

Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, the security agenda has shifted from a strictly state-centric focus to one focusing on protecting individuals and the international community. The nature of the new security threats has challenged national security, thus encouraging joint regional and international cooperation. One of the significant risks posed to security is the rapid proliferation of organised crime, which entails a variety of different activities that pose a danger humankind.

With illicit trafficking being a substantial financial resource for organised crime groups, along with the significant societal and health risks of illegal drugs, this paper focuses on one of the main trafficking routes from Afghanistan, the world's leading opium producer, to Central Asia. While the number of known trafficking routes is always changing, there are several general routes that are used to smuggle Afghan drugs, the Balkan, Northern, and Southern routes. Since becoming independent in the 1990s, the Central Asian countries are still in the development stages of both establishing their legal systems and exercising effective policies, while at the same time being challenged by chronic economic underdevelopment, high levels of corruption, and transnational threats. Thus, this research will study anti-drug efforts in Central Asia, along the Northern route. To provide a complex overview of the anti-drug efforts, the cross-boundary nature of the illicit drugs has instigated the need to study policies and procedures applied at the state, regional, and international levels.

A thematic analysis of anti-drug efforts has suggested that the Human Security approach is the predominant theoretical approach applied within the region, with some efforts being channelled through securitisation theory. However, the empirical findings indicate that while Central Asian countries cooperate to develop their anti-drug policies and measures, they predominantly employ the drug threat as a way to attract and increase outside financial aid. Thus, the predominant focus of anti-drug measures is driven and enforced by regional and international actors. This further suggests that, while international projects are aimed at developing the region and enhancing its resilience to illicit narcotics, effective results are hindered by state governments exploiting the drug threat to attract financial assistance; thus never, in fact, addressing the drug phenomenon, as eliminating it completely would dry up the source for further financial gain.