country or region, it may be almost impossible or simply not desirable to remove all poppy cultivation. While also summarising the previous three points, James W. Spain describes the cultural role of opium poppy for the case of Turkey where the plant had been an integral part of the way of life for thousands of years:

¹¹ It does not matter so much which harvest method is used. The 'lancing' method used in Afghanistan, carving small cuts in the bulbs of the poppies and afterwards collecting the opium that comes oozing out is most labour-intensive. However, the 'Turkish' method of harvesting, collecting the bulbs of the poppy plants, is also still mostly done by hand.

¹² UNDCP, *An analysis of the process of expansion of opium cultivation into new districts in Afghanistan*. UNDCP Afghanistan Programme, Strategic Study Number 5 (1999).

¹³ UNDCP, *Access to Labour: The Role of Opium in the Livelihood Strategies of Itinerant Harvesters Working in Helmand Province, Afghanistan*, Strategic Study Number 5 (June 1999).

¹⁴ David Mansfield, *Diversity and Dilemma: Understanding Rural Livelihoods and Addressing the Causes of Opium Poppy Cultivation in Nangarhar and Laghman, Eastern Afghanistan*, GTZ Project for Alternative Livelihoods in Eastern Afghanistan: Internal Document No. 2 (December 2004).

¹⁵ World Health Organization, *Briefing note, "Access to Controlled Medications Programme,"* (September 2008).

“[I]t provided the main cash crop. Opium gum, which lasts almost indefinitely, is stored from year to year toward a daughter's dowry or other anticipated essential expenditure. Apart from the profits to be had from the narcotic gum, the young leaves were a favourite salad ingredient. The seeds flavoured the local bread. When pressed they made the oil in which food was cooked. The stalks of the plant provided cattle fodder and fuel for the household [and the roofing material]. During the brief harvest period for the gum, otherwise excess skilled labour, much of it female, was utilized profitably in incising and scrapping the poppy pods. In some remote and impoverished mountain villages, the poppy was the only crop that made a subsistence existence possible. To Afyon [the opium region in Turkey], the very name means opium in Turkish, and the other hardcore provinces, the poppy meant at least as much as tobacco to Kentucky.”¹⁶

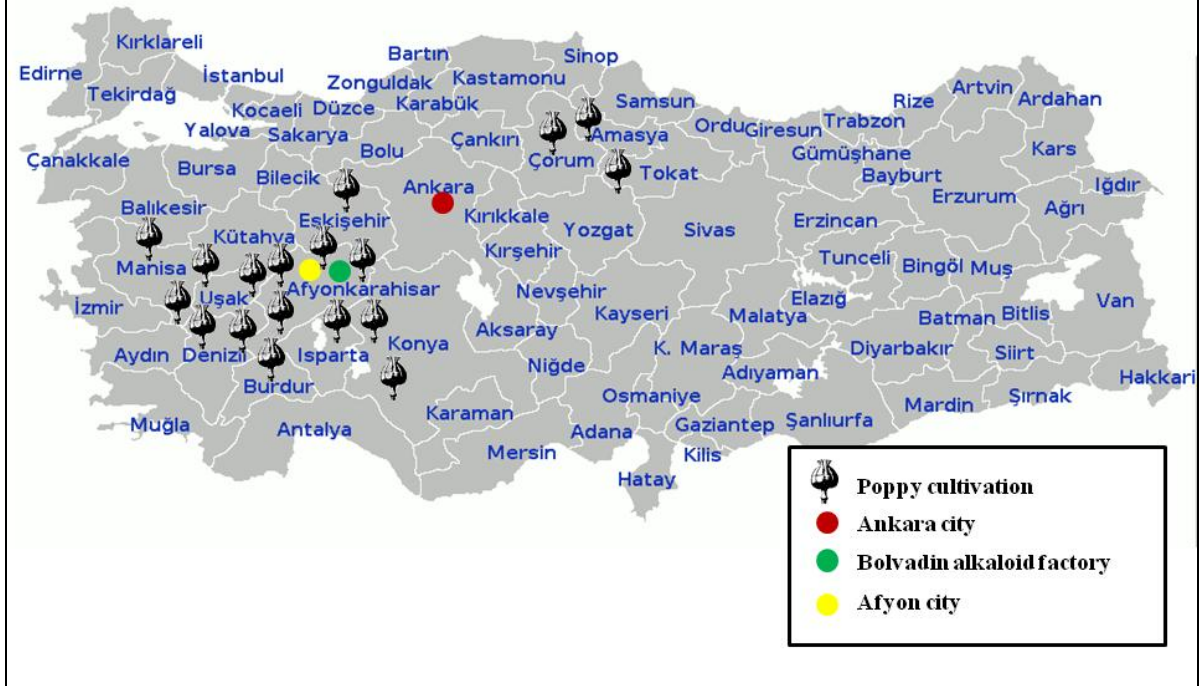
As mentioned above, it is precisely this cultural tradition, that often goes hand in hand with opium poppy cultivation, which could help to de-stigmatise or normalise the use of the plant in agricultural societies. Opium need not be condemned to being ‘bad’, and could be regarded as a source of ‘good’ in traditional uses that go back hundreds of years.

Based on the field research trip undertaken in July 2009 and on previous work conducted by the author¹⁷, the chapters below will look at the specifics of poppy licensing as implemented since the early 1970s in Turkey and supported by the United States in the form of a preferential trade agreement or the ‘80-20 Rule’. The first Chapter will look at the political history of poppy licensing in Turkey. Chapter 2 provide a succinct account of some of the traditional uses of poppies as witnessed by the author during the field research. Chapter 3 will then offer an analysis of the economic benefits of the system to Turkey, whilst Chapter 4 will finally intend to draw some lessons from the Turkish model for the possible implementation of a similar model in Afghanistan. Finally, Appendix I of this research report contains an impression of the Turkish licensing system in the form of photos taken during the field research in Afyon, Turkey. Below is a map of the main poppy growing areas in present-day Turkey.

¹⁶ James W. Spain, ‘The United States, Turkey and the Poppy’, *Middle East Journal*, vol 29, No. 3 (Summer 1975), p. 305.

¹⁷ The author of this paper conducted an earlier study on Turkey based on desk research: Jorrit Kamminga, *Case Study. The Political History of Turkey's Opium Licensing System for the Production of Medicines. Lessons for Afghanistan* (May 2006).

Map 3: Turkey's main opium poppy cultivating areas (2010)



*Map constructed by the author. The basic province map is taken from:
commons.wikimedia.org.*

1. The political history of poppy licensing in Turkey

While the tradition of poppy cultivation goes back thousands of years, Turkey's opium only started to become of real international concern in about 1900 when the international community, led by the United States, started to move towards an international drug control regime. Initial steps led to convening an international opium commission in Shanghai in 1909 and drafting of the The Hague International Opium Convention in 1912.¹⁸ This Convention, gaining near-universal adherence after 1919, was seen as far from perfect, but it contained the basic elements of a comprehensive drug control treaty and functioned effectively as an advocacy tool, for example, with regards to its provisions on the dangerous practices of opium smoking and the non-medical trade in opium and other drugs.¹⁹

As early as 1923, the American Consul General in Istanbul suggested that Turkey could be convinced to substitute its poppies for suitable alternatives such as silk.²⁰ Following increased international pressure to control the production and sales of narcotics, in 1933, Turkey turned the production and marketing of opium into a state monopoly.²¹ In 1937, Turkish President Kemal Atatürk, expressed his concern about Turkish opium circulating as a 'poison' in the world, and suggested sugar beets as an alternative crop.²² In 1953, Turkey and six other countries were authorised by the United Nations to produce opium for export under the so-called Opium Protocol. In the same year this resulted in the establishment of Turkey's first poppy licensing system and by 1958 42 of Turkey's 67 provinces were cultivating opium poppies.²³

¹⁸ *The Turkish-American relationship between 1947 and 2003*, p. 220

¹⁹ UNODC website, *The 1912 Hague International Opium Convention*, [online]. Available at: <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/frontpage/the-1912-hague-international-opium-convention.html>.

²⁰ *The United States, Turkey and the Poppy*, pp. 296, 297.

²¹ *The Turkish-American relationship between 1847 and 2003*, p. 220.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 220.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 220.

Table 1 below shows the amount of poppy growing provinces since 1958.

Table 1: The decreasing number of (licensed) poppy growing provinces in Turkey (1958-2010)	
1958-1961	42
1961-1963	30
1963-1966	25
1966-1967	21
1967-1968	18
1968-1969	11
1969-1970	9
1970-1971	7
1971-1972	4
1972-1974 (opium ban)	officially 0
1974-1975	6 and 4 towns
2000-2001	5
2009-2010	13 ²⁴

However, the concern of the United States increased again soon afterwards as reports came out that too much Turkish opium was entering the illegal market.²⁵ As a result, the political pressure on Turkey from the United States increased considerably. The 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs²⁶, coming into force in 1964, became an additional diplomatic tool for the United States to pressurize Turkey on the opium issue.²⁷ This pressure came to new heights when (domestic) opium and heroin use in the United States started to increase during the time of the Vietnam War. The United States needed a scapegoat for its domestic heroin addiction problem and Turkey seemed to be an easy target. President Nixon's

²⁴ The opium poppy growing provinces in 2010 were Afyon, Amasya, Burdur, Çorum, Denizli, Isparta, Kütahya, Tokat, Uşak, Balıkesir, Eskişehir, Konya and Manisa.

²⁵ Ibidem, pp. 220, 221.

²⁶ The Turkish Parliament ratified the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs in December 1966 and Turkey formally acceded to this treaty on 22nd of June, 1967.

²⁷ *The Turkish-American relationship between 1847 and 2003*, p. 221.

administration erroneously²⁸ believed (or perhaps wanted to believe) that around 80% of the heroin entering the United States came from Turkey.²⁹ The United States started to consider narcotics addiction to be a serious threat to national stability, a threat that could be partly resolved by eradicating opium production abroad in Turkey.³⁰ As a result, in 1969, stopping Turkish opium production became a top priority for the United States:

*“What is needed is a major diplomatic initiative, accompanied by economic inducements, and if need be, sanctions designed to get Turkey (...) out of the business.”*³¹

As economic incentives, or ‘carrots’, the United States offered Turkey several bilateral aid schemes and promises to buy up the entire Turkish opium poppy crop in 1969 and compensate the farmers for the loss of their livelihoods, a compensation package amounting to US\$ 5 million for the 1970 opium poppy crop.³² The United States also offered to help Turkey obtain more international help and access to loans and other assistance.³³

However, the Turkish Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel responded to the US pressure that complete eradication was not possible, due to two reasons: 1) poppy oil was too important to Turkey and 2) a ban on poppy cultivation would be impossible to control for the Turkish government:

²⁸ Next to southwest Asia, a lot of the heroin entering the US market came from southeast Asia (Burma, Laos and Thailand).

²⁹ Daniel P. Moynihan, ‘Memorandum for Honorable John N. Mitchell, Attorney General’ (18 September 1969), in: US Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations, 1969-1976*, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972, Chapter 3 ‘US Policy towards International Production and Trafficking in Illegal Drugs, [online]. Available at: <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve01/ch3>.

³⁰ Henry Kissinger, ‘Memo: Study of Means to Stop International Traffic in Heroin (29 September 1969), in: *Foreign Relations, 1969-1976*, Volume E-1, Documents on Global Issues, 1969-1972, Chapter 3 ‘US Policy towards International Production and Trafficking in Illegal Drugs, [online]. Available at: <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve01/ch3>.

³¹ Daniel P. Moynihan, ‘Memorandum for Honorable John N. Mitchell, Attorney General’ (18 September 1969).

³² *The Turkish-American relationship between 1847 and 2003*, p. 225.

³³ W.P. Rogers, ‘Telegram 110121, From the Department of State to the Embassy in Turkey’ (19 June 1971), in *Foreign Relations*.

*“How can we tell several hundred farmers just to forget their poppy plantings? In many places poppies are grown for their oil which is an important part of farmers’ diet. (...) It is impossible to go to the farmers and ask them to plough under their crops, we cannot control it. The poppies will just appear illegally.”*³⁴

Thus, it was politically and technically difficult for the Turkish government to bow under the pressure of the United States and it deemed the US demands insensitive to Turkey’s domestic politics. Nevertheless, the United States could not give in easily, as President Nixon had promised the US Congress that his Administration would actively address America’s heroin problem.³⁵ Therefore, as negotiations with Turkey reached a deadlock and the US promises of aid and compensation packages did not have the desired effect, the United States moved to apply the *stick* instead of the *carrot* to try to move Turkey into the desired direction.

The United States started threatening Turkey to stop its American bilateral development aid programme and implement serious economic and military sanctions if Turkey would not agree to completely eradicate its poppy cultivation.³⁶ This was a serious threat as the US military grant programme amounted to US\$ 100 million a year for Turkey, and the country annually received US\$ 40 million in aid and another US\$ 20 million in food aid.³⁷ However, the Turkish Government did not give in. When the United States offered another financial compensation package in return for poppy eradication, the Turkish government continued to emphasise the political weight of 70,000 poppy farming families relying on the poppy crop for their survival and the possibility of political instability following eradication.

³⁴ Ambassador William J. Handley, ‘Telegram 7775, From the Embassy in Turkey to the Department of State’ (17 November 1969), in: *Foreign Relations*.

³⁵ US Department of State, ‘Telegram 108468, From the Department of State to All Diplomatic Posts’ (17 June 1971), in: *Foreign Relations*.

³⁶ US Secretary of State, ‘Memorandum from Secretary of State Rogers to President Nixon’ (28 July 1970), in: *Foreign Relations*.

³⁷ Food aid was delivered under the ‘Food for Peace’ Program, which was (partly) created to help solve the problem of enormous US farm surpluses.

Prime Minister Demirel stated that:

*“eradication would create a clash between the government forces and the people, and would make the problem worse, since it would create public support for plantings.”*³⁸

Political instability indeed was an issue and memos from around this time indicate that the Nixon administration was well aware that more pressure on Turkey could easily topple the Demirel Government.³⁹ What eventually did topple the Demirel Government was its increased internal problems resulting in a Turkish military coup in March 1971.⁴⁰ But by then, the Turkish Government had already begun actively dealing with its problem of illegal opium production and trafficking. It had prepared a strict licensing and control law in accordance with the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, which was eventually passed in August 1971 and the Turkish administration had increased the government price for legal opium and expanded the system of government collection to enable improved control.⁴¹

In return for additional poppy crop eradication, the new Turkish government under Nihat Erim's premiership tried unsuccessfully to negotiate a preferential trade agreement for its textiles and leather goods.⁴² Eventually, it accepted an offer from the United States of US\$ 35 million (over three years) together with the, earlier stated promise that the US would use its influence with international institutions such as the World Bank to make loans and other forms of assistance available to Turkey.⁴³ In return, the Turkish Government committed to three actions:

1. To prohibit all planting, cultivation or production of the opium poppy after 30 June 1972;
2. To purchase the entire opium poppy crop that would be planted in the autumn of 1971 and;
3. To pass legislation prohibiting all future poppy farming in Turkey after June 1972.

³⁸ US Embassy in Turkey, 'Telegram 1957, From the Embassy in Turkey to the Department of State' (2 April 1970), in: *Foreign Relations*.

³⁹ Bureau of Intelligence and Research, 'Intelligence Note, Turkey: Waiting for the New Government's Opium Program' (30 April 1971), in: *Foreign Relations*.

⁴⁰ *The Turkish-American relationship between 1847 and 2003*, p. 229.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 231, 232.

⁴² Kamminga, Jorrit, *Case Study. The Political History of Turkey's Opium Licensing System for the Production of Medicines. Lessons for Afghanistan* (May 2006), p. 10.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 10.

Following the Turkish Government's opium decree of 30th of June, 1971, the Turkish Prime Minister Erim explained the decision as follows:

*“In countries where health is endangered through this opium, because smuggling cannot be prevented in Turkey, anti-Turkish opinions are created. The measures to be applied to control smuggling are extremely expensive (...). Our nation, which is known for its honesty and integrity, is now under grave accusation. The time when we must end the placing of blame for deaths in other countries on Turkey is so long overdue (...). [Therefore], our government forbids completely the planting of poppies.”*⁴⁴

He also announced poppy farmers would be compensated and investments would be made in the poppy growing areas to provide new sources of income for the poppy farmers. What becomes clear from the above statement is that Turkey's move towards an opium ban in 1971 was motivated by the role Turkey could play in serving humanity by ending suffering abroad, while saving the prestige of Turkey in the eyes of the international community.⁴⁵ The US official reaction also hinted at this, as President Nixon declared that Turkey:

*“would abandon a traditional agricultural practice in order to make a significant contribution to the well-being of the world.”*⁴⁶

However, from the Turkish political point of view, it is more likely that the poppy ban aimed to strengthen bilateral relations with the United States as the Erim government, which did not have much parliamentary and popular support at home, did not want to risk losing US support.⁴⁷

The bilateral relationship between Turkey and the United States indeed improved following the poppy ban, but the Turkish Prime Minister remained very concerned that the political tension created by the ban would bring down his government.⁴⁸ At the same time, while the US Government was optimistic that it had successfully solved the Turkish opium problem in the short term, it commented in 1972 that the sustainability of the opium ban

⁴⁴ *The Turkish-American relationship between 1847 and 2003*, p. 236.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 237.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 237.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 237.

⁴⁸ US Embassy in Turkey, 'Telegram 4441, From the US Embassy in Turkey to the Department of State' (27 June 1971), in: *Foreign Relations*.

would depend in the longer term on the success of the agricultural programme in producing sustainable and profitable livelihoods for the Turkish poppy farmers.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the bilateral agreement was carried out as foreseen. The United States transferred US\$ 20 million of the total of US\$ 35 million by July 1974 and in mid-1972 gave another US\$ 300,000 to the Turkish Soil Products Office to assist its campaign to control and collect the opium harvest during the final growing season of that year.⁵⁰

Problems started to occur when Turkish officials and public opinion argued that the aid and compensation package was not enough to recompense Turkey for the loss of its important industry.⁵¹ At the same time, allegedly, the Turkish Government only transferred US\$ 2 million from the initial US\$ 10 million it had received to the Turkish poppy farmers. The remaining funds were said to have gone into government planning or were reserved for other purposes.⁵² Lastly, not enough attention was paid to research and investment into alternative livelihoods and the United States decided that it did not want to get too involved in the development programme for the Turkish poppy-growing regions.⁵³

The comparative advantages of the opium poppy crop seemed to make it impossible to successfully substitute this crop. It was the only autumn-sown crop, which meant that it was difficult to replace it with spring crops such as cotton, maize, sugar beets or tobacco.⁵⁴ In some areas, the soil and water conditions were so poor that farmers could only grow opium poppies.⁵⁵ Thus, faced with limited foreign assistance, growing difficulties to find suitable alternative crops, and no real improvements in the lives of the Turkish farmers, the Turkish poppy ban soon became unsustainable. In the run-up to the 1973 general elections in Turkey, many of the country's political parties campaigned to remove the deeply unpopular opium ban.⁵⁶

The sentiments were so strong that resuming poppy cultivation became a matter of national honour and prestige.⁵⁷ At the same time, in the United States it started to become clear that there was little indication that the heroin addiction problem was decreasing

⁴⁹ US Secretary of State, 'Letter from Secretary of State Rogers to Secretary of the Treasury Schultz' (20 June 1972), in *Foreign Relations*.

⁵⁰ *The Turkish-American relationship between 1847 and 2003*, p. 239.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, p. 239.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 239.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 240.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 240.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 240.

⁵⁶ *Case Study. The Political History of Turkey's Opium Licensing System for the Production of Medicines. Lessons for Afghanistan*, p. 11.

⁵⁷ *The Turkish-American relationship between 1847 and 2003*, p. 244.

following the opium ban in Turkey, which slowly led to the conclusion that 80% of the heroin on the United States market probably did not come from Turkey. Instead, as a negative side effect of the opium ban in Turkey, a world shortage of medicinal opium developed and international pharmaceutical companies, particularly strong in the United States, started lobbying the US Administration to solve the situation.⁵⁸

However, despite the increased tensions in Turkey, the United States continued to put pressure on Turkey to maintain the opium ban, but this proved to no avail as the new Turkish government, under Prime Minister Ecevit, announced in March 1974 that it would resume poppy cultivation soon.⁵⁹ About three months later, on 1st of July 1974, the Turkish Government announced that it would resume cultivation in seven provinces⁶⁰, starting in the fall of 1974.⁶¹ The Turkish opium ban that had survived only three years since its implementation in June 1971 had become history.

Confronted with the unpopularity of the opium ban with poppy farmers and the Turkish nationalists, who felt that the opium ban was forced upon Turkey by the United States, the United States was, as early as February 1974, anticipating the possible resumption of Turkish poppy cultivation and internally discussed the possibility of strictly controlled legal production.⁶² While the United States did not know whether the Turkish government could really control such a licensing industry and thought that state farms would probably not include all the farmers that were growing poppies before 1971, it saw three clear advantages of a poppy licensing system in Turkey:⁶³

1. Controlled state production would solve part of the tensions caused by the nationalists that opposed the opium ban;
2. Licensed production would avoid the probable worldwide shortage of medicinal opium caused by the opium ban;
3. Resuming production with proper controls would free the United States from the endless demands of Turkey for financial compensation.

⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 244.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, p. 245.

⁶⁰ Afyon, Burdur, Denizli, Isparta, Kütahya, Usak and four towns of Konya.

⁶¹ Ibidem, p. 245.

⁶² National Security Council, Memorandum from Harold Saunders and Henry Applebaum of the National Security Council Staff to Secretary of State Kissinger (15 February 1974), in: *Foreign Relations*.

⁶³ Ibidem.

Nevertheless, the United States once again tried to put diplomatic pressure on Turkey stating that even the smallest amount of poppy growing was likely to have serious negative consequences for the bilateral relationship between the two countries.⁶⁴ However, the Ecevit Government did not change its decision to resume production although it assured the United States that it would limit and control it.⁶⁵ As a result, the United States moved to its second-best strategy: "seeking to ensure minimum growing under maximum security".⁶⁶ Cutting off all development aid to Turkey was not really an option for the United States as this would have decreased its ability to cooperate with the Turkish authorities in preventing Turkish heroin from reaching American streets.⁶⁷

In six-and-a-half provinces, the Turkish Government planned to give small farmers plots of 0.5 hectares. In 1974, poppy cultivation was taking place on about 80,000 of the allowed 100,000 hectares. The Turkish Government measured all the fields, checked whether more was planted than the license allowed for, and if necessary destroyed parts of the fields and consequently withdrew the license.⁶⁸ Prime Minister Demirel stated in 1975:

*"We have also checked every poppy head to be sure that no incisions were made before the plant was harvested. The Government buys all the plants and we paid 20 Lira which is a very attractive price. It amounts to about 1,000 Lira per hectare to the farmer and we think the program will be very successful."*⁶⁹

Following the Turkish opium ban of 1971, Turkey indeed switched from lancing the opium poppy pods (by making incisions in the pods after which the opium starts oozing out) to cutting the whole plant and shipping it off to be processed abroad. At the time, Turkey still did not have an alkaloid processing factory. The United States believed that the new method of processing the entire plant instead of risking diversion of the opium gum was a good way to control drug trafficking.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ US Embassy in Turkey, 'Telegram from the Embassy in Turkey to the Department of State' (2 July 1974), in: *Foreign Relations*.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ Ibidem.

⁶⁷ National Security Council, Memorandum from Harold E. Horan of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs Scowcroft (10 July 1974), in *Foreign Relations*.

⁶⁸ Prime Minister Demirel in a conversation with President Ford and Secretary Kissinger at the Ambassador's residence in Helsinki (31 July 1975).

⁶⁹ Ibidem.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

Nevertheless, given the difficulties of controlling the small plots of individual farmers in several provinces, the United States saw the establishment of an adequate control system as the only way to minimise the damages done by resumption of opium production in Turkey.⁷¹ Subsequently, the United States applied a renewed policy of *sticks* and *carrots*. On the one hand, it started advising Turkey on the best way to establish a control system, while on the other hand, it threatened the Turkish Government with the application of Section 481 of the US Foreign Assistance Act, which required the President to suspend all assistance to a country if he believed that that its government did not take appropriate measures to prevent narcotic drugs from entering the US market.⁷²

In September 1974, the Turkish Government had informed the United Nations that it would permit the licensed cultivation of opium poppies under a controlled system.⁷³ Upon the official request of Turkey, the United Nations then moved to grant the Turkish Government technical assistance for the construction of a poppy processing plant, as well as resources for the control of licensed poppy cultivation, training assistance and equipment for the law enforcement agencies.⁷⁴ The assistance of the United Nations can be considered as an acknowledgement and compensation for Turkey for the elimination the possibility of opium diversion towards illicit channels.⁷⁵ This was achieved with the introduction of a new method of harvesting poppies, the 'poppy straw process'.⁷⁶ Turkey finished the construction of its Opium Alkaloids Plant in 1981, a processing plant in Bolvadin with the capacity to annually process 20,000 tons of un-lanced capsules of the poppy plant.⁷⁷ Until that time, it had exported the harvested, un-incised poppies to Western Europe for processing.⁷⁸

To further support the licensed poppy industry in Turkey, in 1979, the United Nations requested the countries that were manufacturing opium-based medicines to purchase their narcotic raw materials from the traditional producing countries such as India and Turkey.

⁷¹ National Security Council, Interdepartmental Group for Europe, *Turkish Opium Poppy Ban* (16 July 1974), in: *Foreign Relations*.

⁷² *Ibidem*.

⁷³ UNODC, 'Poppy cultivation under properly controlled conditions so as to meet the world's requirements of opium for medical and scientific purposes', *Bulletin on Narcotics*, Issue 3 (1975), , [online]. Available at: http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin_1975-01-01_3_page004.html#s120.

⁷⁴ UNODC, 'Elimination of opium production', *Bulletin on Narcotics*, Issue 4 (1983), [online]. Available at: http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin_1983-01-01_4_page002.html.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁶ *The Turkish-American relationship between 1847 and 2003*, p. 249.

⁷⁷ TMO, *Poppy and Alkaloid Affairs*, Brochure (no date). In possession of the author.

⁷⁸ *The Turkish-American relationship between 1847 and 2003*, p. 249.

ECOSOC Resolution E/RES/1979/8 states:

*“Calls upon importing countries, in so far as their constitutions and legal authority permit, to support the traditional supply countries and give all possible practical assistance in preventing the proliferation of producing and manufacturing sources for export.”*⁷⁹

Two years later, in 1981, the United States gave legislative effect to this request of the United Nations by extending ‘special protected market status’ to India and Turkey under the, above mentioned, Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) Regulation known as the ‘80-20 Rule’.⁸⁰ In July 1981, a team of American representatives of the pharmaceutical industry and officials from the DEA arrived in Turkey to make sure the pharmaceutical factory started operating under the right conditions.⁸¹ In the end, the commercial interests of the big pharmaceutical companies in the United States prevailed over concerns about Turkish heroin entering the American market. Turkey was not given an individual quota for the US market, but it was decided that, together with India, it could supply 80% of the US needs for opiate raw materials.⁸²

In conclusion, when it became clear that eradicating all Turkish poppy cultivation was technically difficult and politically very sensitive in Turkey, the United States moved from putting political pressure on the Turkish Government to a more pragmatic policy that supported the second-best scenario: licensed production under a strictly controlled system. The support of the United Nations and the American ‘80-20 Rule’ then helped to firmly establish and sustain the Turkish poppy licensing industry up to the present.

⁷⁹ United Nations, Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), *Resolution 1979/8: Maintenance of a world-wide balance between the supply of narcotic drugs and the legitimate demand for those drugs for medical and scientific purposes* (9 May 1979), [online]. Available at: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/638/28/IMG/NR063828.pdf?OpenElement>.

⁸⁰ *Drug Enforcement Agency Regulation Law 1312.13.*

⁸¹ *The Turkish-American relationship between 1847 and 2003*, p. 250.

⁸² *Ibidem*, p. 250.

2. The traditional uses of poppies in Turkey

Opium poppies have been grown by Turkish farmers in the area of Anatolia for centuries.⁸³ As a medicine and food crop, opium poppies have been used in Turkey for thousands of years and they have become part of a strong Turkish tradition. The seeds (*haşhaş* in Turkish) and the oil obtained from the seeds are used for culinary purposes. The image of the poppy plant can be found as a symbol in paintings and other decoration, especially in Afyon, the main opium-growing area in Turkey, which means 'opium' in Turkish. As the Turkish farmer Mohamet Dogan (60) explains:

*"It is a product that we cannot give up, it is part of our life. (...) My father, grandfather and his grandfather have all grown the opium poppy. I started as a child. I grew in the opium fields; it is part of my blood."*⁸⁴

Although opium poppies are beautiful with their white or purple flowers (*haşhaş çiçeği*), the poppy farmers are particularly interested in the poppy seeds. The poppy capsules are handed over to the local TMO representatives, but only after all the seeds have been taken out. In fact, a conversation at the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Ankara, indicated that there is ongoing research into new poppy varieties that would yield more seeds. After the opium ban ended in 1974, seeds from the seed bank of the University of Ankara were used to reintroduce poppies in Turkey. There are thousands of seed types and they all have different uses. For example, the TMO provides the farmers with seeds for new opium poppies while the seeds that the farmers produce themselves are mostly used for food crops.

According to the TMO, the average size of a poppy field (*haşhaş tarlası*) is 0.7 hectares. Entire Turkish families, including women and children, help with the cultivation and harvesting of poppies. The harvesting is still mostly done by hand which means the poppy licensing industry is highly labour-intensive. Harvesting about 0.3 hectares may take an entire family up to three full days without a poppy collecting machine, after which, ten days later another round of harvesting needs to take place to collect the last pods. The poppy pods or capsules are taken from the stem and collected in big bags or plastic buckets. Afterwards, the

⁸³ *The Turkish-American relationship between 1847 and 2003*, p. 219.

⁸⁴ Dorian Jones, 'Government-Controlled Opium Production is Way of Life in Turkey', *Voice of America* (1 July 2008).

Pods are crushed to take out the seeds, before the poppy pods are sold to and delivered at the local TMO agencies. Forty % of the weight of the poppy pod is the capsule itself, while the remaining 60% of the weight constitutes the seeds inside. Locally, the *mukhtar*, type of an elected governor or district chief, is responsible for controlling the poppy fields in his district. Seeds, which provide the most important livelihood derived from the opium poppies, can be bought in local seed shops and are used at home or in village bakeries. The seeds can be found in three main varieties: 1) *sari*; 2) *beyaz* and 3) *mavi*. *Sari* seeds (light brownish or yellow) and *beyaz* (whitish gray) are produced by the white flowering poppies and can be found in the same field, while *mavi*, the blue poppy seeds often used in Western Europe on top of bread, are produced by purple flowering poppies. A kilo of seeds costs about 7 Turkish Lira. They are sold as whole seeds or in the form of a paste, which is the mashed state of the *sari* seeds. This paste is later added to dough and used for baking. All the seeds from one year's harvest are normally used up for culinary purposes within the same year. Villagers often share a central communal oven, run on manure to produce high temperatures (300 to 400 degrees), where everybody is allowed to bake their bread or pastries.

The poppy seeds are fried in the bakery, then mashed with a stone instrument and inserted as paste in the dough. The dough then is rolled out on low wooden tables by the women and shaped into the different forms of the local pastries. On the top of the pastries, sometimes the poppy paste is used again together with some animal fat, as baking oil or butter.

The culinary tradition consists mainly of dishes that are prepared for special ceremonies such as engagements or weddings. Most typical are several varieties of bread, pastries or *bükme* rolls, but the poppy seeds, leaves and oil are also used in salads, soups and desserts. Given the high calorie content of the food, the food is particularly popular during the fasting time at Ramadan. About 25 cities in Turkey use the poppy seeds and oil for their food. The oil or *yağı* is also used as a traditional medicine and has several other uses. About 35 kilos of poppy oil can be extracted from 110 kilos of poppy seeds. Shopkeepers are always looking for the best seeds (the darker ones) that produce most oil. The remaining seed pods are pressed into blocks and sold as cow or fish food. Cows that are fed with such food produce milk that is thicker than normal milk. The region of Afyon is renowned for its *kaymak*, a thick cream that supposedly takes its quality from the special milk.

As such, all parts of the poppy plant are used in Turkey, with even the straw or stalks of the poppy plants being used as firewood in the winter. However, the Turkish poppy oil

industry is slowly disappearing. Factories no longer want to extract the oil from the seeds as it is not considered profitable enough, and many Turkish customers have switched to sunflower oil. Poppy oil is roughly three times more expensive than sunflower oil, but at the same time it does not provide the farmers with much additional income when compared to selling the seeds.

The medicinal use of the opium poppy is not limited to the oil. The capsules, when boiled in water, can also be used to produce a liquid that works as a traditional medicine against headaches, stomach ache or coughing. Also, to make a baby sleep, people put a little bit of oil or poppy paste into a cloth and rub it in the baby's face.

Lastly, it is interesting to note that not all villages in the poppy-growing areas of Turkey grow poppies. For example, the village of Erkmen switched from poppies to fruit trees (mainly cherry trees) which proved to be more profitable for the town. Nevertheless, villages around Erkmen still undertake poppy cultivation and, of course, the villagers of Erkmen use the poppy seeds and the oil in their cooking. Similar to the situation in Afghanistan, the case of Erkmen shows that where profitable alternatives are available, farmers do not have to grow poppies. Table 2 below details the growing season of opium poppy in Turkey.

Table 2: Planting and harvesting season of opium poppy in Turkey	
Planting season	Harvesting season
End of October/beginning of November (Year I; winter variety)	July and August (Year II)
February (Year II, summer variety)	July and August (Year II)

3. The economic benefits of the system to Turkey⁸⁵

At present, in Turkey about 35,000 hectares of poppy are harvested out of a maximum of 70,000 hectares where opium poppies are allowed to grow, divided over thirteen provinces. 100,000 farmers are licensed to cultivate poppies, meaning that indirectly an estimated 600,000 people earn their living from poppy cultivation in Turkey. The system is controlled by the Turkish Grain Board (TMO) that was established in 1938 as a so-called economic state enterprise in order to stabilise the grain market and administer the monopoly of the narcotics market in Turkey.⁸⁶ About 10% of the TMO's total revenue is derived from opium poppies.⁸⁷

Turkey exports 95% of its raw opiate production. The total industry of exporting opium poppy seeds and opium-based medicines is worth between US\$ 30 and US\$ 60 million a year.⁸⁸ The control system that the Turkish Government has put in place costs about US\$ 6 or 7 million a year.⁸⁹ When asked about the profitability of poppy licensing in Turkey, the TMO states that the Turkish poppy licensing system is a 'break-even' industry that is run by the state to keep the Turkish poppy farmers employed and the local traditions alive. Even if world prices were to significantly decrease, the Turkish Government would in principle be willing to continue to subsidise this industry.

The harvesting takes the form of removing the dried poppy pods, which contain most of the alkaloids. Although machines are available in some areas, most of the harvesting still takes place by hand, which means that during harvest time there is a large additional demand for labour. The poppy farmers sell the opium poppy pods to the TMO but they keep the seeds. Used for culinary and other purposes, the poppy seeds bring farmers more than the sale of the poppy pods. The TMO system annually produces 20,000 tons of poppy capsules and 22,000 tons of poppy seeds. As a rule of thumb, about one ton of poppy capsules are needed to produce three kilos of morphine. The bulky amount of poppy capsules necessary explains

⁸⁵ The figures in this Section were mostly collected by the author during the field research in Turkey.

⁸⁶ TMO, *Poppy and Alkaloid Affairs*, Brochure (no date). In possession of the author.

⁸⁷ David Mansfield, An Analysis of Licit Opium Poppy Cultivation: India and Turkey (April 2001), p. 10.

⁸⁸ Goksel Gecin and Songul Hakbilen, 'Opium Poppy's Income to Turkey \$60 Million', *The Journal of Turkish Weekly* (29 May 2005) and Dorian Jones, 'Government-Controlled Opium Production is Way of Life in Turkey', *Voice of America* (1 July 2008) for the US\$ 30 million figure. The TMO did not want to comment on total sales. If it is 10% of its total sales as the TMO suggests in their presentation, then the poppy licensing system would produce an income of about US\$150 million.

⁸⁹ 'Government-Controlled Opium Production is Way of Life in Turkey'.

why the risk of diversion is much lower than with raw opium as it would be impractical, costly and very risky to transport such amounts.⁹⁰

According to the TMO, Turkey annually produces between 80 and 100 tons of morphine (in the form of CPS-M or Concentrate Poppy Straw rich in the morphine alkaloid) plus another 38 tons of derivatives such as codeine that are mostly produced from morphine. Eighty to 90 tons of Turkish CPS-M are exported to approximately 40 different countries. The export capacity of the Turkish plant is about 30-35% of the total world requirements of CPS-M (around 350 tons). However, considering the world total of CPS-M production of 467 tons as projected by the INCB for 2009, Turkey currently only produces 15% of the world total. The technical know-how used in the processing plant comes from German companies.

In terms of employment, excluding the 100,000 poppy farmers, the TMO employs 295 officers that take care of buying the poppy pods from the farmers at 82 local centres.⁹¹ At the alkaloid factory in Bolvadin another 304 people work in three shifts on the production and purification process. In total, more than thousand officials control the poppy licensing system. Farmers normally do not only cultivate poppies. It is mostly part of a diversified agricultural tradition in which the opium poppy provides about 10 or 20% of the farmer's income.

Lastly, in conversations with the author, representatives of the TMO expressed concern about growing production levels in non-traditional producing countries such as Australia and Spain⁹², and other countries that have recently started production (e.g. the United Kingdom⁹³) or are thinking about starting it (e.g. Canada⁹⁴). As a result, the Turkish system of licensed production could suffer from the additional competition which goes against the spirit of the United Nations drug control system which favours production in traditional supplier countries over production in other countries. Instead, the market is becoming narrower for Turkey and if prices go down further, it will be more and more

⁹⁰ David Mansfield, *An Analysis of Licit Opium Poppy Cultivation: India and Turkey* (April 2001), p. 25.

⁹¹ TMO, Poppy and Alkaloid Affairs Department, 'Poppy cultivation and production in Turkey', PowerPoint Presentation (July 2009). In possession of the author.

⁹² Spain's legal poppy cultivation is mostly based in the autonomous regions of Castilla-La Mancha and Andalucia.

⁹³ In the United Kingdom, the Home Office has granted pharmaceutical company Macfarlan Smith a licence to harvest opium poppies, which can now be found on farms across Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire. See: Rhodri Phillips and Barry Wigmore, 'The painkilling fields: England's opium poppies that tackle the NHS morphine crisis', *The Daily Mail* (14 July 2007), [online]. Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-468430/The-painkilling-fields-Englands-opium-poppies-tackle-NHS-morphine-crisis.html#ixzz0sLXnqzSb>.

⁹⁴ Canada is in the early stages of investigating whether poppy licensing might be an interesting option in the domestic market. See: Canadian Government, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, *Memorandum to the Minister, 'Thebaine poppies in Canada'* (10 February 2009). In possession of the author.

difficult for Turkey to subsidise this poppy licensing industry. In this regard, the TMO argues that United Nations' Member States should go back to prioritising imports from India and Turkey. Asked about possible production in Afghanistan, the TMO does not think that licensing would work in Afghanistan at the moment, but as it can be argued that the country is much more a traditional supplying country than countries such as the United Kingdom, France or Spain, they would prefer to see licensed production in Afghanistan given the choice. . In any case, the TMO has officially stated that Turkey cannot be a model for Afghanistan when it comes to poppy licensing.

4. Lessons for Afghanistan

Afghanistan is not Turkey and the conditions prevailing in the Turkey of the 1960s cannot be compared with present-day conditions in Afghanistan, especially in terms of security and stability. Nevertheless, it is useful to take a close look at the Turkish system and identify whether some elements could be adopted – perhaps in an adapted form – and integrated into a similar model for Afghanistan. It is also perhaps interesting to reflect upon some of the reasons why the system (in its current form) was introduced in Turkey in the early 1970s in comparison with the current situation today in Afghanistan.

Firstly, similar to Turkey, in Afghanistan a significant amount of poppy farmers and their families continue to make a living based on poppy cultivation. Afghanistan's economy also continues to depend to a large extent on the rural sector in which (illegal) poppy cultivation continues to play an important role. Therefore, the country's rural communities continue have a vital role to play, not only politically and socially, but also as the starting point for better security in Afghanistan. Secondly, just as in Turkey, poppy crop eradication and other government policies to stop poppy cultivation have led to social protest and are also sometimes perceived as being forced upon Afghanistan by the international community. Thirdly, similar to Turkey in the early 1970s, few alternative crops are available and in some dry areas of Afghanistan the opium poppy seems to be one of the few plants that will grow. Fourthly, the average size of a poppy field, somewhere between 0.5 and 0.7 hectares can be compared with the average size in Afghanistan of two *jeribs* or 0.4 hectares. Lastly, similar to Afghanistan, Turkish women and children work in the poppy fields and help out with the harvest. The significant difference between the legal industry in Turkey and the illegal industry in Afghanistan is that the former uses the poppy straw processing method, while the latter still depends on lancing the poppies to produce raw opium.

Afghanistan's tradition of poppy cultivation may be much less widespread than Turkey as it is mainly limited to the north-eastern region of Badakshan and areas in Herat and Nangarhar provinces. However, because of this limited production over past centuries, it still may be considered a traditional opium producing country. If this criteria is still important for the international community, as it was at the end of the 1970s for the United Nations, licensed production in Afghanistan could be limited to those areas where traditional poppy cultivation

has taken place. Future research could shed more light on exactly what kind of culinary and medicinal traditions can be found in these parts of Afghanistan.

The geopolitical context, of course, cannot be compared, and the existence of a clear link between Afghanistan's illegal opium economy and the ongoing Taliban insurgency does provide a hurdle to the implementation of a licensing system in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, a pragmatic attitude by the international community and the Afghan Government could lead to the same workable solution in the form of poppy licensing. As the history of Turkish poppy licensing system shows, such a solution can be brought about with the support of the international community and specific bilateral trade agreements as described above. Similar to the situation in Turkey, targeted development aid and technical assistance from abroad could help to implement a solid poppy licensing system that can be controlled and can effectively meet some of the unmet needs for opium-based medicines such as morphine around the world.

Conclusions

The model of poppy licensing in Turkey is a clear example of how pragmatic policies can help to solve structural, multifaceted problems to overcome barriers in a highly politicised environment. As such, the example of Turkey could help to de-politicise and de-stigmatise the cultivation of opium poppies for the production of medicines or food crops. At present, the Turkish model perhaps cannot be adapted for immediate use in Afghanistan, but drawing attention to Turkey's licensing system and the example of the preferential trade agreement of the '80-20 Rule' that supports this traditional industry may help to unlock the debate on pragmatic and effective drug policy interventions. At the moment, unfortunately, this debate remains overshadowed by the political inheritance of the repressive 'War on Drugs'.

At present, the political reasons for not implementing poppy licensing form an inherent obstacle that can only be overcome with a certain dose of political leadership and the necessary political courage to try something different. Afghanistan really has little to lose from the implementation of a series of small-scale pilot projects, especially if these were to take place in the more secure poppy growing areas of the country. Even if such scientific pilot projects would not immediately lead to implementation of poppy licensing on a wider scale because of the ongoing security concerns, the technical findings gained by such pilot projects could be extremely useful for future implementation or could perhaps be useful for other economic development projects.

Policy recommendations

Below are three policy recommendations related to the topic of this research paper and following its conclusions.

Policy recommendation I: *Alternative development should include poppy licensing*

Alternative development is a necessary ingredient in the new strategy of the Obama Administration, but the policies should not be limited to the concept of an agricultural economy. Crop diversification is a good first step, but at the same time, longer-term investment should go into new skills and non-farming activities. As such, we should reconsider the baseline assumption that Afghanistan's future is only in agriculture. Micro-credit schemes should empower Afghans to start their own farming and non-farming activities outside of the illegal opium economy. Investment in agro-industrial projects and other industrial and light industrial activities should also be emphasised, which will allow job creation in large urban centres as well as rural areas. Poppy licensing, enabling poppy cultivation for the legal domestic production of an Afghan brand of morphine, is an example of a project that can serve as a (first) bridge between agricultural and (agro) industrial activities.

Policy recommendation II: *Scientific pilot projects should be implemented to further investigate poppy licensing for Afghanistan*

Before implementing poppy licensing on a large scale, it is necessary to test the main elements of the proposal, particularly the details of the control system, the quality of the medicines, the general organisation of the project village cooperatives and their connection with the medicines manufacturing facility in the area. Small-scale scientific pilot projects could answer many of the questions and uncertainties about these crucial elements of the proposal. It is especially useful to implement several pilot projects in different geographical areas and with (slightly) different project parameters. This way, the best set-up for this project can be determined and the best regions for further implementation.

Implementation of a pilot project could, for example, take place in full cooperation with international monitors, experts and specialists from the countries such as the United States, which are already working on development projects in Afghanistan. USAID and

similar development agencies could also play a key role in implementing a poppy licensing pilot project in selected areas of Afghanistan.

Pilot projects seem a cost-effective, low-risk way to study how the licensed production of morphine could positively impact the rural economy and how the local control systems can be optimally used within a poppy licensing market model. The risks involved are limited because of the fact that the actual situation cannot get much worse, with the full 100 percent of opium currently being diverted towards the illegal opium and heroin market.

Policy Recommendation III: An effective interdiction policy should accompany alternative development and poppy licensing

A counter-narcotics policy can only be effective in Afghanistan if it includes a credible and efficient interdiction strategy. This will require the application of an interdiction policy based on three principles. Firstly, it needs to represent an all-inclusive, across-the-board interdiction approach, focusing on all the important actors involved in the illegal opium economy, from the top of the chain to the bottom. Nobody should be excluded from possible investigation and prosecution of drug-related charges.

Secondly, the Afghan government should be supported in putting in place the strongest possible interdiction policy, which is fair but consistent, and effectively provides the necessary disincentives to be involved with the illegal opium economy. Lastly, interdiction needs to be fully transparent, meaning total clarity when it comes, for example, to the number of arrests, charges, convictions and pardons of drug traffickers and others involved in the illegal opium economy. It must be clear to the Afghan people which criteria and benchmarks are involved in interdiction, and under which circumstances pardons are being granted to convicted drug traffickers.

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Appendix I: Photo impressions of Turkey's poppy licensing system

Photos taken by Tjalling Kamminga between the 1st and 10th of July, 2009.



Afyonkarahisar, 'The Black Fortress of Opium' in Turkish, 164,000 inhabitants.



The town Afyon (before Afyonkarahisar) and the fortress it was named after in the back.



The symbol of the opium poppy can be found around the town of Afyon.



A mosaic of the opium poppy in one of the poppy seed shops of Afyon.



The washing area of a mosque on the outskirts of Afyon with poppy-shaped water taps.



Prof. Dr. Sebahattin Özcan, Head of the Agricultural Department of Ankara University (left) with one of the top poppy experts of the Faculty (right).



The papaver somniferum L. or opium poppy – still a bit green and not ready for harvesting.



The dried pods of the opium poppies now ready for harvesting.



Many young children are part of the poppy harvesting 'teams'.



The opium poppy pods or capsules are collected in bags or plastic buckets.



Turkish women merrily collecting poppy capsules in the field.



A poppy farmer collecting the bags of dried poppy capsules.



The women harvesters going home at the end of the day.



The entire poppy farming family going home after a long day of work in the poppy fields.



A poppy seed-pod separator machine to separate the seeds from the capsules before the latter are handed over to the TMO regional offices.



To the Alkaloid Factory in Bolvadin.



The entrance to the Alkaloid Factory in Bolvadin. It is not allowed to take pictures inside.



One of the poppy seed and poppy paste shops in Afyon.



Blue poppy seeds of the ‘mavi’ variety (left) and the light brown/yellowish variety of ‘sari’.



Another poppy seed and poppy oil shop ten meters away from the previous one.



The 'haşhaş ezmesi' or poppy seed paste.



The stone grinder with a grinding block on which the seeds are turned into the poppy paste.



One of the women preparing the dough for the pastries on a special low wooden table. As the picture shows, a bit of the poppy paste is again spread on top.



More women preparing and filling the pastries with ingredients such as cheese, parsley, potatoes, yoghurt or minced meat.



The pastries coming out of the communal village oven and ready to be served. The same ovens are used for the round staple potato bread that is common in the villages of Afyon.



Eating the poppy pastries with Erkmen mayor Memduh Kuş (fourth from the left).



The remains of poppy seed materials after the poppy oil has been extracted; sold as cow fodder or fish food.



The old way of lancing Turkish opium poppies before the Opium Ban of 1971 after which in 1974 the new 'poppy straw' method was introduced.