

## THE DISCOURSE OF DRUG TRAFFICKING FROM GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examined drug trafficking phenomenon from the global perspective. The study employed a desk review research approach with the reports and evaluations obtained from secondary sources of data analyzed through content analysis. The study found that globalization is posing an entirely new challenges or threats to human security which include the global expansion of the drug trade. The study also found that the debilitating effect of the drug trade on societies coupled with its links to other transnational threats can leads to prolonged drug war. The study recommended that international drug control efforts should focus on economic development aimed at undermining the incentives for producing illicit narcotic drugs. To ease the implementation of policy measures aimed at combating drug trafficking and insecurity across nation states, political leaders should muster the political will to eradicate corruption at all levels while also addressing the structural vulnerabilities which their country presents. The capacity of inter-institutional agencies that are directly involved in counter-narcotic strategies and policies across states should also be strengthened in order to bring about cohesion in policy harmonization with global partners.*

**Keywords:** Drug Trafficking, Globalization, Narcotics, Security, Transnational Organized Crime.

### Historical Background

Historically, the uses of Narcotic drugs according to Leduc and Lee (2003) in ancient days were mainly for medicinal purposes and the trafficking of drugs in the Andean Region noted for producing Cocaine (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia) dates back to the colonial days when “coca” the leaf from which cocaine is produced was chewed in order to “sustain long hours of work on the high altitudes of the Andes mountain line” (Alvarez 2011, pp.3-4). Heroin, also derived from the opium puppy plant is produced from two major areas: The Golden Triangle (Thailand, Burma and Laos) and The Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.) (Akyeapong, 2005, p.437). This drug has also existed for centuries while Cannabis from all available record indicates that the plant is cultivated from most regions across the globe.

Leduc and Lee (2003) also cited an earlier work by (Segal,1996) and asserted that the 19<sup>th</sup> century opium trade was shaped by imperial Britain for economic purposes by “selling Indian -produced Opium to China in exchange for tea and silk and fought the “opium wars” to defend its right to do so (Courtwright,2001). According to Akyeapong (2005) the drug trade involved the export of Indian grown Opium by the British to China after 1757 as a capital formation in a bid to ensure “redress in balance -of-payment deficits in trade with China” and in similar track German, Dutch, American and Japanese businesses involved in processing of Cocaine made reasonable fortunes between 1890s and World War II (p.429).

Drug Trafficking into the US however started gaining reasonable attention after World War 11(WW11) with the “boom of the American economy” and by late 1970s large quantities of cocaine were trafficked by the Colombians into the United States through the Caribbean, with Central America and Mexico rising to be the first “drug trafficking organizations” (DTOs) also called “cartels”. Peru and Bolivia cartels also followed soothe while Mexico, Central America, and countries in the Caribbean like Haiti, Jamaica became transit regions “in charge of storage and transportation, serving as a logistical hub for the Colombian cartels” and

finally the United States provided the market for the cocaine trade and money laundering activities presented by the drug trade (Alvarez, 2011, pp.3-4).

Evidence of widespread addiction of cocaine and heroin galvanized prohibitionist forces in the West to agitate for its restriction as Europe and North American took page from lessons learnt about widespread Opium addiction in China in the 19th and early 20th century Akyeapong (2005,p.436) and this dimension offered a new thinking in line with prohibition laws based on the adverse effects of addiction by Great Britain, United State of America (USA) and other countries in the world with United States (US) remaining the largest population affected. The international community therefore responded to control the narcotic drugs usage due to the widespread “high addiction, dependency, and abuse” coupled with the pressures mounted to control such substances. This resulted in three major United Nations (U.N) conventions for the illicit drugs control as summarized by Madi (2003):

Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs (1961) limits production of narcotic drugs for licit medical and scientific purposes only; Convention on Psychotropic Substances (1971) was developed in order to curtail the negative and rapid dependency on synthetic drugs, as LSD, and other stimulants; and Convention Against Illicit Trafficking (1988) was developed as international community realized it is hardly possible to solve the threat of drugs without joint efforts, sharing of data, in order to meet the challenge from growing illicit drug trafficking.(P.27).

In a further attempt to re-emphasize the commitments of states in the recognition of the extent of the drug problem at the global scene, 185 members States at the UN General Assembly on June 10, 1998 in New York signed a *Political Declaration (on the Guiding Principles of Drug Demand Reduction)* as contained in Resolution No. A/RES/S-20/2 which acknowledged that:

Drugs destroy lives and communities, undermine sustainable Human development and generate crime. Drugs affect all sectors of the society in all countries; in particular, drug abuse affects the freedom and development of young people, the world’s most valuable asset. Drugs are a grave threat to the health and well-being of all mankind, the independence of States, democracy, the stability of nations, the structure of all societies, and the dignity and hope of millions of people and their families. (Leduc and Lee, 2003).

Record also shows that the volumes of cocaine consumed in Europe in the last decade have doubled even though consumption stabilized from 2006 to 2009 with record of annual prevalence of 1.2% among the population age bracket of 15 to 64 in 2009 (UNODC, 2011, p.10). According to the World Drug Report (2012), this prevalence increased in 2010 (p.11) and with the increase in global population, consumers also increased correspondingly (UNODC, 2011, p.8).

While cannabis, cocaine, heroin and other psychoactive substances continue to dominate the illicit drug trade, the last decade has witnessed the emergence of the “new psychoactive substances (NPS), i.e. psychoactive substances not under international control that pose a health threat” and its use has rapidly increased with high profit for traffickers. UNODC report also indicates that NPS cases reported by member states “rose from 166 at the end of 2009 to 251 by mid-2012”, being an increase that “exceeds the total number of psychoactive substances currently controlled by the international drug conventions (234 substances)” (World Drug Report, 2013, p.59). These new findings present a worrisome dimension of the global drug trade which needs to be properly examined.

### **The trafficking and Use of Illicit Drugs**

The trafficking of illicit drugs (Cocaine, Heroin Cannabis and Amphetamines-Synthetic Stimulants) has been acknowledged as a “frustrating feature of the international scene” as evidence abounds that the “debilitating consequences” on mankind ranges from health issues, inducement, social vices, civil upheavals and other forms of criminalities too numerous to mention (Leduc and Lee, 2003. In Europe alone, an estimated 3.5 million cocaine users in 2006 was recorded, the figure rose to 4.5 million in 2007, and to 5.5 million in 2008 and much higher increase which also led to greater involvement of traffickers (Udama,2014,p.3) drawn by high value of drugs at the international market (Ayodele,2011,p.35). This is the situation with regards the rising trend of the illicit global trade in narcotic and which have made it a serious issue of security concern globally (Udama, 2014).

According to (Wyler,2012, p.6) the global estimates of illicit narcotic drug users stand between 153 to 300 million people which group fall in between 15 to 64 age bracket with an estimated 15.5 to 38.6 million of these people identified as having problem with drug use. The 2010 global statistics also recorded 99, 000 to 253, 000 deaths that are linked to the use of drug and also identified drug use and addiction as eroding “the social fabric and economic development of societies” thereby creating enormous burden within the public health sectors of states in terms of infrastructure” (Weyler, 2012, pp.6-7). **The severity and complexity of World Drug Situation increase in recent times can be summarized as follows:**

In 2017, an estimated 271 million people, or 5,5 per cent of the global population aged 15-64, had used drugs in the previous year. While this is similar to the 2016 estimate, a longer-term view reveals that the number of people who use drugs is now 30 per cent higher than it was in 2009. Although that increase was in part due to a 10 per cent growth in the global population aged 15-64, data now shows a higher prevalence of the use of opioids in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America and the use of cannabis in North America, South America and Asia compared with 2009 (United Nations Office of Drug and Crime,2019).

### **The Global Nature of the Illicit Narcotic drug Trade**

The illicit drug trade has also become a “formative networks of global integration” and has remained “destructive forces” while reports from United Nations indicate that the drug trade remains a powerful transnational player able to capitalize on the weaknesses of states and their economy in a world where control of such vulnerable region becomes an increasingly important and burdened issue; thus the abuse of the illicit drug remains a problem of social policy globally (Bhattacharyya,2005 pp.91-93). More worrisome is the fact that globalization is posing entirely new challenges or threats to human security which include the global expansion of the drug trade (Adekanye,2004,p.vi; Ayodele, 2011). Globalization as defined by Oosthuysen (1997) is widely accepted to denote a compression in time-space relationships allowing faster; more intense cross-border flows which is usually enhanced through the effective use of communication and information technology (p.10). Oosthuysen (1997) also emphasized “that the global drugs problem is characterized more by diversity than by homogeneity”.

Picarelli (2008) described the illicit political economy that exist globally as the “dark side of globalization” (p.457), a phrase earlier coined in by Stephen Ellis while expressing the ills brought about by globalization. Bybee (2011) also acknowledged that while globalization has been lauded for fostering free trade and economic prosperity, its “Dark Side” has also created opportunities for criminals and non-state actors to enrich and empower themselves by taking advantage of lucrative illicit markets, or by creating new ones (p.1).

The global illicit drugs industry is often “modeled by four forces. The forces according to Dryfus (2002) are consumer preference; drug prices; the modalities and intensity of enforcement; and the weakness or vulnerability of that state. Any state therefore caught by any of these forces definitely becomes a player in

the illicit drug trade .That is why drug trafficking today has remained a global phenomenon, permeating all societies. This fact was acknowledged by the 2013 World Drug Report which stated that:

Globally, the demand for drugs has not been substantially reduced and that some challenges exist in the implementation of the drug control system, in the violence generated by trafficking in illicit drugs, in the fast evolving nature of new psychoactive substances, and in those national legislative measures which may result in a violation of human rights (UNODC, 2013).

The illicit drug trade has therefore remained the largest sector of the “illicit political economy” (Picarelli, 2008, p.457). Another worrisome dimension recorded about the illicit drug trade is the discovery of “new psychoactive substances”. According to the 2013 World Drug Report “there has been a recoded increase in the production and misuse of new psychoactive substances which are substances that are not under international control (UNODC, 2013). The report further reveals that “multitude of new psychoactive substances and the speed with which they have emerged in all regions of the world is one of the most notable trends in drug markets over the past five years (UNODC, 2013). This new trend present yet another challenging feature of the drug trade globally.

### **Links between Drug Trafficking and Insecurity of States**

Globally, notable scholars have researched on the link that exist between drug trafficking and the insecurity of states. From South America continent, drug trafficking has been identified as a major security issue in the region and also for the United States since the 1970s. The drug trafficking phenomenon has also “increased and spread” across many Latin American countries with the acquisition of “new capabilities and operational concepts” in the last two decades which according to experts have turned the region into a “lethal emerging threat posed against many of the fragile developing democracies in Central America”(Alvarez,2011,p.1). This state of insecurity was further described by Alvarez to be contributed mainly by the geographical proximity of Central America to Mexico and the United States, political and economic exchange ties uniting them, and the “heavy migration flow” to the United States from the region.

This is buttressed by notable research works in that part of the continent identified as Andean region where cocaine is produced. Included for reference is (Dreyfus,2002) whose work stressed that drug trafficking remains a national security issue for South American states and analyzed the security issues in Venezuela and Argentina that are “neighboring transshipment countries” of two coca-cocaine producer countries: Colombia and Bolivia. Dreyfus (2002) further explained that in the case of Venezuela, it was discovered that the spillover effects of enforcement against the cocaine industry in Colombia represented an overt threat to the nation since the early 1980s. Secondly organized criminal activities areto generate from the (weak or strong) nature of the states, and may not necessarily stem from the level of economic development of the state. This he argued by citing territorial control, political and economic power of the Russian *mafya* before the disintegration of the - Soviet Union and also criminal organizations that exist in Italy till date.

The study of Alvarez (2011) also align with the study of Dreyfus (2002) which recognized drug trafficking as a major threat in most of the Latin American countries but quickly identified the symbiotic relationship that exist between “drug trafficking cartels and other symmetric and asymmetric entities that are enemies of the free world, and particularly of the United State. Among the list of these enemies we find terrorists, subversive organizations, and rogue states, and entities with extremist ideologies” (Alvarez, 2011).

The Caribbean islands are not also left out in the drug trafficking phenomenon as (Barnes ,2002) research identified Haiti’s “geographic location, political culture, illegal immigrants, entrepreneurial class and weak institutions ... weak democratic institutions, dysfunctional judicial system and fledgling police force” as driving factors that turned the country into a ‘major transshipment point’ especially for South America drugs

destined to United States. The overall effects in Drug Trafficking in Haiti today as concluded by Barnes include but are not limited to “violence, corruption and lack of democratic consolidation” (Barnes, 2002). It is important to note also that the international drug trade experienced several changes after the end of the cold war. Significant changes in that direction include “increased flow of people and goods” from East to West flow, eventual collapse of the Soviet Union & the Eastern Europe empires rendering the citizens vulnerable, resulting in the new groups of trafficking/smuggling “viewed as a “function of global political and economic imperatives”(Leduc and Lee, 2003).

This trend was vividly captured by a researcher on the Asian Continent, in the work of Madi (2003) who acknowledged that the drug trade has permeated the weak states in Central Asia and posed great threat to all sectors of Central Asian Republics (CARs) national security and stability, namely - states that emerged from the former Soviet Union (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). The state of insecurity in that region as cited by Madi was also contributed by the proximity of Afghanistan - a major producer of heroine to states in central Asia and also to Tajikistan - a major trafficker. Madi therefore posits that rather than using military to fight the war on drugs “societal, environment social and economic development programs” should be embarked upon in order to strengthen the state and thereby tackle the drug trade (Madi, 2003).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The global trend of the drug trade requires great attention as its debilitating effect on societies coupled with its links to other transnational threats leads to yet another prolonged drug war. It is therefore recommended that the international drug control efforts should focus on economic and social developmental programs aimed at undermining the incentives for producing drugs. They will address the structural weaknesses contributing to the rising trend of drug trafficking and insecurity. Governments of states should realize that the huge profit to be made from the drug trade rather than ideology remains the driving force that cements the alliance between state officials and drug traffickers. Therefore in sustaining democracy across states, political leaders should muster the political will to eradicate corruption at all levels while also addressing the structural vulnerabilities which their country presents. This will no doubt ease the implementation of policy measures aimed at combating drug trafficking and insecurity across nation states.

The capacity of inter-institutional agencies that are directly involved in counter-narcotic strategies and policies across nation states should be strengthened with a coordinating authority appointed and saddled with the responsibility of providing the much needed springboard for jointly collaborating with regional and global partners such as UNODC, AU, ECOWAS, INTERPOL, EUROPEAN UNION that have been providing technical support and funding for counter-narcotic efforts. This will bring about cohesion in policy harmonization between nation states and regional and global partners.

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