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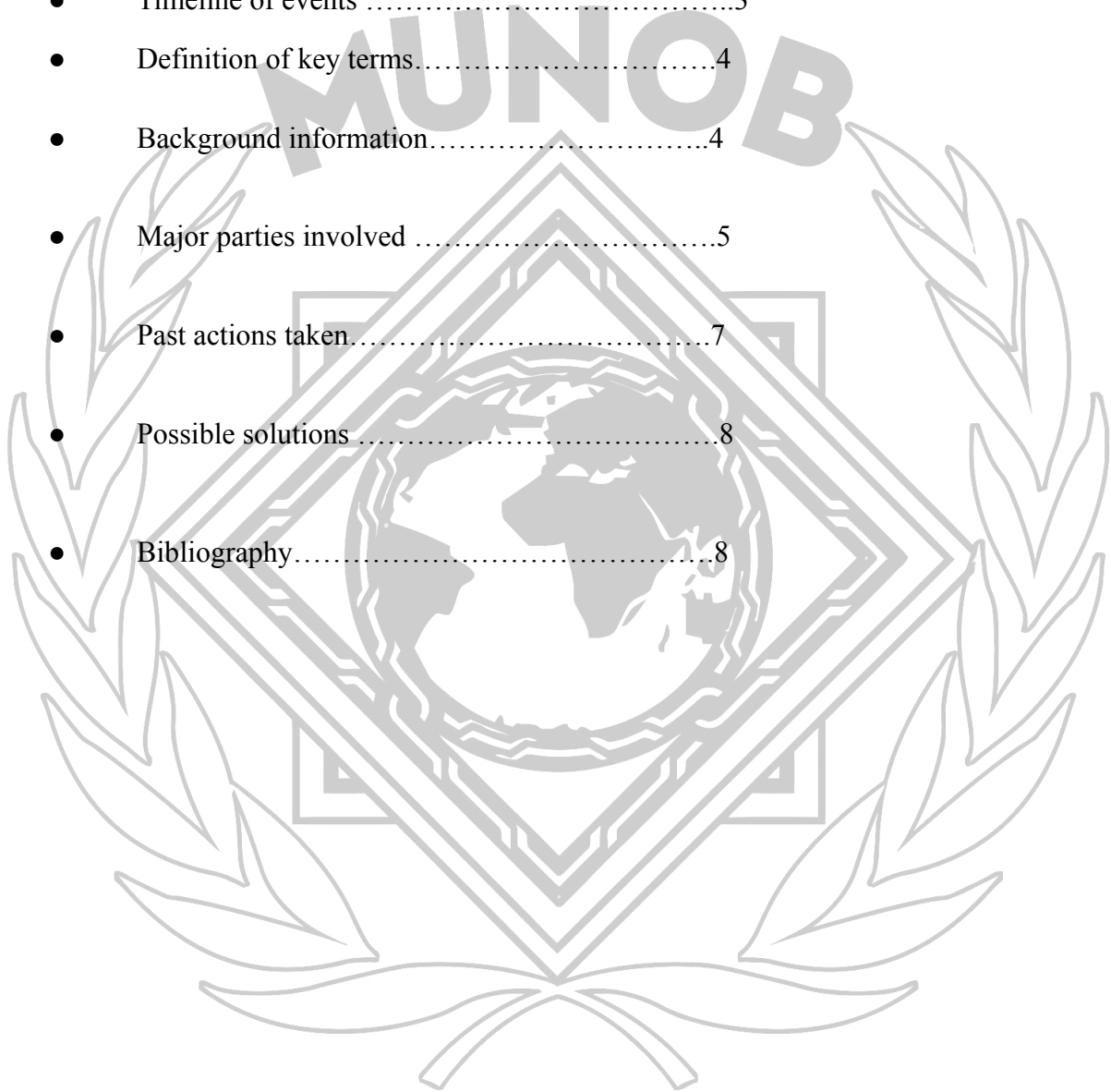
**Addressing the implications of the  
opium ban in Afghanistan**

**United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime**



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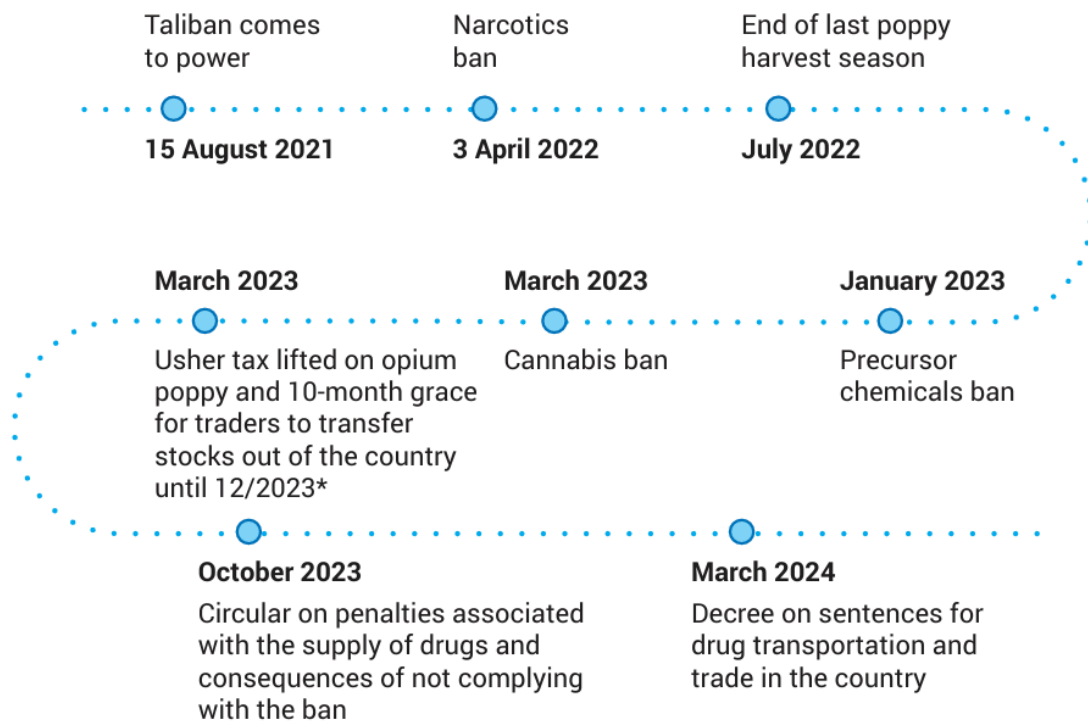


## I. Introduction

In April of 2022, the Taliban banned poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, where 80% of the world's opium supply comes from. After it's produced, it takes the north route to all the markets. Given the unprecedented nature of the ongoing drug ban in Afghanistan, which has continued for a second year, UNODC has sought to examine different aspects of the drug situation in that country. Taken together, reports in the series paint a comprehensive picture of the enforcement of the ban on production, trafficking, and consumption of all drugs and delve deep into the impacts of the ban on the Afghan population, as well as on Afghanistan's neighboring countries and the wider region.

## II. Timeline of events

### Post-Taliban Development



### **III. Definition of Key terms**

- Opium is a highly addictive non-synthetic narcotic that is extracted from the poppy plant, *Papaver somniferum*. The opium poppy is the key source for many narcotics, including morphine, codeine, and heroin.
- "‘Raw opium’ means the spontaneously coagulated juice obtained from the capsules of the *Papaver somniferum* L., which has only been submitted to the necessary manipulations for packing and transport, whatever its content of morphine" (1931 and 1925 Conventions).
- "‘Medicinal opium’ means raw opium which has undergone the processes necessary to adapt it for medicinal use in accordance with the requirements of the national pharmacopoeia, whether in powder form or granulated or otherwise or mixed with neutral materials" (1931 and 1925 Conventions).
- "By ‘prepared opium’ is understood the product of raw opium, obtained by a series of special operations, especially by dissolving, boiling, roasting, and fermentation, designed to transform it into an extract suitable for consumption. Prepared opium includes dross and all other residues remaining when opium has been smoked" (1912 Convention).

### **IV. Background Information**

The Taliban’s opium ban, coupled with Afghan farmers’ replacement of poppy largely with low-value wheat, is likely to worsen dissatisfaction and political tensions. The Taliban’s persistence in enforcing the ban has been notable, especially in 2024. If the ban remains in place, it would demonstrate the regime’s strength but also worsen rural poverty, increase dissatisfaction among landholders, and spur political instability. This will likely lead to increased humanitarian needs and more pressures for outmigration to nearby countries and beyond, both of which are of interest to the U.S. and other Western countries.

The most accurate available data, compiled by a geospatial technology firm, show that opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan fell sharply in 2024, contrary to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime’s (UNODC) estimate that it increased. This clearly demonstrates that the Taliban’s opium ban has intensified, not weakened, in its second year of implementation, highlighting the importance of informing analysis and policy debates with high-quality, timely data.

“With opium cultivation remaining at a low level in Afghanistan, we have the opportunity and responsibility to support Afghan farmers to develop sustainable sources of income free from illicit markets,” said UNODC Director Ghada Waly.



The diplomatic relations of the Taliban with other nations are complex and can be summarized here: [Which Countries Have Relations With The Taliban's Unrecognized Government?](#)

#### **V. Main parties involved**

- The Taliban

The Taliban rose to power as an Islamic militia in 1995 by winning the approval of the people, promising to bring peace and traditional Islamic values to the region. Among other decisions and actions taken by the Taliban, such as public executions as enforcing Islamic law and withdrawing the rights that women had prior to their rise to power, they also decided to outlaw the cultivation of poppies for the opium trade. During the first days of the regime, Afghanistan was producing 75% of the world's supply of opioids, and after futile attempts to slowly decrease the amounts produced, the Supreme Leader, Mullah Omar, imposed a total ban on poppy cultivation. The ban, however, was short-lived, as the regime was toppled by the United States following the attacks of 9/11. Throughout the US-NATO occupation of the region, the Taliban profited from the opioid trade to finance their insurgency led from the territory of Pakistan. In March of 2020, a month after signing a peace deal with the United States, the Taliban announced that they would gradually ban cannabis cultivation in their controlled areas, signaling their intentions. After the US completely pulled their troops out of the country, the Taliban seized power again, capturing Kabul on the 15th of August 2021. On the 3rd of April 2022, they banned all forms of drug production and trade. Even though a grace period for the “winter crop” was given, farmers were taken by surprise, and Afghans lost an estimated 14-28% of their GDP. This, coupled with a withdrawal of foreign financial aid for the country, pushed the Taliban to enforce the ban more aggressively through actions like raiding common places of drug consumption and eradicating poppy crops, possibly killing those who resisted. Today, the Taliban are still struggling to stabilize the economy and provide adequate commodities for their people. Amid political and economic struggles, the Taliban have sought to negotiate agreements with neighboring countries and the broader international community, but the feasibility of the ban still remains uncertain.

- The United States

The United States started being a major party involved in the situation after the attacks of 9/11, when they invaded Afghanistan and first seized power from the Taliban, establishing





an interim government following the signing of the Bonn Agreement. After the initial clashes, the US devises a framework to bolster civil society and help the efforts of the United Nations in rebuilding the infrastructure and political scene. After the election of the first president, the US signs a treaty, gaining access to all Afghan military facilities, which will help them maintain stability and democracy in the region. As time passes, the US begins receiving criticism regarding their approach to the situation. Collateral casualties due to airstrike policies and a general dissatisfaction with the length of the war cause the US approach to be subject to scrutiny. President Obama, however, doubled down on the initiative in 2009 and sent more troops to counter a resurgence from the Taliban but also committed to focusing more on training the local forces, with plans to completely hand over responsibility of defense to Afghan forces by 2014. Following the death of Osama Bin Laden in 2011, the withdrawal program was hastened amidst peace talks with the Taliban. These yielded no results, so the United States extended the period of its presence, raiding nests of extremists from time to time alongside Afghani forces. Under President Trump, the situation was uncertain, with peace negotiations taking place on and off, but in 2020 a peace treaty is signed and a consensus is reached. Following that, the US pledges to withdraw all troops from the region, with the last being pulled out under the Biden administration on the 11th of September 2021, even amidst concerns of a Taliban resurgence.

- NATO

Following the United States' overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, NATO received control of the International Security Forces (ISAF) in Afghanistan, fighting alongside the US-led coalition. NATO was also awarded command for individual Provincial Reconstruction Teams in 2002, an initiative aimed at rebuilding the destroyed infrastructure and expanding the authority of the Kabul government. The way the operations of the PRTs and of NATO in the region in general were carried out was subject to great criticism, as they lacked any central command and proper organization. In the wake of Taliban attacks increasing, NATO members showed reluctance in sending more reinforcements in the region, and in 2009 their goal shifted from a military presence to a more civil focus, with member countries being urged to provide the PRTs with resources and expertise required to build a strong Afghan civil society and to send troops to train the local police force. The organization passes security responsibilities to Afghan forces in 2014 and after that generally follows the United States' plan of troop withdrawal, the last NATO troops leaving alongside the US soldiers in 2021. Today members of NATO and the EU have held talks with the Taliban and are active contributors to organizations such as WHO and UNODC.

- Pakistan



Pakistan has been a major player in the regional dynamics of Afghanistan, specifically the theater of war of the past 3 decades. Initially serving as an American safe haven and logistics hub for their overthrow of the government in 2001, they then moved on to harboring the head of the Taliban. The Taliban leadership managed to regroup and fortify their position in the Pakistan region of Baluchistan, around the city of Quetta. From there, they managed to slowly retake territory from the American-backed Afghani regime until 2021, when they captured Kabul. Throughout time, the Pakistani government has been accused by the UN of openly helping the Taliban through transport contractors and logistical capabilities, but the government denied all allegations. Pakistan sits at an important crossroads regarding drug trade routes, and following the recent ban, experts are concerned that the production deficit will be compensated by an increase in production throughout the territory of Pakistan. Furthermore, as the international community fears that synthetic drugs will be produced to make up for the lack of opioids, Pakistan will be one of the main routes of smuggling the substances out of Afghanistan. It remains to be seen how the government and the international community manage the situation and keep both production and transport of illicit substances in check, amidst rising internal tensions in Pakistan.

#### **VI. Past Actions Taken**

- The United Nations Mission in Afghanistan, established in Security Council Resolution S/RES/1401 (2002), aimed to unify the international efforts under a single administrative entity to help manage the regional logistics and security issues. The newly mandated entity was based on two core pillars of development, those being political development and humanitarian relief and reconstruction, respectively. Throughout the years, there have been changes made to its mandate, most recently in Resolution 2626 (2022), which shifted the focus more on humanitarian assistance, regional resource management, and international fund and economic relief coordination. This mission has for a long time been a crucial effort of the international community to help the people of Afghanistan, but security concerns and challenges have prevented efficient operational expansion.
- UNODC Afghanistan Drug Insights publications. In cooperation with the regional authorities of Afghanistan, the UNODC has conducted several surveys on the opioid situation, how the region has been affected by the recent droughts, and how it is respecting the poppy cultivation ban. Through satellite imagery and governmental reports, it has been able to construct comprehensive reports that not only provide surface information but also accurate data of how the situation is evolving.



- UNDP:
- **UN Security Council Resolution 2727 (2024)**

### UN Security Council Resolution 2727 (2024) | UNAMA

- Resolution 2678 (2022)  
[2023-03-16 - res\\_2678.pdf](#)
- Resolution 2679 (2023)  
[https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2023-03-15\\_-\\_res\\_2679\\_independent\\_assessment.pdf](https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/2023-03-15_-_res_2679_independent_assessment.pdf)

#### VII. Possible Solutions

- Stronger economic support for the country of Afghanistan. The economy needs to be more diverse in order to facilitate a transition from an opioid-based revenue to other more sustainable and licit sources. As a consequence, the general infrastructure needs developing in order to help Afghanistan establish a defined industry and help the farmers find better, more sustainable, and equally efficient alternatives to poppy cultivation.
- The international community needs to take into account the political aspect of the situation. As opioid cultivation was one of the main sources of income for the rural communities, many people are now left in poverty and are discontent with the authority of the Taliban. With discontent on the rise, the government of Afghanistan is facing severe political instability, which may lead to insurgencies or start a chain reaction, sparking more instability throughout the broader region. The situation requires security-related solutions also, but the delicate nature of the context dictates a careful approach.
- The Taliban have a history of violating human rights and not respecting the core values of the United Nations. Given the current context, under the pretext of enforcing the opioid ban through crop extermination, the international community must ensure that they do not ramp up the severity of their crimes against humanity and protect people in the affected areas;

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