

By Graham Moonie

Figures from the UN show that Opium production in Afghanistan fell in 2008. This is only the second time production in the region has not risen since an all time low under the Taliban in 2001.

Opium production trends

Opium production in Afghanistan has been increasing steadily for the last twenty years with a particular surge in 2006 and 2007. This two year period produced record crops with production increased in all areas of the country, not just in the traditional growing areas in the fertile south and west.

In 2007 Afghanistan accounted for a massive 93% of global opium production - 8,200 metric tonnes. This fell to 7,700 metric tonnes in 2008. It is anticipated that there will be a further fall in 2009.

The large increases in production in 2006 and 2007 were characterised by increased production in all areas of the country but particularly in the traditionally non-producing areas in the north and east of the country. The decrease in 2008 is largely down to a near total eradication of production there. 18 provinces were reported poppy free in this time.

Security and regional variations

Data shows that there is a clear relationship between opium production and the security situation. Cultivation is now increasingly concentrated in the south and west of the country, areas where the Taliban insurgency is strongest, and the NATO, UN, and Afghan presence is weak.

Reports by DfID and the World Bank, the MoD, UNODC and the Pentagon have all highlighted the common interests of the Taliban insurgency and the drug traffickers, with extensive financial and logistical links demonstrable at all levels. The DfID/World Bank report showed that conditions of in security and violence are highly conducive to the logistics of opium production.

It is encouraging that opium production is finally starting to fall, with decreases in production showing large areas of the country coming under relative control. Of some concern however is the clear link between opium production and the Taliban insurgency with one feeding the other. Recent announcements of multi-lateral troop allocations to the region will be warmly welcomed as forces battle to extend security to all areas of the country.

The data can be found in a House of Commons Library research note entitled: Afghanistan and

narcotics: Opium poppy cultivation trends, 2001 – 2009

[<http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/briefings/snua-05025.pdf>]. It analyses data from UNODC, DfID, the World Bank, and other sources.