
DRUG TRAFFICKING IN INDIA: AN ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The complex dynamics of drug trafficking in India through an international lens, analysing how its unique geographical positioning makes it highly vulnerable to transnational organized crime.

Situated directly between two of the world's most notorious illicit opium producing hubs the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan) to the west and the Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand) to the east India has increasingly transitioned from a traditional transit corridor to both a major destination market and a key hub for synthetic drug manufacturing. Utilizing data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), India's Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), and current regional security reports, this study analyses contemporary trafficking methodologies, including the rapid expansion of maritime smuggling routes across the Indian Ocean and the utilization of the darknet and encrypted digital payment ecosystems. The paper assesses India's robust domestic legal response under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 1985 alongside its modern "whole-of-government" enforcement frameworks. Ultimately, the adaptive global criminal syndicates. The paper examines a strategic roadmap for enhanced international cooperation, advocating for multi-lateral intelligence sharing, harmonized regulatory oversight on precursor chemicals, and synchronized maritime surveillance to effectively dismantle transnational drug supply networks.

Keywords: Drug Trafficking, Transnational Organized Crime, Golden Crescent, Golden Triangle, NDPS Act, International Cooperation.

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Introduction

Drug Trafficking is the pervasive and is considered to be the most complex form of transnational organised crimes. It has the capacity to render the economy, infrastructure and political alignment of a nation state.² It acts as a menace while posing as a challenge to the sovereignty, integrity and functioning of a particular nation state. When it comes to viewing the concept of drug trafficking as a transnational organised crime from the Indian perspective it can be construed that, India is within the grip of golden triangle and golden crescent due to its geographical position.³ Such a grip makes it vulnerable to the operations of drug trafficking as it acts as transit corridors for the transnational organised crimes. When it comes to golden triangle it comprises of Laos, Thailand and Myanmar and it opens the doors of eastern corridor with regards to drug trafficking which impacts the north-eastern states as it leads to insurgent activities and leads to the involvement of drug money in the states. Whereas, on the hand golden crescent comprises of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran and it opens the doors of western corridor with regards to drug trafficking and such routes gives birth to narco terrorism in India.

When it comes to understanding the existing framework to deal with drug trafficking and its effects as a transnational organised crime it can be seen that, there are various conventions of United Nations such as United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971,⁴ United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances⁵, 1988 and United Nations Convention against transnational organised crime⁶, 2000 which are complementary to each other while dealing with the menace of drug trafficking as a transnational organised crime. When it comes to India, it is a signatory to all the abovementioned conventions and has its own national legislative framework to deal with the drug trafficking but it has maintained silence on dealing with drug trafficking from the lens of transnational organised crimes. Thus, putting forward the challenges of regulatory

² Rakshandha Darak, "A Critical Analysis of Drug Trafficking as a Transnational Organised Crime from Indian Perspective: The Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle Nexus" 9 *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*, 1086 (2026).

Perspective: The Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle Nexus" 9 *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*, 1086 (2026).

³ Press Information Bureau, "Two-day 'Conference on Combating Drug Trafficking' for BIMSTEC", available at: <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage..> (last visited on 14th of June 2026).

⁴ United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances, Feb. 21, 1971, 1019 UNTS 175 (entered into force Aug. 16, 1976).

⁵ United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, Dec. 20, 1988, 1582 UNTS 95 (entered into force Nov. 11, 1990).

⁶ United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, Nov. 15, 2000, 2225 UNTS 209 (entered into force Sep. 29, 2003).

framework to deal with the aftermath of such a crime.

Drug trafficking is the cycle by which people manufacture and sale illegal drugs throughout the country. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's World Drug Report 2005 appraisals the size of the global illicit drug market at US\$321.6 billion out of 2003 alone.⁷ With a world GDP of US\$36 trillion around the same time, the illegal drug trade might be assessed as almost 1% of total global trade. The utilization of illegal drugs is widespread globally and it stays hard for neighbourhood authorities to impede its ubiquity. Millions of Indians are dependent on alcohol, cannabis, and opiates, and drug misuse is a pervasive phenomenon in Indian society, says a new report, published jointly by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and India's Ministry of Social Justice.⁸

Drug trafficking operates as a highly adaptive, global underground market defined by the illicit cultivation, manufacturing, transit, and retail distribution of prohibited substances.⁹ This illicit supply chain spans a vast spectrum of operational scales, encompassing everything from localized, clandestine operations such as domestic hashish or methamphetamine production to highly organized international networks. Because the vast majority of sovereign jurisdictions enforce strict prohibition frameworks that restrict the trade of these substances exclusively to tightly regulated government licenses,¹⁰ the expansion of these illicit networks systematically optimizes narcotic distribution, subsequently driving up domestic addiction rates. Consequently, international legal responses vary drastically, utilizing punitive measures that span from monetary fines and long-term incarceration to capital punishment.¹¹ Ultimately, establishing standardized, global comparative metrics to precisely quantify the systemic economic and societal damages of drug abuse remains a nascent, slow-moving endeavour due to the inherently clandestine and complex nature of the illicit drug economy.

Histoical Background

Since the earliest times, herbs, roots, barks, leaves and plants have been used to relive pain and control diseases. However, the use of drugs does not constitute an evil; drugs

⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, World Drug Report 2005: Volume 1: Analysis 127 (2005).

⁸ Sanjay Kumar, India has widespread drug problem,³ *British Medical Journal* 329 (2004).

⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *United Nations Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances* (1988).

¹⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, World Drug Report 1961: *the single Convention on Narcotic Drugs* (1961).

¹¹ Harm Reduction International, *The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview* (2025).

properly administered, have been a medical blessing. Unfortunately, certain drugs, also initially produce enticing side effects, such as a feeling of euphoria, a sense of “feeling good”, elation, serenity and power. What began as something of a recreational activity evolved in time into a problem of dependency and abuse.¹² In the last two decades, the use and trafficking of illegal drugs have spread at an unprecedented rate and has reached to every part of the world. No nation has been immune to the devastating problems.¹³ The insidious long-term effects of chronic drug use and its impact on the user, the family, the community, and on society cannot be over emphasized, this is why many nations have adopted various means and measures towards reducing it, if not total eradication of the trade. Before the 1980s, no major attempt was made at international level to coordinate effort at curbing the use and trafficking in illicit drugs, but when the trade and consumption became more dangerous, accessible and deadly in our societies, especially with the use of sophisticated weapons, by drug barons and cartel leaders, either against rival groups, dubious buyers and sellers, and even law enforcement agents, this led to the compelling need by the international community to involve and devise ways and means of dealing a lethal blow on the trade and consumption. As a result, the United Nations General Assembly in 1990, proclaimed the period 1991 – 2000, the United Nations Decade Against Drug Abuse,¹⁴ in order to intensify international co-operation and to increase effort of States in that direction. Illicit drugs such as Psychotropic substance and Narcotics have long plague society; some like cocaine and marijuana were once viewed as being fashionable. Before the 1970s, the most common type of narcotic was marijuana and opium, but recently, more potent and devastating drugs, such as cocaine and heroin, which are highly dangerous, became popular in the 1970s.

Ever since, their consumption has been on the increase. Cocaine and heroin consumption were once viewed as the exclusive privilege of the rich. It should also be noted that the major countries in the world being plugged by cartel leaders who have become billionaires many times over are Bolivia, Panama, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia. These countries produce heavy drugs like cocaine and heroin in substantial bulk per year and the vast majority of it for

¹² Ogunniyi, Olayemi Jacob, Historical Perspective of International Efforts at Eradicating Illicit Drug Trade and Abuse, 2 *European Journal of Research in Social Science*, 53 (2014).

¹³ United Nations and Drug Abuse Control New York UNIDCP, 1992.

¹⁴ United Nations General Assembly, Political Declaration and Global Programme of Action on International Cooperation Against Illicit Production, Supply, Demand, Trafficking and Distribution of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Resolution S-17/2, 23 February 1990).

these seemingly insatiable United States market and also smuggled into many countries.¹⁵ The Cocaine barons have enormous resources. For example, in Colombia, a 22,000-gallon tank of the type service stations uses to store gasoline, which contained cocaine, was seized. Also, in Colombia seized a half million gallon of chemicals and 1,200 kilograms of cocaine hydrochloride. In Peru, and Bolivia, there are evidences of cocaine possessing facilities. The world's two productive coca-growing areas are the chaparon region of Bolivia and upper Huallaga Valley in Peru.

Trends, Patterns and Routes of Drug Trafficking

India has been a traditional consumer of opium and various cannabis derivatives (bhang, marijuana/Ganja and hashish). These narcotics were mostly consumed for medicinal purposes, for recreation or during religious and social ceremonies.¹⁶ Earlier, almost all the demands for these drugs were met locally. Only a small quantity of hashish was smuggled in from Nepal and Pakistan. Since the country had a long tradition of narcotics consumption, albeit at low levels, the smuggling of hashish from across the borders, which was in any case far too less a quantity, did not evince any alarm. However, in the early 1980s, in the wake of the inflow of heroin, which has widespread and disastrous consequences, drug trafficking became an issue of concern. In subsequent years, the large-scale availability of synthetic and medicinal drugs and their abuse have added new dimensions to the concerns about drug trafficking.

The global pattern of the flow of illegal drugs reveals that of all drugs, heroin and cocaine are trafficked for long distances; hashish is smuggled for relatively shorter distances; and marijuana/ Ganja and psychotropic substances like Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS), which are consumed locally travel the shortest distance.¹⁷ Nearly 70 per cent of these narcotics and drugs are trafficked over land using various modes of transportation making the country's borders the first point of contact for drug trafficking.¹⁸ As regards India, depending upon the nature of the border and its milieu as well as the production, demand and supply of drugs,

¹⁵ Ogunniyi, Olayemi Jacob, Historical Perspective of International Efforts at Eradicating Illicit Drug Trade and Abuse, 2 *European Journal of Research in Social Science*, 52, 53 (2014).

¹⁶ Pushpita Das, *Drug Trafficking in India: A Case for Border Security*, Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis (2012), p. 8-9.

¹⁷ World Drug Report 2010, United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, Vienna, 2010, p. 12.

¹⁸ Giri Raj Shah, *Encyclopaedia of Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances: Vol. III-Indian Initiatives*, (New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, 1998), p. 883.

different borders display different trafficking patterns.

Legislative Perspective of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substance Act, 1985

In India, the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act of 1985 establishes a comprehensive legal framework to control the production, sale, and abuse of narcotics and psychotropic substances. The Guideline of Narcotic Medications and Psychotropic Substances is one of the essential provisions of the NDPS Act.¹⁹ Denying Certain Exercises: With the exception of clinical and rational purposes, the demonstration prohibits the production, manufacture, ownership, sale, purchase, transportation, storage, use, utilisation, import, commodity, and transshipment of narcotic medicines and psychotropic substances.

Controlled Substances: It also controls precursory synthetics and equipment used to make psychotropic and narcotic substances.

Grouping of Offenses: Little Amount and Business Amount: The NDPS Act recognizes offenses in view of the number of medications included: Little Amount: Ownership of a little amount (for individual use or compulsion) conveys a lighter discipline. Business Amount: Contribution with a business number of medications causes a fundamentally heavier punishment. The public authority routinely refreshes what is little and business amounts for every substance.

Disciplines and Punishments: The NDPS Act recommends severe punishments, contingent upon the nature and seriousness of the offense: Ownership and Dealing: Little Amount: As long as 1-year detainment or a fine, or both. More than Little Amount however Not exactly Business Amount: As long as 10 years of detainment as well as a fine of up to ₹1 lakh. Business Amount: Least of 10 years and as long as 20 years of thorough detainment, and a fine of at least ₹1 lakh, which can be stretched out to ₹2 lakh or seriously relying upon the case. Habitual perpetrators: Rehash offenses can draw in capital punishment, particularly for serious medication dealing offenses.

Powers of Policing: Act awards impressive powers to policing to battle drug offenses: Force of Search, Seizure, and Capture: The Demonstration approves the police, customs, and other requirement organizations to look through premises, hold onto medications, and capture

¹⁹ The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (Act 61 of 1985).

people without a warrant in light of sound data (Sections 41, 42, and 43). Avoidance of Illegal Traffic: It accommodates preventive confinement of people engaged with drug dealing in specific situations.

Exceptional Courts and Quick Preliminaries Unique Courts: The Demonstration orders the foundation of Extraordinary Courts to guarantee the expedient preliminary of NDPS cases. These courts are given restrictive ward to attempt offenses under the NDPS Act. Facilitated Lawful Cycle: The Demonstration expects to speed up judicial procedures to keep away from delays, guaranteeing that drug-related cases are settled rapidly, given their serious nature. Over the years, the NDPS Act has undergone several amendments to make it more effective: 1988 Amendment: Provided more powers to law enforcement agencies for tackling drug-related crimes. 2001 Amendment: Made a distinction between drug users and drug traffickers, introducing provisions for rehabilitation and more lenient sentences for small-time offenders and addicts. 2014 Amendment: Further simplified procedures, introduced more provisions for treatment and rehabilitation of addicts, and allowed medical use of certain narcotic drugs like morphine. These amendments have sought to address the evolving nature of drug-related issues in India while ensuring compliance with international norms.

International Perspective

The misuse and trafficking of drugs is a global issue that requires international cooperation in order to be eradicated. On January 23, 1912, the first international opium convention was signed in The Hague with this issue in mind.²⁰ In order to manage drug usage globally, it established the basic concepts. "Since opium, morphine, and cocaine were the main drugs of abuse in the first half of the 20th century, the international community adopted treaties to limit the production of these drugs and their derivatives to the lowest level possible and to use them exclusively for medical and scientific purposes. Reducing the illegal drug trade was the main goal of these accords' meetings. Additionally, these accords provided for the Permanent Central Opium Board, the forerunner of the International Narcotics Control Board, to oversee and monitor implementation. Last but not least, all of these agreements were combined into the 1961 Convention known as "The Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs,

²⁰ United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, *United Nations International Opium Convention* (1912), 8 League of Nations Treaty Series 187.

1961²¹." In an attempt to convey to the world community that combating this evil cannot be accomplished by a single nation, all of the contracting states extended the entire apparatus of international control to all drugs and narcotic drugs for the first time when this convention came into effect in 1964.

In the umbrella of United Nations, a convention named the "The Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971"²² was adopted for establishing an international mechanism for psychotropic substances which was not present in previous convention of 1961. This convention also established the fundamental principles that availability of psychotropic substances should be restricted for only legitimate purposes and effective action against abuse of such substances demands coordination and global action on the part of contracting parties under the direction of the United Nations. This Convention has also emphasized prevention of abuse of psychotropic substances and early detection, treatment, education, after care, rehabilitation and social reintegration of the individual concerned. It has also laid down several measures concerning drug control, drug traffic, treatment as well as rehabilitation policy for addicts subsequently, the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, was supplemented by 1972 Protocol offering the same basic principles for effective control mechanism for narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.²³

The United Nations Convention against transnational illicit drug trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances held at Vienna,²⁴ Austria in 1988 was arguably one of the first global initiative to act on the illegal drug trafficking proceeds within the comity of nations and expressed the desirability of the mutual legal assistance among the Member States to address the threat in order to provide for confiscation of the moneys and for extradition of the criminals. The Government of India has signed the Convention.

India has historically acknowledged the issue of drug trafficking and abuse. The

²¹ United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, *United Nations Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs* (1961), 520 United Nations Treaty Series 204.

²² United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, *United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances* (1971), 1019 United Nations Treaty Series 175.

²³ United Nations office on Drug and Crime, *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961*, (as amended by 1972 protocol), 976 United Nations Treaty Series 3.

²⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances* (1988), 1582 United Nations Treaty Series 95.

Opium Act of 1857²⁵ and of 1878²⁶ and the Dangerous Drugs Act, 1930²⁷ reflect the same.

Following experience acquired due to India's participation in several international conventions and gaining an awareness and the seriousness of the issue and the necessity for enacting laws in sync with times, the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985²⁸ was enacted by Indian Parliament as an overall legislation on narcotics, allowing stringent and long-term prison sentences and heavy fines to be imposed upon violators. Offender under this Act encompasses the cultivator, supplier, seller as well as the drug consumer. Bail provisions were made extremely stringent. Minimum sentence is ten years. The Drugs and Cosmetics Act²⁹ and Rules as amended also offer deterrent punishment and strict control over manufacture, sale distribution of psychotropic substances.

The functioning of the international system rests on national control by states themselves within the framework of their jurisdiction. As a matter of complying with the provisions of the narcotics treaties, the states are obligated to enact proper legislation, introduce required administrative and enforcement measures and co-operate with international control.³⁰ The defensive response of society against drug pollution has now become that of the international community. The global regulation of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances is based on the multilateral treaties signed between 1912 and 1988.

The international control organs, operating under the United Nations umbrella are one policy making organ, the commission on narcotic drugs, replacing the league of Nations Advisory Committee on Traffic in opium and other Dangerous Drugs, a general control organ,³¹ and one specialized administrative organ, the International Narcotics Control Board which is specifically tasked with the oversight of provision of the narcotics treaties addressing measures of Quantitative Control (statistics and estimates). Both the Commission and the Board are accountable to the Economic and Social Council.

²⁵ The Opium Act, 1857 (Act 13 of 1857).

²⁶ The Opium Act, 1878 (Act 1 of 1878).

²⁷ The Dangerous Drugs Act, 1930 (Act 2 of 1930).

²⁸ The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substance Act, 1985 (Act 61 of 1985).

²⁹ The Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 (Act 2 of 1940).

³⁰ United Nations office on Drug and Crime, *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs*, 1961 (as amended by the 1972 Protocol). United Nations Treaty Series, vol. 520, p. 151.

³¹ United Nations office on Drugs and Crime, *A century of international drug control*. Vienna (2008).

Development of International Drug Control

In 1909, narcotic drug use and abuse were extensive in other parts of the world apart from the Far East when the first attempt at the international level was initiated, opium abuse was the focal point. There had been the opium wars in China in middle of nineteenth century to maintain Chinese market open to the trade in opium from British India,³² and then the great rise in opium from British India and then the great rise in the use of Morphine during American Civil War. A major step was made in 1906 with the adoption of an edict in China that prohibited the growing of the opium poppy. This was the initial step toward the eventual complete prohibition of opium smoking.³³

Shanghai Opium Commission

The platform was ready for the initial international conference on narcotic drug that paved the way to signing the initial treaty three years down the road. At the instigation of the United States administration led by President Theodore Roosevelt, thirteen interested powers in the Far East entrusted the appointment of an Opium Commission which was convened at Shanghai in 1909. Nine resolutions concerning every feature of the opium evil were adopted by the commission. The primary target of the commission, to quote the Viceroy of the Liang Kiang, was, "to consider the question of stopping consumption of opium. For the whole world, if by the efforts of the conference a means is discovered to abbreviate the limit and achieve the abolition of opium at an early date."³⁴

The commission asked for gradual suppression of smoking opium and suggested steps aimed at preventing smuggling of narcotics, particularly by preventing their export to areas which did not legally accept them. A plea was also made to the governments that managed foreign concessions and settlements in China to take multiple steps to cooperate with the Chinese government. Governments were also encouraged to adopt extreme measures for regulating the production and distribution of morphine and other opium derivatives.³⁵ The commission did not create any legally binding obligations but it pointed out the direction for future action.

³² Bayer, I., & Ghodse, H. (1999). *Evolution of international drug control*. Bulletin on Narcotics, 51(1-2), 1-17.

³³ Chatterjee, S. K. (1981). *Legal aspects of international drug control*. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

³⁴ *International Opium Convention*, 1912, 8 League of Nations Treaty series 187, art. VI.

³⁵ Report of *International Opium Commission*, Shanghai, China, Vol. 1, 1909, p. 63.

The Hague Convention, 1912

The Hague Opium Convention of 1912 was the first international convention where an effort was made to curb the abuse of opium and other allied drugs. The Preamble of the convention stated: "Desirous of advancing a step further on the road opened by the International Commission of Shanghai of 1909." This convention has six chapters which only discussed opium (raw and prepared) and allied drugs (cocaine, morphine etc.) although a special chapter (VI) was brought into operation only in respect of China giving effect to certain of the Shanghai resolutions. The convention entered into force on 28th June 1919.

This convention made international co-operation in the control of narcotic drugs a matter of international law and principles enunciated in it have continued to form the foundation of international narcotics control. The convention provided that the manufacture and export of raw opium should be regulated by law, that smoking of opium should be progressively suppressed, and that the production, sale and consumption of manufactured narcotic drugs (i.e. of morphine, other opiates and cocaine) should be restricted, by law to medical and legitimate purposes, manufacture of and dealers in such drugs were also brought under a system of permit.

The Covenant of the League of Nations stipulated that the members of the League should "entrust the League with the general supervision over agreements with regard to the traffic in opium and other dangerous drug." The Advisory Committee on Traffic in opium and other Dangerous Drugs was established by the first League assembly to aid and advise the Leagues council in these activities.

The Geneva Convention, 1925

The 1925 Geneva International Opium Convention, being the first convention signed during the League era is a move towards curbing the drug scourge.³⁶ This convention, adopted on the second opium conference of Geneva from November 1924 to February 1925, was necessitated by the failure of The Hague Opium Convention of 1912 to stem contraband trade in and misuse of narcotic drugs. The aim of this convention was to introduce a more effective restriction upon the production or manufacture of narcotic drugs by having a tighter control and supervision of the international trade. This Convention has seven chapters. Chapter

³⁶ United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, *International Opium Convention*, 1925, art. VI.

VI of the convention was dedicated to the Permanent Central Board which was formed for international supervision of the drug industry. According to this convention, governments were obligated to report to Permanent Central Board yearly statistics relating to production of opium and coca leaves and manufacture, use and stocks of narcotic drugs and quarterly ones relating to import and export of such drugs, including opium and coca leaves. It also provided the system of import certificates and export authorization subjecting each import and export to governmental approval.

Therefore, a Permanent Central Board was created to oversee the introduced statistical system under the convention. The board was made up of eight autonomous experts acting in their own capacity and not as their government's representative.

Then The Convention for Limiting the Manufacture and Regulating the Distribution of Narcotic Drugs,³⁷ 1931 was convened whereupon contracting parties asserted that this convention was signed not only to supplement the Hague Opium Convention of 1912 and the Geneva Opium Convention of 1925 but also to make effective control over the narcotic drugs. The Convention for the Suppression of the Illicit Traffic in Dangerous Drugs, 1936 was executed at Geneva on 26 June, 1936 and entered into force during October 1939, demands the punishment of the illegal traffickers.³⁸ The Paris Protocol of 1948 entered into force on December 1949 empowering the World Health Organization to bring under full international control any drug (including synthetic drugs).

Later on, The Protocol for Limiting and Regulating the Cultivation of the Poppy Plant, the Production of International and Wholesale Trade in and Use of Opium,³⁹ 1953 emerged with the goal of restricting the utilization of drugs for medical and scientific purposes and limiting the manufacture of raw materials out of which natural narcotic drugs are derived. In this way, the countries went on making attempts to prevent drug addiction and illicit traffic in narcotic drugs by close cooperation between all states and to further consolidate the system of narcotics control on National as well as international levels.

³⁷ United Nations office on Drug and Crime, *Convention for Limiting the Manufacture and Regulating the Distribution of Narcotic Drugs*, 1931.

³⁸ United Nations office on Drug and Crime, *Convention for the Suppression of Illicit Traffic in Dangerous Drugs*, 1936.

³⁹ *Protocol for Limiting and Regulating the Cultivation of Poppy Plant, the Production of International and Wholesale Trade in and Use of Opium*, 1953.

Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961

The only convention on Narcotic Drugs 1961 was convened at Geneva from 6th March, 1972 to 24th March 1972 under United Nations auspices. It was an inaugural effort to streamline and amalgamate international drug central machinery. This tool formalized all the prevailing multilateral conventions and combined the permanent Central Board and Drug supervisory Board in the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) a pertinently constituted authority in the global context that prescribes rules and limitations in respect of narcotics.⁴⁰

The Single Convention was not merely a consolidation of earlier international agreements but also expanded the regulatory framework to include additional substances, such as cannabis and coca leaf, while introducing new control mechanisms. Its key provisions include:

- (a) The ban on the production, trade, and non-medical use of all narcotic drugs.
- (b) The inclusion of cannabis and coca leaf under controlled substances.
- (c) Restricting the possession of narcotic drugs to authorized individuals for medical or scientific purposes only.
- (d) Mandating production limits for manufactured drugs, based on the estimation system established by the 1931 Convention (excluding raw materials).
- (e) Integrating core elements of the 1953 Protocol, such as national opium monopolies and farmer licensing, and applying these measures to cannabis and coca leaf.
- (f) Extending the import certificate and export authorization system from the 1925 Convention to cover poppy straw.
- (g) Enhancing the international statistical control system to encompass all transactions involving substances regulated by the Convention.

A notable aspect of the Convention is its emphasis on new obligations for the medical

⁴⁰ United Nations office on Drug and Crime, *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs*, 1961.

treatment and rehabilitation of individuals struggling with addiction.

Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971

Another responsibility for determining whether a new substance should be medically included under the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances lies with the World Health Organization (WHO). Once the WHO evaluates the substance, the final decision on its scheduling is made by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, which considers additional factors such as the extent of known risks, potential for abuse, and trafficking patterns.⁴¹

The Convention also emphasizes the prevention of psychotropic substance abuse and highlights the importance of early identification, treatment, education, aftercare, rehabilitation, and social reintegration for individuals affected by substance use.

Concerns over the sharp rise in drug-related issues during the late 1970s prompted the United Nations General Assembly to develop an International Drug Abuse Control Strategy⁴² in 1981, along with a five-year action program. This strategy outlined a series of policy measures addressing various aspects of drug control, trafficking, and the treatment of addicts. The sixpoint strategy included:

Strengthening the international drug control system by encouraging broader adherence to existing treaties, coordinating efforts to ensure a balance between the supply and demand of drugs for legitimate medical and scientific purposes, eradicating illicit drug trafficking by promoting income-generating alternatives for those involved in illegal drug production, intensifying efforts to detect and dismantle clandestine laboratories and trafficking networks.

Implementing measures to prevent drug abuse and promote treatment, rehabilitation, and social reintegration for individuals struggling with addiction. The Programme of Action outlined specific activities for the United Nations and member governments to achieve these objectives. The Commission on Narcotic Drugs was tasked with monitoring and coordinating the implementation of these measures.

⁴¹ United Nations office on Drug and Crime, *Convention on Psychotropic Substances*, 1971, 1019 United Nations Treaty Series 175, art. 2.

⁴² United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 36/168: *International Drug Abuse Control Strategy*, 1981.

Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances 1988

The 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances,⁴³ held in Vienna from November 25 to December 20, 1988, was convened in response to the growing global concern over the increasing illicit production, demand, and trafficking of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances. These activities were recognized as posing a severe threat to human health and welfare, as well as undermining the economic, cultural, and political foundations of societies worldwide. The participating parties were determined not only to penalize those involved in such illicit activities but also to address the root causes of drug abuse. Recognizing that eradicating illicit trafficking is a shared responsibility, the Convention emphasized the need for coordinated international cooperation, including efforts to suppress illicit trafficking by sea.

The primary goal of the Convention was to promote cooperation among participating states to more effectively address the multifaceted issue of illicit drug trafficking, which often spans international borders. It encouraged states to adopt necessary legislative and administrative measures in line with their domestic legal systems while respecting the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other states.

Under the convention of 1988 providing guidelines for determining offences and sanction required each party to adopt such measures as may be necessary to establish as criminal offences under its domestic law when committed internationally. The lists of criminal offences as suggested by the convention are as follows:

The production, manufacture, extraction, preparation, offering, distribution, sale, delivery, brokerage, dispatch, transport, importation, or exportation of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances in violation of the 1961 and 1971 Conventions.

The cultivation of opium poppy, coca bush, or cannabis plant for the production of narcotic drugs, contrary to the provisions of the 1961 Convention. The possession or purchase of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances for the purpose of engaging in any of the activities listed above. The manufacture, transport, or distribution of equipment, materials, or substances

⁴³ United Nations office on Drug and Crime, *Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances*, 1988, 1582 United Nations Treaty Series 95, art. 3.

knowing they will be used for the illicit cultivation, production, or manufacture of narcotic drugs or psychotropic substances.

The conversion or transfer of property, knowing it is derived from drug-related offenses, to conceal its illicit origin or assist offenders in evading legal consequences.

The concealment or disguise of the true nature, source, location, disposition, movement, or ownership of property derived from drug-related offenses.

The Convention directed parties to adopt measures ensuring that the offenses listed above are criminalized under their domestic laws. It recommended punishments such as imprisonment, other forms of deprivation of liberty, pecuniary sanctions, and confiscation of assets derived from illicit activities. By establishing a comprehensive framework for international cooperation, the 1988 Convention aimed to strengthen the global response to illicit drug trafficking and related criminal activities, while also addressing the underlying causes of drug abuse and promoting public health and safety.

Challenges and Opportunities

Research on drug trafficking at the international level has revealed that weak law enforcement capacity and corruption are instrumental in keeping the illicit market resilient. Corruption has been found to exist all along the drug supply chain, from production and trafficking to distribution, and it affects a wide range of institutions: eradication teams, law enforcement agencies, the criminal justice system as well as the health sector for instance when users can get drugs through corrupt doctors and pharmacists.⁴⁴ (UNODC, 2017).

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have highlighted how corruption entrenches poverty by discouraging foreign investment and increasing the level of income inequality, which in turn is known to encourage drug consumption and fuel more corruption and instability (World Bank Group, 2017).⁴⁵ Furthermore, recent reports link a number of terrorist groups-such as the Taliban, insurgent movements and non-State armed groups to the drug trade. (UNODC, 2017).

Following the money trail of the drug market has proven to be one of the most effective

⁴⁴ United Nations office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2017*.

⁴⁵ World Bank Group, *World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law* (2017).

approaches to combating drug trafficking. Drug trafficking is driven by profits, and identifying the flows related to those profits as well as the investment and laundering channels can function as effective counteraction⁴⁶ (GLOU40 Global, 2017; Soudijin, 2016; UNODC, 2015). Strengthening international cooperation in preventing and countering money-laundering also helps to reduce or eliminate the potential negative economic and social consequences of illicit activities.

Conclusion

The shifting dynamics of drug trafficking in the Indian Ocean particularly the exploitation of the Southern Route underscore that the drug menace is no longer just a localized law enforcement issue, but a complex, transnational security and public health crisis. While comprehensive legal frameworks like the NDPS Act of 1985 provide the theoretical teeth needed to combat this threat, their success hinges entirely on rigorous, uncompromised execution by cross-border control and narcotics agencies. Ultimately, an international perspective reveals that supply-side interdiction is only half the battle. To permanently dismantle trafficking networks, societies must aggressively target demand-side vulnerabilities. This requires a profound paradigm shift: framing drug users as victims in need of rehabilitation rather than criminals deserving of stigma, integrating preventative education into schools, and addressing the socio-economic gaps like youth unemployment that syndicates exploit with the allure of quick wealth. Looking forward, traditional policing alone cannot keep pace with the agility of global trafficking networks. True progress demands a heavily unified approach: combining robust international maritime cooperation to secure vast ocean spaces with grassroots domestic interventions like NGO campaigns, institutional counselling, and crop containment. Only through a highly coordinated, multi-agency strategy that balances strict cross-border enforcement with empathetic, localized community care can nations successfully secure their borders and protect their citizens.

Suggestions

1. A modern solution will require a more comprehensive, global system, instead of a small, local system for cracking drug supply chains, which are increasingly flexible and

⁴⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Programme against Money Laundering*, Proceeds Crime and the Financing of Terrorism, (2017); M.R.J. Soudijn, "Following the Money Trail" *Journal of Money Laundering Control* (2016); United Nations office on Drug and Crime, *World Drug Report* 2015.

transnational.

2. Interlink regional intelligence hubs, like the Information Fusion Centre, Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) and Indian Ocean Region Security Conclave (IOC) partners directly with global platforms such as the INCB's Precursor Incident Communication System (PICS).
3. To set up automated alerts for rising risk of maritime anomalies, darknet vendor activities and suspicious hawala (alternative remittance) of financial profiles, compulsorily for 24/7; and
4. Establish a clear-to-ship period for all dual use chemicals, including non-scheduled designer precursors, of 48 hours for all dual use items, through a unified digital validation process that is managed by the PEN Online (Pre-Export Notification) system.
5. Develop uniform Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) between chemical manufacturers and impose strict "Know Your Customer" (KYC) requirements on worldwide freight forwarders and chemical distributors.
6. Implement AI-powered Maritime Domain Awareness (MIDA) platforms to automatically monitor satellite dark vessels (those that intentionally turn off their Automatic Identification System or AIS).
7. Form multi-lateral Ship Rider Agreements and joint task forces. This will enable law enforcement officials of one country to travel on board the boats of partner navies/coast guards and lend direct boarding power to those vessels when operating in international (or contiguous) waters.
8. Uniformly implement Evidence handling at Sea (EHS) manuals in all participating countries in order to maintain the chain of custody from the first VBSS (Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure) to court.
9. Develop specific and streamlined Mutual Legal Assistance Treaties (MLAs) to address electronic evidence (including encrypted cell phone evidence). GPS tracks, AI based tracking logs as universally admissible in multinational narcotics trials.