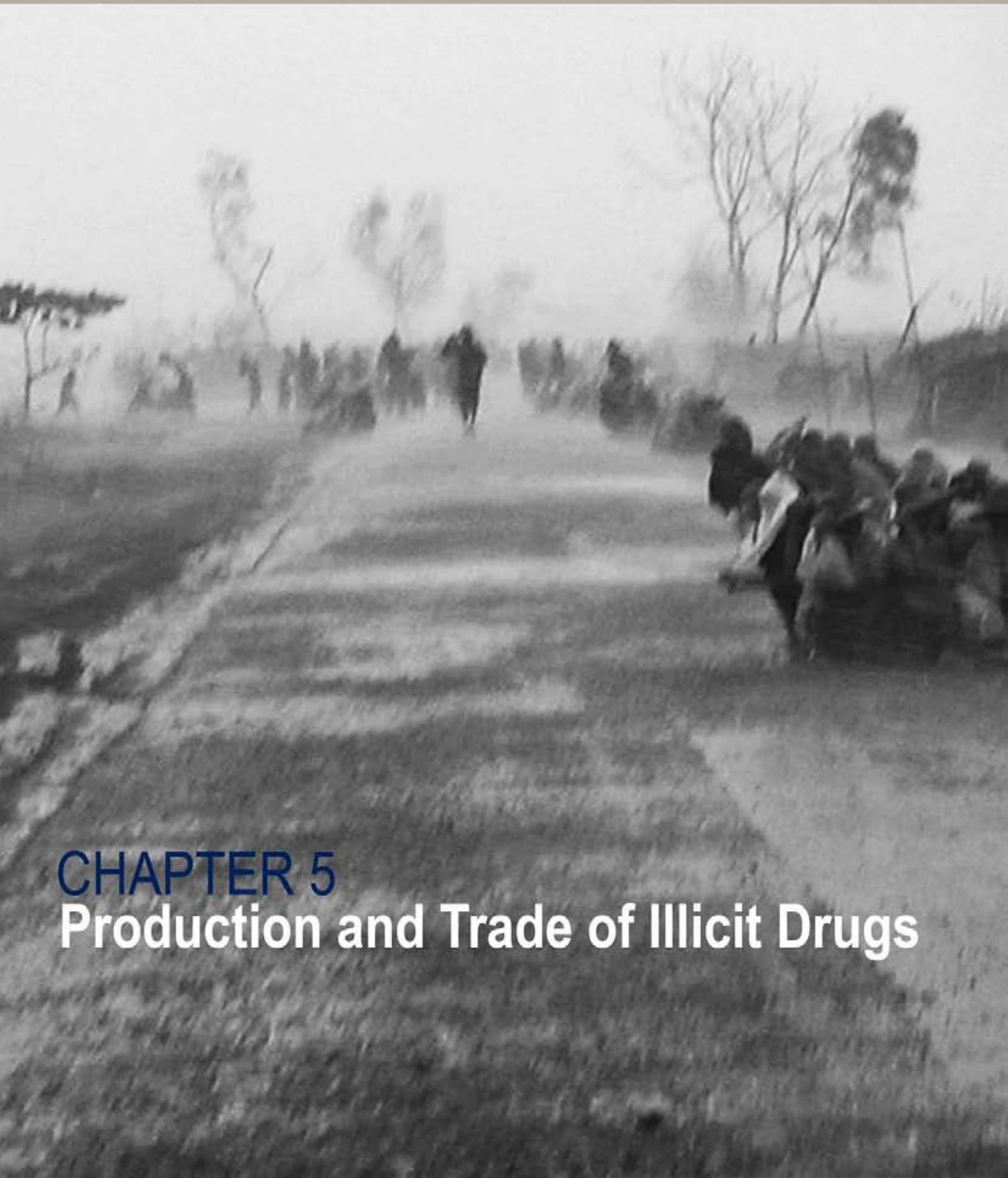


15th Annual Edition

BURMA

HUMAN RIGHTS YEARBOOK 2008





CHAPTER 5

Production and Trade of Illicit Drugs

BURMA

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5.1 Introduction

While mention of the Golden Triangle conjures images of the exotic east and Graham Greene's 'white nights' of opium fuelled sleep in clandestine dens, the reality for those living in Burma's portion of the Golden Triangle is far less romantic. The north eastern regions of Burma are, in the current climate, riven with factionalism, illegal trade, gangs, drug and human rights abuse unfolding inexorably in an environment of continuous hardship and poverty. Opium has traditionally played a large part in the lifestyle of the inhabitants of these regions, of Shan State predominantly. Cultivation and use of opium has long comprised a part of ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, and is used in traditional medicine as a guard against malaria, respiratory diseases and diarrhoea. It has also been used to produce cooking oil, is connected to spirit worship and has been used as currency for trade. Despite the arguably beneficent tradition that opium cultivation and use has played in Burma historically, opium has now become an integral factor in the civil conflict and one that threatens to prolong the suffering of those involved in the cultivation of opium poppy.

The role played by opium in Burma has changed significantly, and continues to do so, thanks in no small part to the long running civil conflict. Opium was first commercially cultivated in Burma in the mid-19th century, after it was found to be ideally suited to the mountainous northeast; an area where few other viable cash crops would grow. This was a blessing for the peoples of these regions, but it would become, at some point in the future, a curse. The northeast was also an area marred by Burma's internal struggles that developed into a haven for the Kuomintang anti-communist forces from China who used Burma as a base of operations, as well as the anti-State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) resistance forces of the Communist Party of Burma (CPB); a fighting force comprised mostly of ethnic Wa fighters, with backing from China. During the life of the CPB, opium cropping had largely been frowned upon, however, with the dissolution of the party in 1989, the situation changed markedly. During the course of 1989 the Wa leaders, who were said to be unhappy about losses of their rank and file in battle, staged a mutiny. This revolt, combined with a period of dwindling support from China, heralded the demise of the CPB in 1989 and led to the formation of four separate armies in the Wa region of Shan State. The New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K, mostly made up of Kachin), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) in Kokang and Mongko, the National Democratic Alliance Army (NDAA – mostly constituted by Kokang Chinese in Mong La) and the largest of the groups, the United Wa State Army (UWSA).¹ In order to prevent these groups from reorganising against the then SLORC (later to become the State Peace and Development Council), the head of the Directorate of Defence Services, Brigadier Khin Nyunt was dispatched to the region to negotiate with the former Communist party members. Nyunt was able to sign ceasefires with all concerned parties in return for full control of their respective areas and retention of their weapons. A further concession left the groups free to engage in any business activity that they saw fit. There were some similarities in the agreements reached between the SLORC and the ceasefire groups to those agreed to with militias that had been used in the region to augment regular SLORC forces in their offensives against insurgent ethnic groups, starting in the 60's. These groups had been given concessions for their loyalty to the SLORC during the civil conflict by being allowed to engage in business activities unimpeded by the SLORC. In the Shan State, these concessions sometimes meant the involvement in, and protection of, opium trafficking.²

With the new agreements in place, alongside the older ones secured with the civilian militias, Shan State became an area containing a complex mix of militia groups, ceasefire groups and military forces, all with a vested interest in the drug trade, with civilians caught in the middle of the profit making and political dealings. The former Communist fighters, freed from the constraints of Chinese influence and censure, became increasingly involved in the drug trade, which, combined with other groups such as the militias, Chinese gangs and military

authorities, culminated in Burma being responsible for between half and two thirds of the world's production of opium and heroin in the decade between 1989 and 1999.³ An additional development that led to a radical legislative change in Burma was the surrender of notorious drug kingpin Khun Sa, the leader of the Mong Tai Army in 1996. The surrender of Khun Sa in return for amnesty and protection by the SPDC paved the way for further ceasefire agreements as well as the eventual agreement between the regime and ceasefire groups to ban cultivation of opium with an aim of eliminating cultivation of poppy by 2014.⁴ This ban began in the Wa Special Region 2 from 2005, when 94 percent of opium cultivation was taking place in Shan State, of which, 42 percent was originating in the Wa Special Region 2.⁵

In the decade since these figures were released, the importance of the role played by opium in the lives of the Burmese civilians of the northeast in particular, has remained constant. Other factors have been in cycles of flux however. The role that opium has played in the civil conflict, its importance to the insurgent armies, the manner in which opium has been used as a political tool and its crucial role in development have all undergone changes in the past decade and have had serious consequences for the human rights of civilians living in these regions where poppy cultivation was predominantly practiced.



An ethnic Lahu family from eastern Shan State gather in their home to smoke opium. Opium usage remains a considerable problem for those in the area. *[Photo: © FBR]*

It is not merely the ethnic conflict regions that have suffered from the effects of drug use in Burma however. Rates of drug addiction, though difficult to quantify, appear to be increasing across the country. Two well documented shifts in drug habits also give cause for concern. Firstly, the transition from opium smoking to heroin smoking and finally to heroin injection, which has led in turn to HIV/AIDS rates increasing to match the levels of intravenous drug use.

The second shift has been the market shift from heroin use to so-called amphetamine type substances (ATS). The ATS categorisation includes drugs such as amphetamines (known as 'speed' in the west), methamphetamines, crystal-meth, and 'ice'. The changing tastes of drug users, largely driven by economic considerations, toward these synthetic drugs have posed problems for all stakeholders concerned with the eradication of drugs in Burma; actors ranging from China to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The transition to synthetic drugs coincided with the junta's crackdown on poppy production over the course of the last ten years, resulting in the SPDC's trumpeting of its successes in drug eradication. Despite the eradication of poppy cultivation in certain areas, concomitant

human rights abuses have negated a good deal of the positive effects of this reduction. Forced relocation, deprivation of livelihoods and lack of viable alternatives for farmers who were forcibly evicted from their lands have all been the result of a push by the SPDC to make Burma drug free by 2014 (in line with ASEAN's stated goal of a drug region by 2015). Thus, while the SPDC preens itself over the eradication of opium cultivation, and largely ignores the problems it has caused in the process, the nation has rapidly become addicted to alternative drugs, which pose just as dangerous a threat to Burma and its neighbours as opium ever did. These are factors which have brought the debate surrounding drug production and trafficking in Burma into the realm of human rights and developmental discourse, international relations and conflict resolution.

Greed Versus Grievance

Burma may well be a good case study in the discourse of greed versus grievance. The debate over greed versus grievance revolves around the causes behind civil conflict and the factors that may prolong conflict. Scholars have suggested that countries blessed with resources often fall into patterns of long term conflict as the motivations for belligerents begin to change over time and fluctuate between grievances based on ethnic and political considerations, to greed based on control of lucrative natural resources. In the case of Burma, this could be explained in terms of the long running civil conflict being prolonged by the opportunity for opium cultivation. This opportunity may partly change motivations of belligerents from those of a political nature into those of a more financial nature. (For an in depth explanation of the greed versus grievance debate, see Reappraising the Greed and Grievance Explanations for violent Internal Conflict, Murshed, S. M, and Tadjoeeddin, M. Z, 2007)

The northern states of Burma have provided ample opportunity for groups, both non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and the Burmese military to invest in opium cultivation, leading to the production of heroin, and later into the production and trafficking of amphetamine type substances (ATS). The combination of opportunity and the collusion between the belligerents (in the form of ceasefire agreements that in effect entrench the machinery by which both ceasefire groups and the ruling military junta can profit) mean that there may not be an end in sight to the problem of drug trafficking out of the region. The regional implications of the trafficking problem has only recently been recognised or acted upon in a serious way by China as an issue of regional security, which is surprising considering how much of the annual opium crop production of Burma ends up passing through southern China bound for other destinations.

The symbiotic relationship between the NSAGs and the military serves to perpetuate the problem. This relationship is exemplified by the ceasefire agreements that condone production and allow groups such as the UWSA to invest drugs profits into the legal economy. Despite the previous status quo which has benefited both sides, the junta began to push for drug eradication, encouraged by the international community and China in particular, in 1999. The push by the SPDC for eradication, though partially successful according to some, has been hamstrung by the lack of inclusion of the NSAGs into the political process which has effectively denied the ethnic minority groups a political voice. This lack of political inclusion has bolstered the image of drug trafficking in the eyes of the NSAGs as a means to guarantee the development of their regions, through the investment of drug profits into infrastructure as well as the promises of the SPDC to also invest in infrastructure and social service provisions in those regions as part of the peace deals brokered earlier.⁶

5.2 Drug Production

The two most prevalent types of drug production in Burma as of 2008 were, and continue to be, heroin and the so-called amphetamine type substances (ATS). ATS is an umbrella term encompassing amphetamines, methamphetamines, crystal meth, 'ice' and for the purpose of this chapter, ecstasy which is an MDMA derivative. Drug production in Burma has changed markedly since the 90's when Burma was producing a large portion of the world's heroin. Divergent events within Burma, in the surrounding region and across the wider world have together changed the type, quantity and reasons behind drug production within the country.

Heroin

It is difficult to generalise about the production of heroin in Burma, however, there appears to have been three relatively distinct cycles to production over the past three decades. During the 80's and 90's Burma led the world in production thanks to the involvement of insurgent groups, militias, criminal elements, village farmers and the SPDC. More recently the SPDC crackdown on poppy cultivation has led to a marked decrease in production that has cut production from 33 percent of the world's supply in 1998, to just 5 percent of the world's supply in 2007.⁷ These figures are courtesy of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), however, as will be discussed in a moment, these are contentious numbers that have created a large degree of consternation and debate. The last clear cycle appears to be the resurgence in poppy cultivation over the previous two years.

Before discussing the variations in the levels of production, it is necessary to return briefly to the problematic numbers provided by the UNODC. A large part of the problem of discussing the production of drugs, especially heroin, in Burma has been the manner in which data has been gathered and interpreted. This problem and its proper understanding have important implications for policy in regard to the treatment of Burma by the international community. A 2004 report by Altsean detailing Burma's drug eradication efforts pointed out some weaknesses of the UNODC methodology in gathering data for its yearly reports on production trends in Burma. Whilst acknowledging that those methods, including satellite imaging and ground surveys, were probably the best available at the time, Altsean suggested that there was a high risk that the figures were not entirely accurate. The Altsean report, entitled "*A Failing Grade*", suggested several possible reasons for this, including crops hidden in inaccessible areas and opium crops interspersed with other crops (such as mustard or beans). The report also highlighted the problems associated with extrapolating results from the accessible areas where the surveys were primarily carried out to other parts of Shan State. These three possibilities were all problematic elements of the UNODC surveys according to Altsean. The report also pointed out that the figures arrived at through examination of satellite images were extremely difficult for teams on the ground to verify.⁸

The net result of using surveys that may not be accurate is that drug production in Burma may not be nearly as high as what the figures have suggested previously. Questions surrounding methodology have led some to debate the veracity of Burma falling from the world's leading producer of heroin in 1996, to holding just a 5 percent worldwide market share in 2007. This would probably have been a more important debate, had not the figures from 2008 shown a steady revival of opium cultivation in Burma. Regardless of the resurgence of poppy cultivation, the debate over figures holds valuable lessons for those watching the drug production levels in Burma.

The rationale for the discussion of the accuracy of the production figures released by the UNODC in particular, is that it relates directly to the track record of the SPDC regime and the political motivations of the junta. In this regard, further contention exists around the figures

that were used in the past decade to describe the levels of Burmese heroin production. Figures from the US were at some stages three times higher than what was suggested by those actors actually participating in the production of drugs in Burma at the time. If the figures of production were actually 200 percent higher than was the actual case on the ground, the implications are wide ranging. UNODC has recently claimed success in drugs reduction in Burma and has praised the SPDC's efforts at eradication; however, the vast reduction may not have been so impressive had the original production figures been significantly over estimated to begin with.

Regime Involvement in Production

It has long been posited that the military regime in Burma has been implicitly connected with and involved in the drug trade. Beyond anecdotal and circumstantial evidence linking SPDC members to the trade, a theory put forward by Australian scholar and Burmese security expert Desmond Ball in 1999 offers one of the most cogent and convincing arguments for suggesting the regime's complicity, at many levels, in the drugs trade. In *Working Paper No. 336*, produced for the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre of the Australian National University, Ball asserted that individual members of the regime have been heavily involved in the drug trade and that the ability of the trade to flourish has been facilitated by the complicity of members of the SPDC. In the paper entitled *Burma and Drugs: The Regime's Complicity in the Global Drug Trade*, Ball says that given the ability of the SPDC to control the civilian population and the ethnic insurgent armies with superior technologies and manpower, it is almost impossible to assert that the drug trade could continue without the involvement of members of the armed forces. Ball suggested that the Burmese military had already acquired vast amounts of military hardware from China, its principal arms supplier, to the tune of US \$3 billion, by the time of the paper in 1999. These purchases included "Chinese weapons, vehicles, and other pieces of defence equipment," since 1998.⁹ Such purchases, according to Ball, had resulted in a military comprising what the author described as "modern elements, including technical intelligence collecting capabilities, communication systems", among other capabilities.¹⁰ The Burmese military's capacity as of 2008 continues to support Ball's assertion. A further 10 years of military acquisitions from its still staunch supporter in China can have had no other effect than to increase the surveillance and logistical powers of the Burmese military even further.

In the working paper, Ball claimed that the *Tatmadaw* (Burmese Army) were involved in drug production, and indeed were operating refineries in four areas under direct military control. The areas in question stretching from the Northwestern Command, including parts of western Chin and Arakan States, across the top of Burma to the Northeastern Command stationed in Shan State, to the infamous Triangle Region and down to the Eastern Command based in Taunggyi, bordering Thailand's Mae Hong Son Province.¹¹ Since the junta announced the crackdown on drugs beginning in 1999, there continues to be evidence of the regime's complicity in production. Numerous reports from Shan State indicate that although there are often moves by the SPDC to destroy crops, these efforts are rarely focused on areas that are under direct military control. Another problematic factor in judging regime complicity is that there appears to be disparity between those directives that emanate from Naypyidaw and the actions that are carried out on the ground in areas where poppy cultivation takes place. Traditional areas of cultivation are isolated, far away from the overbearing presence of the generals and the centralised power structure. These areas have represented lucrative business opportunities for local commanders in the past, who have run small fiefdoms, intimately connected with local militias, drug lords and poppy farmers. Many generals who have previously worked local commands in drug production areas maintain their relations with drug lords and have been accused of using these links to funnel and launder drug profits into the legitimate economy through the financing of infrastructure projects and other business ventures, such as construction companies and

casinos. General Maung Aye for example, who was a former Commander of Eastern Command, has extensive drug connections from his former days based in Taunggyi, the capital city of Shan State.¹² These connections will be explored in greater detail in the drug eradication section. The most important point to note is that directives issued from the higher levels of the military are not always implemented on the ground, with many drug lords paying off local commanders in order to continue with production. In November 2007 for example, a police force led by officer Ye Naing discovered a heroin refinery close to the village of Htitan in Hsi Hseng Township, about 95 kilometres south of Taunggyi. The police raid netted a haul of 2.5 billion kyat worth of heroin (around US\$ 2 million). The owner of the refinery was reportedly Khun Chit Maung, a former leader of the Shan Nationalities Peoples Liberation Organisation (SNPLO). A local source was quoted at the time as saying that Khun Chit Maung had been, “paying Kyat 5 million (\$4,000) per month to the Eastern Region Command and Kyat 3 million (\$2,400) to each of the light infantry battalions stationed in the area, LIB 425 and LIB 426,”¹³



An opium farmer cutting open a poppy bulb to harvest the sap for opium production. Burma is the second largest producer of opium in the world after Afghanistan. [Photo: © Irrawaddy]

Clearly those at the bottom of the pecking order would not be able to operate without some level of sanction from the upper echelons of power in the SPDC. In addition to the low level involvement of SPDC officials, several of Burma's highest ranking officers have been notorious for their connections to the production of drugs, including Senior General Than Shwe, General Maung Aye, the former Commander of Eastern Command, and General Khin Nyunt, former head of Military Intelligence and Prime Minister prior to a purge that removed him from office (though 'health reasons' was the official line trotted out at the time of his forced retirement). According to Ball, Khin Nyunt was likely the general with the most intensive connection to the drugs industry having been intimately involved in procuring the ceasefire agreements in exchange for open drug production. The involvement of Nyunt in the negotiations also opened the opportunity for the eventual general to secure a share of the insurgent groups' drug trade profits. Among his friends General Khin Nyunt could count

many drug barons, including: Pau Yu Chang of the United Wa State Army (UWSA), Sai Lin of the Myanmar National Alliance Army, Kokang leader Phone Kyar Chin, major drug runners Wei Hsueh-kang and the Kokang Chinese Lo Hsing Han. Lo Hsing Han is also the founder of Burma's largest group of companies, Asia World Co Ltd.¹⁴

Despite the prior sanctioning of drug production from the hierarchy of the SPDC in the past, as of 2004 there was a major downturn in opium production according to Altsean. Three factors resulted in this downturn: efforts by the SPDC and the UNODC to implement crop replacement programs, unfavourable weather conditions affecting harvests in the 4-5 years prior to 2004 and finally the market shift from heroin to ATS.¹⁵ This downturn lasted until roughly 2007, with the SPDC heralding a triumph in reducing opium cultivation significantly, due to its crackdown on poppy farming.

July 2008 however, saw the release of the 2008 World Drug Report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The report outlined that there had been a global rise in drug production thanks to high yields, especially in Afghanistan. The report also noted that,

*“after six years of decline, opium poppy cultivation in Southeast Asia increased by 22 percent last year, mainly driven by a 29 percent increase in Burma. While some areas in Burma, such as the Wa region, remained opium-poppy free, cultivation of opium in the eastern and southern areas of Shan State increased significantly.”*¹⁶

The resurgence in production was also in evidence in Kachin State. On 30 June 2008 it was reported that farmers in Kachin State were replacing rice crops for opium poppy crops due to the rising demand within the state for opium. The report claimed that the increasing demand was being driven by loggers and miners of gold and jade. The report cited the additional pressure to switch crops based on the increased revenue that comes with poppy cultivation. The report claimed that the Hukawng Valley in Kachin State was now home to some 100,000 acres of poppy crops, supported and owned by Chinese interests who pay for fertiliser from China to increase yields and who also pay off SPDC officials, members of the KIA and the New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K).¹⁷

The recent surge in production in Burma, especially just four years out from the targeted ASEAN and SPDC goal of a drug free Burma by 2015, raises two significant points. Firstly, the precipitate rise in production once again raises Ball's pertinent question. How could this happen without some level of collusion between the SPDC and the major players in the drug trade? Secondly, the vast increase in production in such a short period of time bears out the hypothesis held by many that drug production, while being touted by the SPDC as having almost being eliminated, is far from extinct. Burma drug watchers have suggested that the eradication of crops, far from discouraging farmers from continuing cultivation, have merely driven poor farmers into the more inaccessible regions of Shan State, and more frequently, into parts of Eastern and South Eastern Shan State, whereupon they have continued to cultivate poppy crops as a means of survival. For the larger growers with more cash however, the situation is markedly different. On 5 March 2008 it was reported that opium poppy production in the ethnic Palaung area of Mong Tong Township, Shan State was on the rise. The report claimed that although small growers of opium had all but desisted from the practice fearing retribution from the SPDC authorities, larger growers and businessmen were able to offer large bribes in order to conduct their business unimpeded. The report claimed that the location of large poppy crops was common knowledge, but that bribes paid to local authorities meant that nothing was done about them by the relevant authorities.¹⁸

The strong suggestions of links between Burmese army units and opium production persist in Shan State especially. Khuensai Jaiyen, the editor of *Shan Herald Agency for News* stated in an article in 2007 that the likelihood of a connection between the SPDC forces and

drug production was evidenced by the increase in battalion numbers that were stationed in Shan State between 1998 and 2007. He claimed at the time that the number had risen from 33 to 141 in the space of nine years. The involvement of the army in drug cultivation and trafficking was a result of the SPDC's so-called self-reliance policy suggested Jaiyen, saying, "Each military unit has to raise money locally to pay for its expenses. So money from drugs helps to meet these needs. The officers profit the most."¹⁹ He went on to add that,

*"With the Burmese army profiting at every level, no wonder the junta is not serious about eradicating drugs, ... More poppy is grown today in areas under the control of the Burmese army than in other areas."*²⁰

The idea of military involvement in drug production was supported late in 2008 by the Chairman of the Lahu Democratic Front (LDF) Ailong Khammwe, who suggested that the military was not only involved in the drug trade but was forcing civilians to grow opium poppy as well, in order that they may collect taxes on the crops.²¹ Due to the involvement of troops, Khammwe claimed in interviews that opium cropping had increased in the areas of Mong Hsat and Mong Ton in eastern Shan State. Two years after Jaiyen had suggested the nexus between the army and drugs in Shan State, Khammwe's assertions, if valid, seem to suggest that the practice continues.²²



This photograph, taken in November 2008, depicts a young Burmese man and woman injecting heroin down one of the backstreets of the Chinese border town of Ruili opposite Hsipaw in Shan State. [Photo: © Nic Dunlop/Panos]

Jaiyen's statements in relation to the military's self-reliance policy fit in with the way that the policy has affected other ethnic conflict areas where it is in operation. In many other areas of Burmese life under military control, the rules of the SPDC are often flexible, provided that the military can make a profit from the bending of those rules. The role of extortion in everyday life has become quite commonplace and it of course plays a significant role in the production of drugs. The use of extortion by the military is common sense in some respects, as it allows the military to apply arbitrary fines and taxation upon the population, thereby supplementing the meagre wages delivered by the military authorities. By imposing fines and taxes in place of conducting arrests for breaches of the domestic laws, military personnel are able to make a profit while leaving the victim at liberty, whereupon they can be taxed again at some point in the future. This theory is borne out by the amount of civilians who are detained for various spurious reasons but are never charged with anything concrete and are subsequently released, often much poorer than they were prior to their arrest.

In Shan State in areas under SPDC control, extortion is an integral part of drug production and of life under military control. The SPDC decision to shut down drug production in some areas of Shan State circa 2001-2002 forced many farmers into the difficult decision of having to find alternative methods of sustaining their livelihoods or moving location in order to continue with the production of poppy crops. Few viable agricultural alternatives were provided by the authorities. Other factors came into play regarding the viability of poppy cropping, including the forced relocation of villages, much as had happened in other areas of Burma, most notably in Karen State. For those farmers forced to relocate to SPDC controlled areas, old farming lands were difficult to leave, resulting in some farmers returning to these areas in order to continue production.

The June 2008 monthly report by *Shan Herald Agency for News* reported a case of extortion that highlights the manner in which the SPDC extorts money from those farmers in contravention of domestic law in order to profit from them, instead of arresting them. It was reported that a column of 45 troops from the LIB #569, based northwest of Kun Mong village in Kaeng Town area in Mong Nai Township, Shan State, were on patrol on 29 December 2007 when they came upon three poppy crops where the village of Loi Saai used to stand before it was forcibly relocated several years earlier. The troops partially destroyed the crops and on the next day went searching for the owners of the farms. The next day while searching in the area of Nam Hsan Township the troops happened upon a farmer tending his opium crop in the deserted village of Kung Maak Keng (which had been forcibly relocated several years prior), in Kho Ood village tract. The farmer identified as Saw Nan Da from Kho Lam village, had been secretly returning to the village from which he had been forcibly relocated several years earlier and was using the old plots to grow opium in order to support his family. Saw Nan Da was subsequently forced to pay a bribe of 150,000 kyat in order to secure the safety of his crop. Upon returning to their base, the troops of LIB #569 summoned the three owners of the poppy farms discovered and partly destroyed on 29 December 2008 and extorted a total of 250,000 kyat combined from the three farmers by threatening to destroy the crops completely unless they complied. The farmers identified as Mu Ling (m), Zaai Leng (m) and Pan Ta (m), were all from Kun Mong village in Kaeng Tawng area, close to the base of LIB #569.²³

Heroin Refineries and Changing Structures of Production

A report from 28 June 2008 stated that although the events of the previous decade had conspired to reduce the amount of heroin refineries, in Shan State in particular, the output from the refineries was still high. The reduction in heroin production and its pre-cursor forms had made it possible for the trade to be monopolised and controlled from the Wa area capital of Panghsang. This eventuality was in no small part contributed to the taking over of the UWSA Finance Ministry on 4 July 2006 by drug kingpin Wei Hsueh Kang, who is wanted in both Thailand and the United States for involvement in the drug trade. The restructuring of the drug production from a de-centralised system spreading across Shan State and controlled by many units, to one quite centralised near the capital located on the Sino-Burmese border means that Thai buyers were forced to deal almost solely with Panghsang. Despite the reduction in refineries from 93 (59 heroin, 34 methamphetamines) in 2002, to a level of 37 (13 heroin, 24 methamphetamines) as confirmed by SHAN, there had been a maintenance of quality and an ability to regulate supply based on demand from buyers. A businessman based in Kengtung indicated that the minimum purchase for a shipment of *ya ba* tablets would be 500,000, which indicates the seriousness of the capacity of the refineries in question. The report claims that other groups were also capable of production upon request, such as the Kachin Defense Army (KDA) and Panhsay militia. It further claimed that smaller factories had popped up in southern Shan State, where the precursor to heroin, known locally as 'huangpi' was being produced for trafficking through the north of Shan State to its eventual destination in China.²⁴

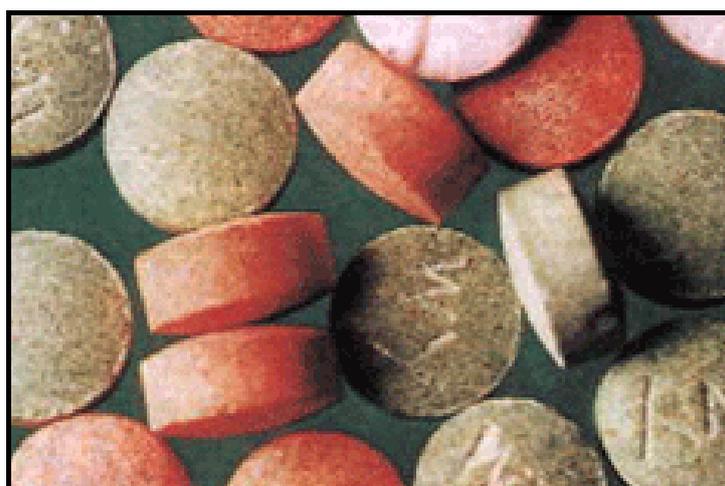
Amphetamine Type Stimulants

During the past decade there has been something of a shift in Burma toward the production of so-called amphetamine type stimulants (ATS), as well as 'ecstasy'; an Methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) derivative.²⁵ According to the Director of the UNODC, Antonio Maria Costa

*"A decade ago, synthetic drugs were a cottage industry,.....Now they are big business, controlled by organized crime syndicates that are involved in all phases of this illicit trade, from smuggling precursor chemicals to manufacturing the drugs and trafficking."*²⁶

The regime's crackdown on the cultivation of opium has driven the price of opium up, putting the cost of smoking opium out of reach of many. This has had several consequences. One is that users of opium have turned to smoking heroin, and from there, to the more cost effective, but more dangerous method of injecting heroin, with all the problems that this practice entails. The other consequence of the rising price of opium and heroin is that users have turned to the cheaper and widely available option of ATS.

The ease of producing ATS means that it proved to be relatively simple for drug syndicates to switch from the production of heroin to the production of ATS. Even if precursor chemicals could not be obtained through smuggling them into the country, over the counter medications were until recently available that also contained the ingredients with which ATS could be manufactured. This practice was highlighted when a Thai police operation during October 2008 netted a large haul of pseudo-ephedrine in the town of Mae Sai on the Thai-Burmese border. Police seized over 500,000 cold relief pills in raids. The pills contain pseudo-ephedrine which would have been extracted by drug manufacturers to make amphetamines. Subsequently, the Thai police have been cracking down on over the counter sales of the pills. On 17 November 2008, Thai police also raided the 9 Stars Hotel in Tachilek on the Burmese side of the same border crossing and netted 50,000 amphetamine pills. The production of vast amounts of amphetamines continues to be a problem in the area and the same report claimed that the UWSA had recently bought around 10 tonnes of pseudo-ephedrine from Thai suppliers.²⁷



Examples of the WY-branded *yaba* amphetamine-type stimulant (ATS). These tablets, produced in the methamphetamine laboratories of the UWSA sell for approximately 8,000 – 10,000 kyat each. [Photo: © Narinjara News]

5.3 Drug Use

Intravenous Drug Use

“Nearly 55 percent of the world’s amphetamines users (14 million) are estimated to be in Asia. Most of them are methamphetamine users in East and South-East Asia. Ninety seven per cent of all amphetamines used in Asia are consumed in the East and South-East sub-region.”²⁸

As mentioned earlier, there has been a dramatic rise in the use of synthetic drugs in Burma over the previous decade. Several factors account for the changing tastes of drug users in Burma. In some respects the crackdown on the production of opium has been a success story, however the side effects of the operation to make Burma drug free by 2015 have been significant. The drug production section of this chapter made mention of the changing patterns of drug use in Burma as users have begun to turn away from expensive options such as opium following the crackdown on its production and subsequent increase in price, and have increasingly turned to ATS. Users have also turned toward injecting heroin as a means of achieving the most efficient and powerful results for their investment.

In a report from 2008 released by the Transnational Institute entitled *“Withdrawal Symptoms”*, a drug user from Riuli on the Burma-China border was quoted as saying,

“People have started to inject it (heroin) because they have no money and injecting is cheaper, ... many begin by smoking heroin, but quickly realize the cost-effectiveness of injecting, where they can achieve a stronger effect from a smaller amount.”²⁹

Predictably, the turn to intravenous drug use has brought the concomitant problems of increased risk of HIV/AIDS. In a country with already high rates of infection and limited support or educational training from the authorities, the consequences of intravenous drug use in Burma are alarming and pervasive. Some estimates of HIV-positive intravenous drug users in Burma are as high as 40 percent; this in a country where according to UNAIDS estimates, a mere 3 percent of intravenous users have access to services to help treat and manage drug addiction. The TNI report of 2008 suggests that there is little in Burma in the way of educational programs to educate users about the dangers of needle sharing, even though this remains one of the major causes of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country.³⁰ Compounding this problem, drug users are not able to access anti-retroviral medication, which in other parts of the world has become standard for those with HIV/AIDS.

A report from 5 February 2000 illustrated the extent of the problem of HIV/AIDS in parts of Burmese society. The report suggested that up to 90 percent of prisoners held in Kachin State’s Myitkyina jail are HIV positive. The report stated that the likelihood of infection is increased by the unsafe practices of sharing needles, a practice that was particularly present in Myitkyina prison according to Tate Naing of the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners Burma. The report also cited research by the Kachin National Organisation, based in Thailand stating that 100,000 people between the ages of 10 and 40 had died from HIV/AIDS in the past ten years.³¹

ATS Use

On 12 September 2008, the UNODC released its annual report on drug use for 2008 which outlined the increase in drug use across Asia, particularly in the case of Burma, where there has been a sharp rise in the use of chemical substances. The report suggested that the increased usage of these types of drugs in the developing world was being driven by “Asia, with its huge population and increasing affluence.”³² While the ‘affluence’ of Asia may well be driving consumption levels and demand in places like China, it is actually the poverty of Burma that has produced demand for cheap drug options. Local Burmese community leaders echoed the concerns of the UNODC report. Aung Wa, the chairman of the Kachin Development Network Group (KDNG) claimed (somewhat dubiously) that “More than 60 percent of the young people in Kachin State are using drugs”. Aung Wa further claimed that “Poverty and a lack of jobs in Burma is a major factor that is forcing young people to become involved in dealing drugs.”³³ In other areas of Burma, drug use among the young population has also become problematic. A teacher from Three Pagodas Pass in Mon State claimed that as many as 8 out of 10 students were taking drugs of some form in order to cope with the bleak economic and political situation. The issue of drug abuse has far reaching effects, both physically and economically. A rubber plantation owner told *Irrawaddy* that the prevalence of drug dealing has made it increasingly difficult for her to hire labourers to work on her plantation. The profits to be made from dealing in drugs far outweigh the financial incentives that she can offer for day labour. She told the magazine, “It is very difficult for me to find people to work in my rubber plantation now,...I can only afford to pay 150 baht (US \$4.30) per day. Young people aren’t interested.”³⁴

The affordability and ease of access to ATS make them a logical replacement for more expensive drugs like heroin and have become, according to those inside Burma, a reasonably common problem. ATS are said to be the drugs of choice for students, truck drivers and sex workers to name just a few categories of user. One sex worker from Riuli told TNI researchers

*“I use ya ma [yaba] because life here is hard. In the morning I take five pills. If I do sex work, I will take some more, because sex work is very tough. After taking the pills I feel fresh, and I am very patient with my clients.”*³⁵



A Burmese drug addict smoking amphetamines Ruili of China’s Yunnan Province. Some sources have maintained that while the sale and use of heroin has decreased in the border town, there has been a significant rise in the use of ATS produced in Burma. [Photo: © Orlando de Guzman]

Drug Use and the Extractive Mining Industry

A relatively undocumented aspect of drug use in Burma has been that associated with the mining industry. In particular, Burma's jade mines have come under particular scrutiny from rights groups who claim that a raft of rights abuses including forced and child labour, land confiscation, drug abuse, sexual exploitation and environmental damage are occurring both in the mines themselves as well as in the communities closely associated with them. Reports suggest that up to 20,000 people are currently working in the mines that are tightly controlled by the junta or its business partners.³⁶ Reports vary, however the industry surrounding the extraction of imperial green jade is estimated to generate somewhere between US\$ 300-400 million per annum.³⁷ The lives of those involved in the jade industry are miserable and fraught with danger. One man, who spoke to the New Statesman in October 2008, suggested that drug use was a way of coping with hardship. The individual in question turned to heroin after seeing his friend crushed to death while sifting for Jade slivers in the run off from mines. He said,

*"Our lives are very miserable and difficult, ... I use many kinds of drugs; heroin, alcohol, ... I smoke heroin which I get from drug-selling shops in Hpakant. The government soldiers do nothing to close the shops. The drug-sellers just give money to the authority leaders; they bribe them and sell it freely ... I started to take heroin to feel happy, because my life is hard."*³⁸

According to EarthRights International, the prospects for improvements in Burma's human rights track record in the mining sector are not likely to improve given the large financial incentives involved.³⁹ The growing demand for energy in China, as well as demand for jade in the Chinese domestic market, continued to drive the involvement of Chinese multi-national corporations in the Burmese natural resource extraction sector in 2008. The jade mines such as those at Hpakant in Kachin State are large sources of revenue for the junta, who often form joint ventures with foreign investors, and are likely to continue, unaffected by outside pressures. The military presence in mining sites is growing with the military sometimes providing security for companies at mining sites.⁴⁰ The economic relationship between the region's rising powerhouse and the region's worst human rights abuser seems likely to determine that China will not be applying too much pressure on Burma to reform its errant ways.

Domestic Drug Laws

A troubling aspect of the drug use problem in Burma has been the stance taken by the authorities in dealing with the phenomenon by trying to legislate it out of existence. In keeping with the aggressive approach to eradication of cultivation regardless of human rights consequences or sustainability, the SPDC has enacted harsh and highly disproportionate penalties for those caught using drugs. The ceasefire groups who also seek eradication within their areas of control in Kachin and Shan States have also been stringent with drugs users; this has led to a situation whereby criminalizing drug use has reduced addicts' access to harm reduction measures and health services. In SPDC controlled areas in Burma, for example, a person caught with more than 0.2 grams of heroin can be sentenced to prison for up to 15 years, while possession of 5 *ya ba* pills could result in 20 years in prison.⁴¹

5.4 Drug Trafficking

The reality of Burma as a hub of drug production and trafficking has had dire and wide-ranging effects upon the country itself. As discussed in several other sections of this chapter, SPDC involvement in many areas of drug production and distribution, including members of the military and law enforcement, continue to complicate the process of eradication. The long running civil conflict has played a significant part in Burma's reliance on drugs and continues to be a pivotal factor in the development of the border regions controlled by ethnic ceasefire armies.

It is clear that the scourge of drugs has had a pervasive effect on the domestic affairs of Burma; however it is not just that country alone that has suffered from the problem. The geopolitical importance of Burma and its prime location between the regional powers of India, China and Thailand have also made Burma a focal point of international powers of drug trafficking. With the collusion of corrupt officials, organised criminal elements, non-state armed actors and military authorities, the drug problems of Burma are not confined to its borders. Trafficking of finished opium products continues out of the country (though at much reduced rates to those of the previous decade) through Bangladesh, and thence to Pakistan and on to Europe's markets. Other destinations include China, Australia, and India, constituting a serious problem for these other nations of Asia and the Pacific.

The export of heroin continues to be a problem for Bangladesh in particular, where state capacity to combat trafficking is weaker than other countries of the region. Bangladesh has become the prime transit route for trafficking heroin to Europe from South East Asia and heroin consignments destined for Europe are increasingly passing through Bangladesh. The common method and routes for smuggling heroin into Bangladesh are by courier from Pakistan, by commercial vehicles and trains from India and along the Bay of Bengal or over land by trucks or public transport from Burma.⁴²

In terms of the trafficking of ATS, the US Department of State (US DoS) on 1 March 2008 released its latest findings on the drug trade in Burma highlighting the growth in ATS production, specifically in crystal methamphetamines and Ketamine (better known as a horse tranquiliser). The report noted the Wa controlled special region as a growing source of the drugs.⁴³ A subsequent report on 3 March 2008 claimed that Burma remained the world leader in methamphetamine production, prompting a change in name for its north eastern region from the former 'Golden Triangle', to the 'Ice Triangle'. Despite drastic reductions in opium cultivation, production of synthetic drugs has risen precipitously in recent times. The report quoted David T. Johnson, Assistant Secretary for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs as saying, *"the lack of cooperation that we have from Burma threatens not just its own public but also the countries of Southeast Asia."*⁴⁴ Despite the reduction in opium cultivation, sources from the US administration claimed that Burma had demonstrably failed in its international counter-narcotics obligations. This was claimed to be the result of a myopic focus on crop reduction, without sustainable alternatives and furthermore, a lack of openness to outside assistance.⁴⁵

The international ramifications of Burma's drug problem are given gravitas by the frequency of the arrests of Burmese citizens in the surrounding countries (See Partial list of trafficking incidents below). In Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, for example, police arrested 35 year old Rahmat Ullah from Mitar Sara village of Ramu Upazila on 8 January 2008. Ullah was in possession of 170 *yaba* ("crazy medicine") tablets, and it was alleged that he had been involved in trafficking drugs for a number of years, bringing both *yaba* and Phensidyl (whose active ingredients include codeine phosphate and ephedrine) into Bangladesh. According to traders in Teknaf, the trade in methamphetamines and amphetamines is still prevalent in the area, though it was said to have come down since vigilance on both the Bangladeshi and Burmese sides of the border had increased, especially after a huge haul of *yaba* was taken in Dhaka in October 2007.⁴⁶

One part of the problem of eradicating drug trafficking stems from the involvement of law enforcement officers, the very agents tasked with preventing the trade, in the trafficking of drugs themselves. A report from 26 November 2008 detailed the manner in which police officers had abused their authority by arresting drug dealers in order to extort money from them. The report identified district police officer Aung Htay and township police officer (OC) Nyi Lwin Soe of Maungdaw Township who posed as drug dealers in order to trap two suspects, a monk and a man from Sittwe, the capital of Arakan State, outside the Bangladesh Monastery near Myoma Kayindan village of Maungdaw Town. The officers seized *yaba* tablets from the two men and arrested them. Sources close to the police related to *Kaladan News* that police officers then took 2 million kyat from the suspects and then released them.⁴⁷

This example of premeditated extortion on the part of law enforcement officers shows just one aspect of how difficult it is to stamp out the problems of drugs in Burma. In cases such as the one above, the problem is twofold. Not only are the police involved in extortion, but the drug dealers are also released and consequently allowed to continue criminal activity. It is not difficult to speculate as to the motivation of law enforcement officers. Police officers, like military personnel and most civil servants are poorly paid, and are not immune from the enticements of outright corruption in order to supplement meagre wages. Regardless of the economic motivations of police officers, it does not bode well for Burma that the police, as one of the two main arms of fighting the problem of drugs in the country (along with the military) may be to some extent involved in perpetuating the problem.

The judicial system, widely seen as representing the interests of the junta, also plays a role in exonerating criminals, which in any case makes it difficult for law enforcement officers to enact their mandate, even if they were not involved in the trade. On 4 February 2008 for example, three *yaba* smugglers from Maung Ni Village located on the outskirts of Maungdaw Town, Arakan State, were sentenced to 20 years in prison each after they were caught trying to smuggle 800 pills into Bangladesh. Even though the three men said they were paid by two drug store owners, Zaw Win and Har Chai, to traffic the drugs and identified the two store owners, the case went no further. Despite the two store owners being arrested, the judge eventually released them unconditionally amid rampant speculation that a large bribe had been paid to the judge to secure their release.⁴⁸

Although the ethnic ceasefire army the UWSA is better known for its role in production of heroin, evidence suggests that they have diversified their business interests in the wake of banning opium cultivation and have moved into the ATS production and trafficking market. It was reported on 6 February 2008 that a drug smuggler carrying some 200,000 speed pills was shot following a fire-fight with a band of men in Wiang Haeng District in Chiang Mai Province Thailand, about a kilometre from the Burma border. The smuggler was said to be an ethnic Wa, though this was yet to be confirmed at the time of the report. The report also went on to cite a separate incident in which two men were arrested in a sting operation on the Chiang Mai-Mae Taeng road. Police posing as drugs buyers purchased 38,000 speed pills from Chatree Chantong, 46, a Mae Rim district resident, and Ja-ea Jalorbu, a member of the ethnic Lisu ethnic group in Chiang Dao District. According to the report,

*“Ja-ea confessed to being a member of a drug network controlled by a deputy commander of the South Wa State and a supervisor of a drug storage facility in Burma’s Nakawngmu village opposite Chiang Dao district of Chiang Mai.”*⁴⁹

Drug Trafficking -Partial list of incidents for 2008

On 7 February 2008 a Burmese national identified as Mohammad Alir was arrested in Zaliya village in Teknaf Town on the Burmese Bangladeshi border. The man was in possession of some 205 *yaba* tablets. The report claimed that many such arrests had been made in the area as Burmese citizens in western Arakan State were faced with conditions of dire poverty. Lack of economic opportunity was said to be leading many to disregard the penalties for trafficking in ATS in their search for income.⁵⁰

On 16 February 2008 U Aye Myine was arrested in the vicinity of Three Pagodas Pass on the Thai-Burma border in possession of 28,000 *yaba* pills and 10,000 Thai baht in currency. Police later found a further 300 pills in his residence on the Burmese side of the border town. On the same day, New Mon State Party (NMSPP) officials intercepted two men at a checkpoint. The two later escaped, leaving behind roughly 4,000 pills. Combined with the previous haul, police seized amphetamines with a total value of 150 million kyat for the day.⁵¹

On 13 March 2008 Ma Than Tin, the wife of Sergeant Zaw Lin, a police officer in charge of the 4 mile gate in Maungdaw, Arakan State, was arrested. The woman was carrying 700 *yaba* pills and 100 gm of heroin. The arrest was made by the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) of Buthidaung Township at about 6 pm at the Buthidaung jetty. Two further arrests took place thereafter of the two labourers carrying the bags of Ma Than Tin, namely Sha Shu (45), and Mohammed Rashid (40). The husband of the accused, Sergeant Zaw Lin was also arrested later the same day. All of the accused were being held at Tactical Operation Commander (TOC's) office of Buthidaung at the time of the report.⁵²

It emerged on 11 June 2008 that Lieutenant General Ye Myint had been asked to resign his commission in the Burmese Army following the arrest of the Lieutenant General's son, Aung Zaw Ye Myint on drug trafficking charges in the last week of May. The office of the accused was in Kemmendine Township, where special police and military intelligence discovered drugs, a gun, handcuffs and several million kyat. The arrest of the prominent businessman also led to the arrest of another of Burma's richest men, Maung Weik and several cinematic celebrities. The arrest of the well known drug dealer came only after the businessman fell afoul of Senior General Than Shwe, who was said to be displeased by the criminal's handling of a construction contract that had been previously won. Aung Zaw Ye Myint, the head of Yetagun Construction Company had won the contract to build the Maymyo-Mandalay road project. A failure to complete the project satisfactorily forced the SPDC to hand the contract over to the Asia World Company who were forced to rebuild the road. Although the criminal was well known to authorities, it is indicative of the environment of impunity within which criminals can operate that Aung Zaw Ye Myint was allowed to conduct clearly illegal activities until his actions displeased high level authorities.⁵³

On 16 June 2008, State media from Burma announced the arrest of 245 drug traffickers over the month of May. Authorities "*seized 76.78 kg of opium, 1.19 kg of heroin, 3.43 kg of marijuana, 93,867 stimulant tablets and other narcotics*" and "*action was taken against 245 persons - 201 men and 44 women in 158 cases.*"⁵⁴

It was reported on 23 June 2008 that the arrests of Aung Zaw Ye Myint and Maung Weik on drugs related charges may have stemmed from their connection to the grandson of Senior General Than Shwe. Nay Shwe Thway Aung had until June been the favoured grandson of the military leader, however, rumours suggested that family members had found him to be in possession of methamphetamine tablets that had reportedly been procured from the two arrested businessmen, leading to their subsequent arrest by authorities.⁵⁵

On 6 August 2008 it was reported that two drug smugglers had been arrested in Bomu Para in Maungdaw Town by Sergeant Maung Kye of Maungdaw District Police and three other unnamed individuals, in Maungdaw Township in Arakan State. The report said that the police were acting on a tip off from the Sayadaw (chief abbot) of Bangla Monastery of Maungdaw Town. The report claimed that the two smugglers, who were in possession of 4,000 tablets of WY brand methamphetamines produced by the United Wa State Army, were later released after paying the officers in question one million kyat. This transaction was not reported to the officers' superiors. The 4,000 WY tablets were kept by the police. A civilian broker who owned the house where the smugglers were arrested, Than Lwin, had placed orders with the smugglers to provide the tablets, and had received money from Sergeant Maung Kye in order to pay for the methamphetamines. The sequence of events strongly suggests that Sergeant Maung Kye had arranged the drug deal in order to sequester the drugs so that they could be sold at a later time, and charge the smugglers a bribe on top for personal gain.⁵⁶

On 13 August 2008, the media reported the arrest of the Managing Director of BME 1 nightclub, Thet Naing. The accused was picked up by Thai police in Bangkok and handed over to their Burmese counterparts. The suspect was later remanded to Insein prison in Rangoon. Thet Naing gained notoriety after becoming friendly with Aik Hauk, the son-in-law of UWSA leader Bao You-Xiang. Aik Hauk, is a renowned property owner as well owner of the BME nightclub chain, who employed Thet Naing. The BME clubs were well known for initially distributing free drugs and later selling them on their premises. The arrest is thought to be related to the investigations surrounding the young business tycoons Maung Weik and Aung Zaw Ye Myint.⁵⁷

On 8 September 2008, two Burmese nationals were arrested in Jalalabad union of Edgha Upazila, Cox's Bazar district, Bangladesh. The pair was in possession of 1,200 *yaba* tablets. The arrested individuals were identified as Siddique Ahmed (32) and Anwar (28), both from Buthidaung Township, Arakan State. The pair was arrested following a police raid on the home of Maulana Nurul Amin of Jalalabad union, who was also arrested, around 11 pm.⁵⁸

On 20 September 2008 a source close to Maungdaw police in Arakan State alleged a traffic policeman identified as Sub-Corporal U Tin Aye of Maungdaw Town had been trafficking *yaba* tablets in Arakan State and also smuggling them into Bangladesh. The report suggested that the Sub-Corporal had been responsible for smuggling *yaba* between Buthidaung and Maungdaw on his motorcycle.⁵⁹

On 4 November 2008 Bangladeshi Police arrested a group of Bangladeshi men travelling from Arakan State at the Whykong checkpoint. The car contained 900 *yaba* tablets and was travelling from Arakan State to Bangladesh when it was intercepted by police. Police arrested individuals identified as Mohammed Rofique (25), Ibrahim (24), and Yunus (22), all from Teknaf. The driver Nobiu Alam and helper Abdul Aziz were also arrested under suspicion of trafficking.⁶⁰

5.5 Drug Eradication Efforts

On 17 September 2008, Burma was again noted, for the seventh year running, for having “*demonstrably failed*” in its obligations to combat drug production and trafficking. Despite a recent decline in heroin production, the United States Assistant Secretary of State in charge of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, David Johnson, made mention of the fact that Burma has done very little in the way of combating the huge production levels of methamphetamines that eventually flow out of Burma to neighbouring countries and beyond. The Assistant Secretary also mentioned that despite past declines, it appeared as though poppy cultivation was once again on the rise within Burma. In comments to the press, Johnson said,

*“The military regime has made little apparent effort to curb production of the pills and little effort to stop poppy cultivation,.....Their efforts to reduce demand, interdict drug shipments, and combat corruption and money laundering continue to be lackluster.”*⁶¹

The harsh criticism meted out by the State Department is in some respects justified, however, the remarks fail to accurately describe the reality on the ground in Burma and furthermore, fail to take note of some of the wider failures associated with eradication of opium within the country. A more nuanced take on the situation would have made mention of the role that has been played by poor policy and poverty in Burma’s former drug producing areas in the north, an area which has been the focus of the SPDC crackdown on opium farming since 1999, and more recently by the ceasefire armies.

Opium Eradication

To date the major focus of drug control efforts has been the eradication of opium poppy cultivation, predominantly in Shan State. The push by the SPDC to declare Burma as opium free by 2015 (in line with the ASEAN timeline), as well as the ban enforced by the UWSA since 2005 in the Wa Special Region 2, have resulted in large scale reductions in cultivation that have seen Burma’s contribution to the world’s supply of heroin seriously decline. At first glance, the rapid decline in heroin supply appears to be a great success, however, thorough scrutiny of the situation reveals otherwise. The vast reduction of poppy cultivation has come at the expense of the rural poor, and according to the UNODC has occurred at a faster pace than is acceptable due to the lack of viable income generating projects to replace the opium farming option.⁶² The SPDC and UWSA campaigns have left farmers with little options for supporting families following the elimination of their major cash crop. They face forced relocation, food insecurity and falling indicators of health and education.

Effects of Eradication on Livelihoods

In Burma, 43 percent of the average yearly household income (approx US\$437) of opium cultivating households, predominantly in Shan State, was derived from opium sales in 2006. Since a large proportion of the household cash income is generated by opium, farmers in Burma are vulnerable to opium price fluctuations and possible decreases in production, whether caused by drought, disease or law enforcement. Such changes can have a serious and immediate impact on household food security. In Wa Special Region 2 where local authorities enforced an opium ban in 2005, farmers have lost up to 70 percent of their cash income.⁶³

The 2006 UNODC report on the effects of eradication programs does point out several positive outcomes from crop eradication in Shan State, especially in the Wa region. Commendable outcomes in the areas that formerly cultivated opium as a cash crop have been the reduction in numbers of addicts (addiction figures are closely related to areas that grow poppy), reduction of women's workloads and the "*opportunity to diversify out of an unreliable cash crop.*"⁶⁴ Despite the promising ring of having the 'opportunity' to diversify, many crop substitution programs have failed in the past.

Unfortunately, these positives appear to be far outweighed by the negative consequences in the rapid and poorly handled crackdown on poppy cultivation in the region. As has so often proven to be the case in Burma, it has been the rural poor who have borne the brunt of ill-conceived policy decisions.

The reduction in opium cultivation has had impacts on food security, has resulted in a serious lack of income and increased debt for farmers as well. According to the 2006 UNODC report on production in the Golden Triangle, many farming families were subsequently unable to purchase basic essentials such as cooking oil, salt and clothing; such was the reduced state of their finances following crop eradication.⁶⁵ The report claims that around 30 percent of households in the Wa region of Shan State were in debt in 2006, while up to 90 percent of households experienced food insecurity.⁶⁶ With such intense pressure placed upon families who were poor to begin with, it is easy to imagine that the long-term sustainability of opium reduction in such regions would be questionable. The figures from the past two years (2007-2008), showing a significant increase in opium production on the back of six years in decline, may be an indication that the temptation to return to opium cropping out of economic necessity has been simply too great to ignore for many farmers looking to feed hungry families.

Crop Substitution

The failure of the crop substitution projects in Burma along with the speed with which they have been carried out can be contrasted to good effect with the developments in Thailand over a period of roughly 20 years between 1965 and 1984. The Royal Thai Government undertook socio-economic needs surveys in 1965/66 to determine the situation that they were facing on the ground in Thailand's north western regions in regard to opium production. Following careful planning and in conjunction with UN agencies, alternative development projects were implemented gradually. The carefully crafted programs, in addition to the strong political will displayed by the Thai government, were able over the course of two decades to eventually reduce the population's dependency on opium as a cash crop. Furthermore, the program provided sustainable alternative income generation without impinging upon the human rights of poppy farmers.⁶⁷

According to the Altsean report from 2004 entitled *A Failing Grade*, crop substitution plans undertaken in Burma had been far less successful as of 2004. In 1999, a 15 year plan was implemented which included some crop replacement programs that attempted to switch opium for rice, substituting a Chinese rice variant, '*Hsin Shweli*'. Although the Chinese rice was supposed to have higher yields, it was in fact less productive and yielded a poorer quality of rice than that grown traditionally in the Shan State.⁶⁸ Despite the failure of the crops in all townships where the rice was grown, the SPDC continued to hand out the seeds and punish farmers who did not meet planting deadlines. The scheme also raised questions over the intelligence of planting rice in the mountainous areas of Shan State, due to the fact that rice is grown predominantly in the lowland areas of that region.

Even where crop substitution may appear to be successful, unexpected dilemmas may still arise. In the Wa region of Shan State (as well as in neighbouring Laos and southern China) local authorities have promoted the cultivation of rubber plantations as an alternative cash crop to opium. Bringing in roughly twice the price of opium per hectare, rubber seems like it would be an ideal alternative, however, there have been hidden drawbacks to the plan. Besides the fact that rubber is a long term investment, another disadvantage has, ironically, been its popularity. The large regions covered by rubber plantations, which have been facilitated by Chinese investors, have had a negative impact on the micro-environments of regions in southern China's Yunnan province and the Wa region of Shan State where too much rubber has been planted. A further problem has been the power of larger investors buying up prime land at the expense of poor farmers, who are left with low quality land and are at times obliged, and indeed sometimes forced, to work on commercial plantations.⁶⁹ Working as day labourers on larger plantations mean minimal wages for poor farmers and at times they receive no pay at all for their toil. In addition to the labour rights abuses associated with these plantations, the environmental lessons learned from Laos and China do not bode well for the continued mass plantations of rubber in Burma. NGOs have raised red flags regarding the dangers of widespread use of pesticides and the resultant drop in soil fertility, affects on biodiversity, and illegal logging and deforestation to make way for new rubber plantations.⁷⁰



A Burmese police officer adding a piece of wood to a pyre during an SPDC drug burning ceremony. Among the drugs burned were opiates, heroin, marijuana, and ATS. [Photo: unknown, found online at www.militaryphotos.com]

Further negative aspects of crop substitution schemes are the vastly reduced incomes that are derived from economically inferior crops. As mentioned above, cash crops of opium provided as much as 43 percent of farmers' incomes per year. Losing half of yearly income resulted in poorer health and education levels for farming families. According to World Food Program figures, around 58 percent of children in the Wa region are stunted and 26 percent were severely stunted as of 2005, as a result of malnutrition. Households with reduced incomes have at times turned to negative coping strategies such as eating less frequently, eating less nutritious foods, eating forests products etc, all of which have deleterious effects on the health of the family, especially on children who are vulnerable to malnutrition.⁷¹

Another negative consequence of failed or inadequate crop substitution has been the need for food aid, care of the World Food Program, as alternative crops such as rice only provided sustenance for four to six months of the year. In the worst cases, rice cultivation only yields enough food for one to three months.⁷² Normally the shortfall would have been taken care of

by the income generated by poppy cultivation, livestock for the more well-off villagers, or collection of non-timber forest products (NTFP) for those less fortunate.

Abolition of poppy crops (such as those in Wa State for example) has pushed many families into situations of starvation as farmers are left with no viable alternatives. The lack or failure of alternative crops threatens the sustainability of crop eradication, as farmers may return to cultivation out of necessity. The situation in 2008 took a turn for the worse as dual natural disasters combined to create food scarcity in the Wa region of Shan State. Cyclone Nargis in Burma's south and the earthquake in Sichuan Province in China created problems in the rice supply that is necessary for the Wa Self Administered Region (SAR), as it is known in the military drafted constitution. The region has traditionally been an importer of rice, due to the unsuitability of the terrain for growing a rice crop. The partial elimination of the rice growing regions of the Irrawaddy Delta affected supplies from the south, while the earthquake in Sichuan prompted the Chinese government to suspend cross border rice trade and also threatened the yearly 10,000 tonne rice donation from China.⁷³ Junta restrictions on rice movement between townships in the wake of Nargis, and the ban on poppy production since 2005 in the region prompted calls from many former poppy growers for a return to cultivation as a means of bolstering the livelihoods of suffering villagers.⁷⁴

The combination of legislation and recent natural disaster has significantly increased the pressure on the United Wa State Army as administrators of the Wa Special Region 2, as the population that they represent faces increasing hardship with no end in sight. The populations of the region formerly engaged in cultivation must surely be tempted to resume cultivation, and some reports suggest that cultivation has indeed restarted in more remote locations in Shan State and that the bans have pushed many farmers into the south and east of Shan State in an attempt to maintain livelihoods. According to Jiao Wei, the UWSA's publicity spokesperson, there is disappointment among the Wa that efforts at reform and eradication have received insufficient support from the international community that have left poor farmers in dire need of assistance to ensure food security.

*"We have asked our farmers to grow rice, tea and rubber, but it doesn't offer enough revenue. They don't have enough food and need help.... Most farmers are against the ban. The poverty creates tensions. We feel a growing pressure from our people."*⁷⁵

Alongside eradication efforts by law enforcement and the counter-narcotics activities which have resulted in the consequences described earlier, the populations of Burma's remote regions have also been subject to the Border Areas Development Program (BADP), which has been in effect since the early 1990's. The BADP has resulted in infrastructure investments in roads, bridges, schools and clinics that have brought attendant human rights abuses such as forced labour, extortion and sexual violence among many other violations at the hands of the military.⁷⁶ (For more information regarding rights abuses associated with infrastructure projects, see Chapter 7: Forced Labour and Forced Conscription)

One of the most startling figures to emerge from the UNODC report on cultivation in 2006 was that related to revenues spent on eradication and substitution programs. In order to appreciate how little has been done in Burma, the figures for Thailand need to be looked at first. In reducing Thailand's poppy cultivation from 9,000 hectares to just one hundred hectares over the past 25 years, around US\$250 million has been spent. In Burma's Wa Special Region 2, less than US\$20 million has been spent on development assistance, even though the areas under cultivation are vastly greater; 20,000 hectares in 2003, down to a marginal amount in the areas surveyed in 2006. Mathematically this relates to a miserly US\$3 per person, per year in the region.⁷⁷

The poor approach to eradication is set to have ramifications beyond the short term. The 2006 UNODC report indicated that in areas of Wa Special Region 2 surveyed by the UNODC, up to a third of households during the course of 2005 had outstanding loans.⁷⁸ Importantly, almost all of those respondents indicated that they lacked the means of generating sufficient income to repay their debts in 2006. The UNODC concludes that these figures show a strong correlation between poppy cultivation and poverty, however it would also appear to show that a limited approach to eradication and lack of viable income generating projects have the propensity to lock farming families into a cycle of debt in the aftermath of the opium ban.

ATS Eradication

The efforts to control the flow and use of ATS in Burma have been a failure relative to what has been achieved in reducing opium cultivation. There appear to be several reasons for this. The trade and production of ATS is completely different from that of opium and heroin. Firstly, Burma is a net importer of the precursor chemicals that are required to produce ATS. The nature of the precursor chemicals is such that they can be used for a number of legitimate applications, not just the manufacture of illicit drugs. As such, these chemicals pose a different set of problems for law enforcement and customs as they are notoriously difficult to trace. As a consequence, synthetic drugs or ATS are produced at up to a rate of 500 tonnes globally per year. According to the executive director of UNODC Antonio Maria Costa the problems for law enforcement are manifold,

“When one lab is shut, another opens. When one type of precursor chemical is unavailable, producers switch to an alternative, ... This presents a challenge to law enforcement since production is so close to retail outlets.”⁷⁹

Secondly, the production of ATS can be vastly different in scale and can be easily hidden from view. While a poppy field is visible from the air, an ATS lab can be easily concealed in a house. Furthermore, the size of *yaba* tablets, for example, makes them relatively easy to transport. A backpack can contain up to 100,000 tablets that can be carried with relative ease across porous, remote borders, as has often proved to be the case in areas like northern Thailand. With so much attention focussed on the crackdown on opium in the northern states, there seems to be much less attention paid to the drastic rise in the production of ATS. Another difficulty for law enforcement officials seems to be that there are many different origins and points of entry for the precursor chemicals, ranging from India to Bangladesh, China and Thailand. After the drugs are manufactured in labs, there are just as many different destinations for the final products, if not more. Opium growing areas are well known and can be monitored closely and controlled, whereas the production of ATS could theoretically take place in a variety of locations which can be easily changed, thanks to mobile labs.

These factors combined make the task of controlling the production and trafficking of ATS much harder for law enforcement officials. In addition to the multifarious difficulties of controlling ATS is the very real, and at times substantiated, threat of corruption within law enforcement, which results in officers becoming involved with the drug trade in order to take bribes or illegal taxes in return for turning a blind eye to trafficking. Some activist groups have also claimed judicial officials have been jointly involved with police officers in cases where traffickers have been let off with lighter sentences in return for kickbacks.⁸⁰ (For more information see “Section 5.4: Drug Trafficking” above)

The International Relations Dimension

There exists an international relations and security dimension to the drug trade in Burma that could have implications for human rights in the region. Some analysts suggest that the economic growth of China may drive up demand in the southern provinces of China for heroin and amphetamines that may in turn encourage continuing cultivation of poppy crops in Shan State.⁸¹ This outcome would be incongruous with China's lack of tolerance toward drug trafficking and use that may cause tension between Beijing and Naypyidaw.

Although relations between the two nations are firm, with China being Burma's main military supplier, those relations need to be carefully handled by the regime. On the one hand there is pressure to eliminate drug production; however there is also the temptation of continuing the trend of involvement in the drugs trade in order to finance public infrastructure projects that the debilitated economy cannot finance due to years of inept management by the generals. Growing Chinese demand and/or continued regime involvement would only serve to exacerbate the human rights abuses associated with the drug trade. Either of these factors would continue to drive production, which may result in forced migration, population pressures, a lack of access to sustainable livelihoods and increased levels of poverty for rural populations formerly reliant on opium production as a means of augmenting income.

Commentators suggest further that the dimension of the junta harbouring Indian insurgents within Burma's borders for a price may cause tension between the leaders of that country and India. A report from March 2008 suggested that if these insurgent groups were to get a foothold in the resurgent production of heroin, it would have the potential to enrich such groups, in turn giving them the capacity to increase armaments and troop strength.⁸² A development such as this would necessarily make it much harder for the Indian government to bring these elements under control. The report suggests that the re-emergence of the heroin trade may provide an opportunity for India, Burma and China to bolster international relations. The threat of Indian insurgent involvement in heroin and amphetamine production in Burma has implications for all three countries, and could provide an opportunity for India to exert its influence in Naypyidaw. If India was able to encourage Naypyidaw to crack down on the groups and deny them haven within the country, it would provide an alleyway for India to improve its relations with Beijing. If India were successful in eliminating the insurgent influence and access to the opium trade and cultivation, thereby stemming the flow of drugs into China, which appears to be where the majority of Burma's drugs are heading recently, then it would be a major boon to Sino-Indian relations.⁸³

The eradication of drugs in Burma is clearly a task that has involved other countries beyond Burma's borders. The effects of drug production and trafficking are of international significance as they have far reaching consequences on regional stability and international relations. The flow of drugs into southern China is just one small example of the international nature of the problem. Indeed, Burma has sped up its eradication efforts thanks to pressure from China, a country which views the eradication programs as a way of reducing instability in the region, in a bid to maintain good foreign relations with its major arms supplier. Burma's drug production and trafficking has also been problematic for the US which has taken steps to curb the problem due to its former position as a major destination for Burmese heroin. Despite the drop in Burmese heroin reaching the US market, the US authorities have taken steps to aid the push from China and from the SPDC themselves to control drug production and trafficking in Burma. On 14 November 2008 the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) in the Treasury Department named Wei Hseuh Keng and the United Wa State Army as 'Specially Designated Narcotics Traffickers'. The designation came under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act (Kingpin Act).⁸⁴ Also named were Pao Yu Hsiang, Ho Chun Ting and Shih Kuo Neng. It was not the first time that Pao Yu Hsiang had been named. He had previously been identified in a similar manner in 2005 under the Kingpin Act along with Wei Hseuh Keng, who is commander-in-chief of the UWSA.

To the east, Thailand too has taken steps in the fight against drugs emanating from Burma. The flow of drugs from Burma, mostly comprised of methamphetamines prompted the Thai government in February 2008 to announce a restart to the controversial 'war on drugs' campaign that was launched under the former Thaksin regime in 2003. The campaign, which was derided by rights groups as an attack on human rights but lauded by the rural Thai population, eventually petered out, whereupon supply lines from Burma re-emerged allowing resurgence in methamphetamine supply.⁸⁵

With so many foreign interests involved, the eradication of drugs in Burma has proven to be an increasingly complex task, balancing elements of civil conflict, criminal activity, business interests and foreign policy. Some analysts have suggested that the drug eradication programs conducted by the SPDC in conjunction with the UNODC should come in for criticism, asserting that resolving Burma's drug problem is a task that has fallen prey to political interests. Many groups, in particular Altsean in their 2004 report "*A Failing Grade*", see the policy of the SPDC as being driven by the need to be certified by the US government in order to secure development funding.⁸⁶ The veracity of this argument is not for this chapter to discuss; however, the idea raised by Altsean is indicative of the manner in which the problem of drugs has been dealt with by the stakeholders. Namely, the concerns of those responsible for growing opium have usually been the last to be considered in the discourse. The farmers who live in poverty and rely upon opium to sustain livelihoods have never been a participatory group in the decisions regarding their future, even though they stand to lose the most in eradication programs, including fundamental human rights and access to sustainable livelihoods.

Pressure from Burma's neighbours to eradicate drugs has grown steadily over the last decade and the SPDC have responded in a typically one dimensional fashion that has seen a military and law enforcement based approach focussed solely on the eradication of crops. Thus, Burma's international relations with the surrounding countries have had a profound impact on human rights in the areas known for poppy cultivation, as well as in other areas of the country. The pressure from surrounding countries can only increase over time, making it incumbent upon the regime to diversify the fight against the drugs trade to include more than simply eradicating poppy crops. Thus far, the junta's approach has simply driven drug production into remote areas, helped fuel a market for cheaper stimulants and narcotics and criminalised drug production and use. The criminalisation of drug use in particular has masked the fact that users need treatment, not jail time; that the treatment for addiction requires a medical and social welfare based approach, not a judicial one. Furthermore, the junta has failed to address the appalling state of the Burmese economy as a stimulus behind drug production, use and addiction.

5.6 Drug Use and Production - Partial list of incidents for 2008

On 25 January 2008 it was reported that Thailand and Burma were set to sign a 'Memorandum of Understanding' that would precipitate further joint actions on drug suppression and eradication. The report suggested that director-general of Burma's Police Brig-Gen Khin Yi, and a team of anti-drug officials from Burma were to visit the Doi Tung Development Project in Chiang Rai, Thailand, in March 2008 in order to study the opium eradication scheme and crop substitution project. The Thai project had been successful in urging hill tribe peoples in the region to replace opium with alternative cash crops. In explaining the cooperation between the two countries under a bilateral agreement or drug control, the report also said that *"Thailand has worked closely with Burma on exchanging information such as names of drug suspects and locations of drug factories along the Thai-Burmese border."*⁸⁷

On 4 March 2008, a report surfaced claiming that opium production in Shan State was returning to figures similar to the pre-crackdown days of 2001-2002. In the period following this time opium production was banned by the SPDC in several areas including Kokang, Wa and Loimaw areas of Shan State, which dropped production in those areas. The report claimed however, that the production, far from being halted, had simply moved to new locations, pushing farmers and their crops into eastern and lower Shan State.⁸⁸

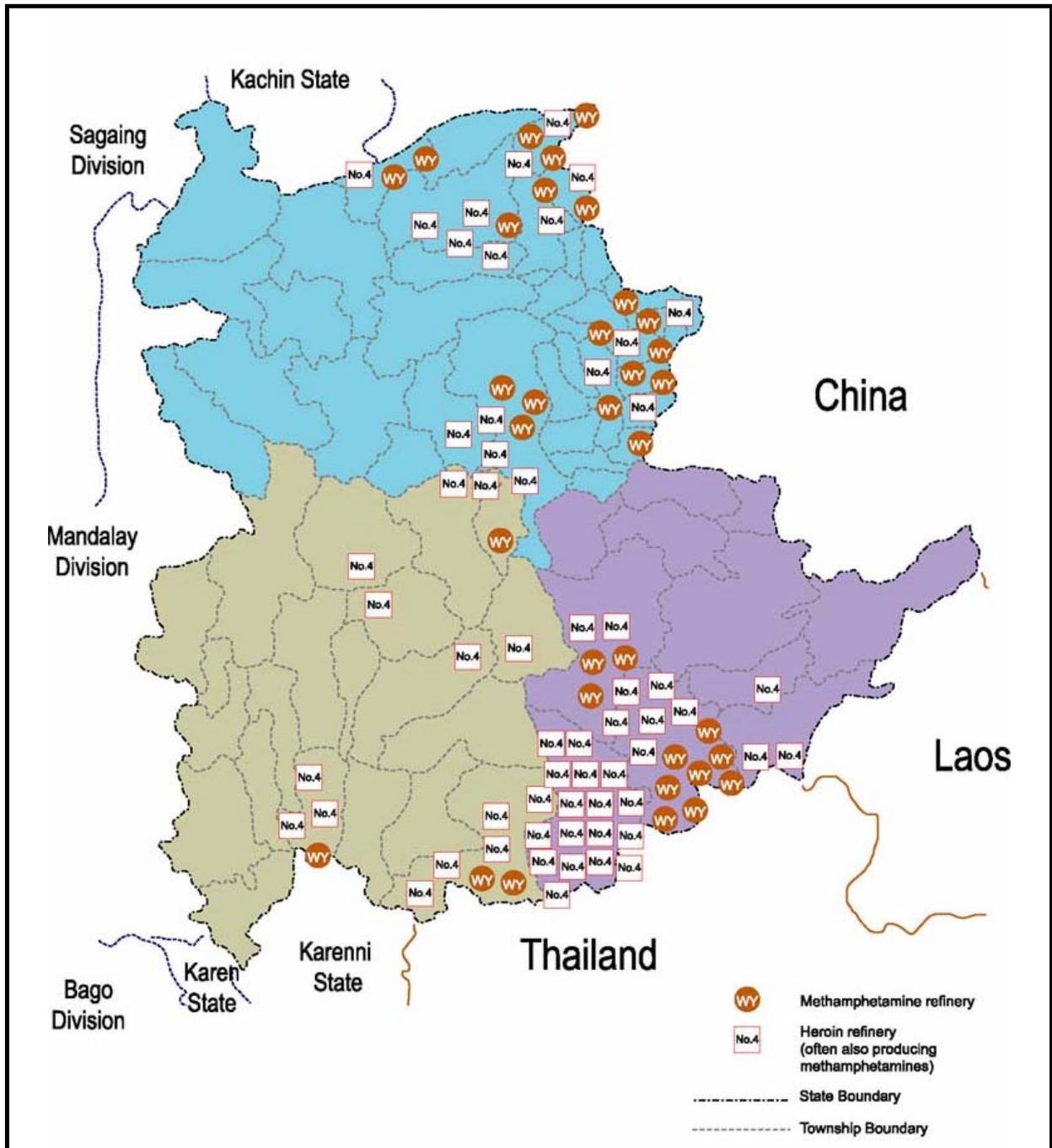
It was reported on 23 April 2008 that locals and officials in areas populated mostly by ethnic Wa peoples of Shan State in northern Burma, were complaining of the difficulties in sustaining livelihoods following the SPDC's clampdown on poppy production. The reports came from Pangyang, 30 miles west of Panghsang, the Wa capital, where the clampdown, which had begun three years prior to the report, was claimed to have led to increased impoverishment in the area. Locals reported on the economic effects of the reduction in poppy cultivation including the downturn in market trade and the increased difficulties in meeting the costs associated with sending children to school in the area. Some former poppy growers told of how crop substitution, such as growing tea instead of poppy had failed due to the fragility of tea, leaving those farmers without income. The former poppy farmers were now receiving rations of 20 pay (66.7 litres) each time twice per year from the WFP (World Food Program) however, the provisions were only enough to sustain those families throughout 8 months of the year, leaving a four month shortfall.⁸⁹

On 25 June 2008 China was reported to have praised drug eradication efforts of Burma. In 2004, China seized 10.8 tonnes of heroin that originated from northern Burma, however by 2008, that figure had dropped dramatically to 4.6 tonnes. According to Yang Fengrui, head of the Ministry of Public Security's Narcotics Control Bureau, the area of Burmese territory under cultivation decreased from 165,300 hectares (about 390,000 acres) to 18,600 hectares (45,961 acres). Despite international isolation of the regime most notably through the sanctioning by Europe and the US, Chinese officials announced that,

*"We will keep cooperating on intelligence exchanges, fighting drug traffickers, eradicating drugs, personnel training and helping the Myanmar [Burmese] government with substitution programs."*⁹⁰

On 26 June 2008 SPDC Minister for Home Affairs and Chairman of the Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control, Major-General Maung Oo claimed at a commemoration of the International Day Against Drugs that the SPDC's drug eradication efforts had been successful in reducing the land cultivated for opium production from 140,000 hectares to 27,700 hectares in the ten years leading up to 2007. These claims, though partly accurate,

were criticized from several corners notably from Khunsai of the *Shan Herald Agency for News*, and by Martin Jelsma, coordinator of the Transnational Institute's Drugs & Democracy Programme. Both pointed out the incongruence of claiming the success of drug eradication programs whilst the numbers of ATS production has skyrocketed and there has been a decline in living conditions for former opium farmers. They also pointed out that much of opium production has simply moved location to areas where it was undetectable.⁹¹



Map of Shan State showing the locations of known methamphetamine and heroin production facilities current as of March 2003. The red circles represent ATS laboratories, while the white squares indicate the locations of heroin refineries. [Photo: © SHAN]

On 26 June 2008 members of the All Kachin Students Union conducted a poster campaign in Myitkyina, Kachin State to coincide with International Anti-drug use and trafficking day. According to members of the AKSU, the campaign was initiated due to the perceived increase in drug addiction in Kachin State. The report covering the campaign listed drug prices from Myitkyina as follows, "A vial of 'Formula' is sold at Kyat 8,000, a capful of the penicillin vial is Kyat 1,500-2,000, a tablet of ecstasy at Kyat 8,000-10,000 and raw opium pasted on cloth weighing one tical (about 6.5 gm) Kyat 10,000."⁹² The AKSU also claimed that members of the authorities including police and members of the justice system are complicit in the drug trade, by helping to get those arrested lighter sentences or acquittals in return for bribes and a cut of seized drugs. The AKSU was at the time conducting further research on the Hpakant Jade mine where it claimed drug use is rampant and HIV/AIDS infection is widespread among miners and sex workers.⁹³

On 15 July the junta mouthpiece *New Light of Myanmar* released figures claiming that SPDC authorities had arrested 329 drug traffickers in June in a crackdown. The report claimed that authorities seized more than 119 kg of opium and heroin, 2.39 kg of marijuana and 16,082 stimulant tablets. It was further asserted that action was taken against 329 persons - 265 men and 64 women in 192 cases.⁹⁴

On 12 August 2008 the Bangkok Post reported that deputy secretary-general Pitaya Jinawat and other Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) officials were headed to the Ban Yin area of Taunggyi in northern Shan State, Burma in order to initiate a crop replacement program. The implementation of the program in the Pa-o area of the state was to follow on from the success of a similar program instigated five years earlier in the area of Yong Kha. The new program was to be run by the ONCB and the Mae Fah Luang Foundation, which runs the Doi Tung Development Project in Chiang Rai, who were granted permission by the Burmese junta to start the project. Plans were set to get the project under way by the end of 2008, with hopes of replacing opium crops with cash crops.⁹⁵

On 13 August 2008 it was reported that large numbers of drug dealers and users had been arrested in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State. The report claimed that the increases in the rates of arrests coincided with the appointment of Major-General Soe Win, who took over the post of Northern Command (MaPaKha) Commander. The report said that many of the arrests had taken place in residential areas such as Jan Mai Kawng, Shatapru and Dukahtawng.⁹⁶

On 13 August 2008 it was reported that authorities in Burma had arrested 385 drug traffickers including 317 men and 68 women. 105 kilograms (231 pounds) of opium, 1.6 kilograms of heroin, 138,550 stimulant tablets and smaller quantities of other narcotics and chemicals were seized in July by police, customs and military forces. The arrests came on the heels of reports by the UNODC that claim opium production had risen by 46 percent between 2006 and 2007, despite SPDC claims that Burma would be drug free by 2014.⁹⁷

It was reported on 26 June 2008 that amphetamines were becoming increasingly easy to access in Mon state, particularly in the towns of Pa'an and Kawkreik. The report claimed that it was in these towns where the drug, known locally as Say-pyar, was most easily purchased from local authorities and members of the ethnic ceasefire groups. It was claimed also that use of amphetamines was reasonably common among male university students who were able to purchase the pills for about 4,000 kyat, which showed a marked increase in recent times from the former price of 1,000 kyat. From being a relatively drug free area ten years ago, the New Mon State party seized 28,000 amphetamine tablets around the Three Pagoda Pass checkpoint in 2008.⁹⁸

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The Human Rights Documentation Unit (HRDU) is the research and documentation division of Burma's government in exile; the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB). The HRDU was formed in 1994 to document the human rights crisis confronting the many and varied peoples of Burma, and to defend and promote those internationally recognised human rights that are inherent and inalienable for all persons irrespective of race, colour, creed, ethnicity or religion. To this end, the HRDU published the first *Burma Human Rights Yearbook* in 1995 to comprehensively document the systematic and egregious nature of the human rights abuses being perpetrated in Burma throughout the previous year. This report, the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook 2008*, represents the 15th annual edition of the *Burma Human Rights Yearbook*, which, combined with all previous editions collectively comprise well over 10,000 pages of documentation and provide an unbroken historical record spanning the past one and a half decades.

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Human Rights Documentation Unit

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