

Small Arms and Drug Trafficking In the Indian Ocean Region

Prof. Aparajita Biswas



University of Mumbai

Working Paper: No. 4

Centre for African Studies

Area Studies Building
Behind Marathi Bhasha Bhavan
University of Mumbai
Vidyanagari, Santacruz (E)
Mumbai : 400 098.
Tel Off : 022 2652 00 00 Ext. 417.
E-mail : renumodi2003@yahoo.com
african_studies@rediffmail.com

Resume

Dr. Aparajita Biswas completed her M.A. in International Relations from Jadavpur University, Kolkata (erstwhile Calcutta). She did her Ph.D. in African Studies from University of Mumbai and presently is a professor at the Centre for African Studies, University of Mumbai, India. She is associated with many universities, research institutes and research groups in India and abroad. Her main interest in research includes India-Africa relations, Africa's international regional organizations in Asia and Africa, Africa and the Indian Ocean region and South and Southern Africa

Acronyms

| | |
|----------------|---|
| IO | Indian Ocean |
| SAARC | South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation |
| SADC | Southern African Development Community |
| ISI | Inter Services Intelligence |
| ULFA | United Liberation Front of Assam |
| NSCN | National Socialists Council of Nagaland |
| NDFB | National Democratic Front of Bodoland |
| MULTA | Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam |
| MULFA | Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam |
| IBRF | Indo-Burmese Revolutionary Front |
| LTTE | Liberation Tamil Tigers of Elam |
| LeT | Lashkar-e-Toiba |
| ASEAN | Association of South East Asian Nations |
| BIMSTEC | Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation |
| SLOC | Strategic Sea-Lanes of Communication |

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Introduction

The late 20th century has seen a profound change in the concept of security. A major feature of the change was the conclusion of the Cold War, the end of major conflicts in the region, and the dismantlement of apartheid in South Africa, which paved the way for the current period of democratisation, regional co-operation and relative peace. However, despite these changes in international and regional relations, security threats have not been totally eliminated but simply re-manifested. Non-traditional security threats like environmental degradation, mass population movements, small arms proliferation and drug smuggling to name a few, have assumed prominence.

This article is intended to address the issues of small arms and drug trafficking as well as the symbiotic relationship that exists between narco traders and arms dealers. These issues will be examined by means of a regional geographical analysis with Indian Ocean region being the focal point. As the IOR is vast, I have concentrated my investigation on a few South Asian and Southern African Countries in the IOR, where the situation of small arms and drug trafficking is most alarming. My article would also likely to interrogate the possibilities of co-operation between regional organisations like South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) and Southern African Development Community (SADC), to counter this illicit network in the Indian Ocean region.

Security Challenges

The end of Cold War was followed by a rise in trans-national security issues. Many countries in the Asia –Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions are slowly recognizing that the trans-national security issues are emerging as their top security challenges, and pose even more long-term threat to state and regional security than the inter-state conflict. At their most basic level, trans-national security issues can be defined as non-military threats that cross borders and either threatens the political and social integrity of a nation or the health of its inhabitant. This can be termed broadly as low intensity conflict. Unlike conventional and nuclear threats, which are resorted to by states, low intensity conflict is the instrument employed by state sponsored groups, as well by non-state actors---- such as criminal gangs or terrorists groups--- who hardly care for international laws and standards. Their causes are multifarious and not easily ascertainable. It is a long-term problem characterised by the dilemma of finding the ideal solution--- should it be a single policy change or by introduction an international law and convention. ¹

The unrestrained spread and the associated illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons is not a new phenomenon in itself, but has attained a new dimension with the end of the Cold War. The funding link between terrorist groups and narcotics trafficking is well known. The nexus between the two has led to the term narco-terrorism. The term narco-terrorism was coined by President Belaunde Terry of Peru in the year 1983 when describing terrorists' type of attacks against his nation's anti-narcotics police. Now a subject of definitional controversy, narco-terrorism is understood to mean the attempts of narcotics traffickers to influence the policy of the government by the systematic threat or use of violence.²

On a regional and national level, drugs and small arms together can be destabilising influence. The small arms trafficking intimidate the state in several ways. First, it can

undermine democratic institutions as government seeks to control the threat. Their attempts often result in the draconian measures, such as military takeover of the civilian government. Added to this, small arms nurture domestic criminal groups that erode or confront the power of the state. In fact, the proliferation of the small arms around the world partly reflects the ‘shift of armed conflict progressively from the regular to irregular’. It is been institutionalised to such an extent that it has created a new kaleidoscope wherein neither the old rules nor new weapons apply. The developing world is most affected by it and yet, the threat of LIC has not given the systematic academic dimensions that it deserved.

The South and South-East Asian Region

The South and South-East Asian regions are particularly vulnerable to the scourge of small arms trafficking. This is due to various factors. The Afghanistan –Pakistan region arguably contains the world’s largest concentration of the illicit weapons, a situation made more volatile by the fact that it is also centre for terrorist and extremist ideology. Similarly Asia has two of the largest opium producing countries in the world- Myanmar and Afghanistan—and it is well known that narcotics trafficking and its collateral violence, depend extensively on the availability of small arms.

In South Asia, the fallout of the religious fundamentalism pursued by Pakistan as an instrument of regional policy and the subsequent post-Najibullah events in Afghanistan also saw the spread of several negative patterns for deeper ramifications for South Asian security. The large scale weaponisation in Afghanistan, Baluchistan and North West Frontier Province of Pakistan and the intertwined relationship of weapon production and narcotics trade, lumped together as the ‘Kalashnikov culture has set off a fundamentalist drive into Kashmir, Tajikistan, Chechnya, Bosnia and elsewhere. India’s vulnerability increased from the growing narcotics trade across borders, bringing with it a host of social and political problems. The harmful effects of arm conflicts, international terrorism, drug smuggling and the illicit trafficking in small arms has challenged world security and stability. National borders did not confine those

threats and no individual country could cope up with those challenges. It should be confronted to the regional, national and international levels.

The point worth noting is that the Cold War period left behind the legacy of weaponry, that could undermine the progress made to foster peace and democracy in the developing countries. During the Cold War, United States of America (USA) and the erstwhile Soviet Union resorted to arming rebel groups throughout the world. The irony is that today many of these illicit transfers of arms by these two countries have come back to haunt them. For example, USA is now engaged in a fight against Colombian drug lords who, ironically enough, are sometimes armed with very weapon slipped to Central America by USA to fight communism in the 1980's.

India is caught between the three largest heroin and opium producers in the world such as the countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Myanmar, resulting in conflicts on her borders adjoining major drug production /transporting areas. Sri Lanka too suffers tremendously from the serious proliferation of small arms. The Sri Lankan militants have penetrated deeply into the drug world, to augment their armed strength against the Sri Lanka Army.

Added to this is the fact that the notorious drug producing and illicit arms trading areas of the 'Golden Crescent' and the 'Golden Triangle' lie within the geographical propinquity of the IOR. This geographical association is further reinforced by the link between narcotics and arms, with the sea routes of the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal providing ideal waterways for the supply of both arms and narcotics.³

In fact, one critical problem arising out of the confluence of two major narco-producing and trading regions - the Golden Crescent and the Golden Triangle - is the cementing of a diabolic relationship between insurgent groups, arms dealers and narco-terrorists. Such a relationship is quite common with the groups operating in the region. Although not all the insurgent groups engage in narco-production or narco-trafficking, it has nevertheless been found that all of them have regularly taxed and extorted money from

the traffickers, while providing protection to the latter for conducting trafficking in drugs. There are several critical implications to this.

Firstly, the trans-national narco-networks, now backed by armed insurgents, make anti-narco-production or narco-trafficking drive immensely difficult. And taking into consideration the geographical and topographical conditions in which the insurgents and the traffickers operate, there is now all the more reason to believe that the nationally –organised military or coercive solutions may not be the correct way of overcoming the menace of narco-terrorism.

Secondly, weapons, particularly small arms in the hands of both the insurgents and traffickers, become more rampant, to the point of threatening the law and order situation in the vicinity. A large portion of the money received from taxing and extorting the narco-traffickers goes towards purchase of small, at times sophisticated, arms for the insurgents.⁴

The situation in Sub-Saharan Africa

In Africa too, the same scenario persists. The end of the Cold War did not see Africa become a more peaceful place. The dissolution of the bi-polar world order was also accompanied in some cases by the collapse of individual states. Coupled with it there was a gradual erosion of interests among the major world powers towards Africa. In the void left by the crumbling state and the international community have stepped external non-state actors, sometimes as proxies, sometimes as independent agents who have influenced events and fuelled conflicts. Millions of small arms----- lightweight, portable and devastatingly effective even in the hands of the young or poorly trained users---- were shipped to Africa during the Cold War, to equip anti-colonial fighters, newly independent states and super power proxy forces alike. Even after the Cold War ended, a flood of new small arms entered Africa as arms manufactures put millions of surplus Cold War era weapons into the international arms market, at cut rate prices. In July 2001, the US Government estimated that small arms have fuelled conflicts in 22

African countries, leading to loss of 7.8 million lives. Indeed, in Africa, guns are more than weapons of choice-----they are weapons of mass destructions.

In the Southern African region the situation is most volatile. The region has recently emerged from a period of protracted violent conflicts characterised by a series of national liberation insurgencies and civil war. Currently it is undergoing a term of relatively peaceful democratic consolidation. Despite these developments, uncertainty in terms of potential threats to the region and localised conflicts, which have been sustained by massive socio-economic disparities and mass movements of refugees, present a major obstacle to achieving peace and human development. Local conflicts have been exacerbated and even intensified by the availability of small arms. The result was that, years later these durable killing machines have fallen into the hands of insurgents, local militants and criminal organisations. This have left ordinary people vulnerable to violence arising out of ineffective policing and simmering civil conflicts.⁵

This article would like to examine the continuing trade in light weapons, and its nexus with the narcotics movement, where it exists in the IOR. The argument has been made that the weapons and narcotics movements respect no frontiers, their passage accelerated by under-development, ignorance and economic decay, which destabilise the entire region. Arms spill over from conflict to conflict, and they serve the greed and need of criminals who recognise no borders. It is not possible for a single state to handle and control the situation, underlining the absolute necessity of evolving the regional approach to solutions, moving in parallel with a global awareness of the problem and a determination to deal with it.

In broadly classifying the countries in the IO region, it is certain that some countries are primarily weapon repositories, others are mainly drug producers. In the African littoral states of South Africa and Mozambique, small arms played a major role in exacerbating crime and armed violence. Somalia offers a textbook case of the dangers of light weapons proliferation and irresponsible arming of unstable regimes by the former

powers. But in all these states, smuggling of drugs and weapons are a follow up symptom rather than the disease itself.

However, this classification does not hold good in the case of countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan. In both these countries, statistics show the availability of weapons and drug cultivation have touched an all time high, and the growth of narcotics cultivation is synonymous with the rise of the conflict itself. These commodities flow out into the IO region through the ports of South Asia, on their way to the lucrative markets of Europe and USA.

Circulation of Small Arms

The terms 'small arms' and 'light weapons' - often used co-terminously - have come into common use in recent years. The definition of the light arms and light weapons used by the Small Arms Survey covers both military-styled weapons and commercial firearms (handguns and long guns). Small guns include weapons like revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, assault rifles, sub-machine guns and light machine guns. Light weapons are heavy machine guns, hand-held under barrel and mounted grenade launchers, portable and anti aircraft guns, recoilless rifles, portable launchers of anti-tank and anti-aircraft missile system and mortars of less than 100-meter calibre.⁶

These weapons have become easier to obtain, easier to conceal and to smuggle across borders, and easier to use and maintain to the point that it has resulted in the phenomenon of the child soldier or child combatant, turning innocent children, many of them as young as seven, into ruthless warriors and killers. These weapons are increasingly lethal, with most recent models capable of firing as many as 700 rounds a minute. According to Ado Vaher of UNICEF, small arms and light weapons are now responsible for no less than 90% of war casualties. Since 1990's, more than 3 million people had been killed by small arms and light weapons. Among them 80% are of

innocent civilians with children accounting for 25% of all casualties. This means that the deaths of 750,000 children were directly caused by small arms and light weapons.⁷ Worldwide, AK47 rifles are proving to be extremely popular small weapons.⁸ Within the AK series of assault rifles alone, an estimated 78 countries are using them, while more than 14 countries have manufactured between 35 and 40 million AK assault rifles in the period between 1945 and 1990. The proliferation of these rifles is mainly due to their ease of production, their excellent performance under adverse conditions and, most importantly, their ease of use and disassembly. AK 47 rifles, the nodal of the AK family, has achieved unparalleled levels of availability in the global arms market. These rifles are user-friendly and can be easily handled even by child-soldiers. Such is the ubiquity of the AK rifles that they have become a symbol of resistance and guerrilla movements worldwide, including the Afghanistan Mujahideen, the African National Congress, the Irish Republican Army, UNITA, and the Kosovo Liberation Army.⁹ An indication of the extent of proliferation can be measured from the fact that, in some parts of Africa, AK47 rifles can be purchased for as little as US\$6 or traded for a chicken or a sack of grain.

The most classic situation is in Afghanistan, where USA sent billions of dollars of military aid to radical Islamic fundamentalists in 1980 to fight the Soviet-backed regime of Babrak Kamal. This country received large amounts of weapons in the 1980's, and is today a major source of small arms and light weapons supply in South and Central Asia. During the Afghan War between 1979 and 1989, the erstwhile USSR on the one hand and groups of nations on the other, pumped in millions of small arms in the region. According to sources, USSR incurred an intervention cost of around US \$3billion a year up to 1992.

In Afghanistan, the billions of dollars that USSR spent on the regime were, in terms of quantity, far less than the billions that are spent in buying tons of assault rifles, RPGs, and mortars, to sustain resistance movements. Other sources have put the cost of the Afghan conflict at US \$5billion, which was about fifty times the yearly aid that has given by USSR to the Afghan regime till 1989. In addition, ten million anti-personal

mines were laid by the then Soviet troops during their 10-year occupation of Afghanistan. The mining operation continued till their withdrawal in 1989, covering nearly 13 million square meters of land - from rural landscape to urban thoroughfares. Only 43,000 mines have been cleared so far. Most of the agricultural land in Afghanistan is infested with mines and the rest is under poppy cultivation. The erstwhile Soviet Union is known to have spent as much as US \$20billion on arms supplies during their Afghan occupation. Some of these arms have undoubtedly fallen into the hands of Afghan warlords, the real beneficiaries of the largesse from the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan.¹⁰

It is a common knowledge that during the Afghan–Soviet war in the 1980’s, both the CIA and the ISI played a direct role in funnelling weapons and money to the so-called ‘freedom fighters’ - the Afghan Mujahideen. The two agencies were also at least indirectly involved in the nascent, local trade in narcotics. The Mujadeen received most of the funds supplied by the CIA (and matched by Saudi Arabia) through the ISI, where national logistic cell trucks delivered weapons to Afghanistan and brought opium to Pakistan. The CIA channelled at least US \$2billion in weapons aid, or an estimated 80% of the agency’s covert aid budget to the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, in its fight against the then Soviet forces.

The involvement of the ISI in both arms and drug trades raises further questions about the adequacy of a category such as ‘narco-terrorism’, and would require an assessment of how such different actors as resistance guerrillas, intelligence agencies and terrorist organizations use the drug economy. It has been reported that 340 Stinger missiles were fired during the Afghan war, bringing down 269 aircraft, a 70% success scored by marksmen who were not even fully trained. The paradox is that, USA is now worried that the deadly Stinger – supplied by it - might fall into the hands of the terrorists. According to sources, Stingers were resold to countries like Libya, Iraq, and North Korea.

It was partly as a result of this practice of siphoning off a portion of the arms in transit, that Pakistan has become a major source of small arms supplies in South Asia. This covers both black market arms and arms supplied covertly to insurgent groups in the region. While there are some ideological incentives for transferring arms, some tribal groups (e.g. Baluchistan region in Afghanistan) view these transactions mostly from a financial point of view.¹¹

Under the Reagan Administration of USA, it was believed that the arms aid amount in the Afghan conflict jumped from US \$80 million in 1983 to US \$120 million in 1984. These figures climbed to US \$470 million in 1986 and US \$630 million in 1987, and covered arms ranging from M-16 and UZIS to Kalashnikovs of different makes, including Russian, Chinese and Eastern European manufactures.¹² Total aid from all sides has been put by other sources at around US \$8.7 billion (1986-1990), far exceeding the legal weapons imports of most countries during the same period.

There is clear evidence that the instances of violence in India and Pakistan are a direct outcome of the irresponsible arming of Afghan Mujahideen by USA, with considerable assistance from Saudi Arabia and partly from Britain. In this context it is to be mentioned that the flow of weapons into the region has clearly played a major part in the erosion of law and order over the past decade.¹³ Large numbers of pipeline weapons have made their way into the hands of Sikh and Kashmiri militants. The militants obtained weapons either directly from the Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan or from the arms bazaars situated in the North-West Frontier Province.

In India, while many factors contributed to the growing strength and resolve of Sikh fighters during the mid-1980's and through the early 1990's, however increased access to vast quantities of more advanced weapons allowed them to consolidate power through force. At the same time, the acquisition of large numbers of these weapons contributed to the dramatic increase in both the frequency and severity of abuses inflicted on the unarmed civilians. It is clear that there is a co-relation between the

number of civilians killed and the use of automatic rifles; as the use of Kalashnikov's increased, so did the number of civilian killings.¹⁴

The other disquieting factor is that India's rebel groups also receive weapons originating in Pakistan. In the north-eastern part of India, there are three insurgency groups – the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). These groups are in direct contact with Pakistan's ISI and the Afghan Mujahideen. Not only do they get training in those countries but also receive weapons through a pipeline originating in Pakistan, and the South-East Asian pipeline running through Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore.¹⁵

It may be mentioned here that the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Indian Ocean are the most insecure region. The waters around the islands are routes for the Chinese gun-running to Bangladesh, from where the arms reach North-East India. It was mainly for this reason that the Indian government upgraded the security structure of the islands and the surrounding areas in 1998. It had established a high Service Command to combat smuggling of narcotics and arms, and to keep an eye on illegal shipping and other maritime activities in the region. As regards strategic concerns, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands provide the key to the eventual success of the much talked about 'Look East Policy' of India that was enunciated by the then Prime Minister of India, Narasimha Rao, in the early 1990s. It is the close proximity of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands with South-East Asia that makes India as much a part of this region as South Asia.

According to Indian Intelligence Reports, the chief patron of ULFA is Pakistan. ULFA has for long maintained close linkages with Pakistan ISI, which procured several passports for its chief, Paresh Barua and the other ULFA cadres. The top ULFA leaders are in close touch with certain officers of the Pakistan High Commission in Bangladesh, who have arranged for their passports in various names to travel to Karachi, on the way to various training camps run by the ISI and its affiliates. At least

300 ULFA cadres were trained in Pakistan in the use of rocket launchers, explosives and assault weapons. There are several madrassas and mosques sponsored by the ISI in the Sylhet and Cox Bazaar areas that are being used to hoard and transfer arms procured by the ULFA from Thailand and Myanmar.¹⁶ The ISI largesse enabled ULFA to buy arms in Cambodia, paying for them in hard currency routed through Nepal. Their allegiance to Pakistan is so intense that they openly supported Pakistan during Indo-Pak war in Kargil.

Furthermore, according to Indian Intelligence sources, ULFA is receiving direct support from Bangladesh and China. It had established close contact with the Chinese army and through them, arms has been transported from China to ports in Bangladesh on merchant ships of various countries, including North Korea. ULFA'S camps in Bangladesh have been functioning since 1989. Commencing initially with using Bangladesh as a safe haven and training location, ULFA gradually expanded its network to include operational control of activities and the receipt and shipment of arms in transit before they entered India. The Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) and the Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA) are the chief suppliers of arms for the ULFA through Bangladesh. This group has reportedly set up bases at the hill region of Meghalaya, to coordinate transit of arms coming through Bangladesh.

Moreover the co-operation between various terrorist organizations in India's north-east and foreign groups was formalised with the formation of the Indo-Burmese Revolutionary Front (IBRF), in 1989. The IBRF was made of initially by the NSCN-K, ULFA, NDFB, Kuki National Front and Chin National Front of Myanmar. The ULFA and the NFDB have also developed contacts with Liberation Tamil Tigers of Elam (LTTE), the rebel group in Kashmir, the Kachins in Myanmar and the Rough in Cambodia.¹⁷ The NSCN, which is heavily armed, constantly provokes insurgencies in neighbouring states of India like Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura and Assam. It also receives active political and material support from India's hostile neighbours.

Another country which suffers tremendously because of serious proliferation of small arms is Sri Lanka. The Tamil militants have purchased explosives and weapons from a wide variety of sources such as North Korea to Myanmar and Ukraine and from middlemen operating from Europe to Asia and the Middle-east. The accumulation of small arms in Sri Lanka is driven by the rebel secessionist movement led by the LTTE fighting for independence from Sri Lanka in the northern part of the country. Within two decades LTTE had emerged as one of the world's most feared guerrilla groups.

It is a well known fact that prior to 1987, the LTTE guerrillas were trained in several camps in India and were permitted to run their own camps in the country. During the latter part of the 1970s and the first seven years of the 1980's, New Delhi played a key role in supporting the militant Tamil struggle in Sri-Lanka, backing both the LTTE and several other militants groups. This support was a product of wider ideological and geopolitical concerns. However, after the arms flow from India dried up following the Indo-Sri-Lanka Peace Accord, the LTTE has successfully replicated that network internationally. It is to be mentioned here that LTTE refused to accept the peace accord which aimed to bring about a negotiated settlement to the insurgency in Sri Lanka by providing for a general ceasefire and the devolution of local powers of governance for an autonomous north-eastern Tamil province. The Indian Peace Keeping Force was despatched to Sri Lanka to oversee guerrilla disarmament and provide security to local administrative council elections. The LTTE regarded the Indian policy reversal as an unforgivable act of treachery which influenced its decision to assassinate India's then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi.

The LTTE arms net-work is headed by Kumaran Pathmanathan, aka 'KP'. At the heart of KP's operations is a highly secretive shipping network. The LTTE started building its maritime network with the help of a Bombay Shipping magnate in the middle of 1980's. It is believed that LTTE have around 10 freighters, which are equipped with sophisticated radar and Inmarsat Communication technology. The vessels mostly travel under Panamanian, Honduran or Liberation flags (famously known as Pan-Ho-Lib).¹⁸

The communication hub of the LTTE weapons procurement network is the south-eastern countries like Singapore and Hong Kong, which are not only strategically situated on key shipping lanes, but also have highly developed banking structures. These two 'city states' orchestrate cells located in Thailand, Pakistan and Burma, effectively plugging the LTTE into the booming arms bazaars of South East and South West Asia.

More distinctively, the international arms procurement activities of the LTTE are carried out from 5 main geographical locations. These are 1) Northeast and Southeast Asia, focusing particularly on China, North Korea, Cambodia, Thailand, Hong Kong, Vietnam and Burma. 2) Southwest Asia, focusing particularly on Afghanistan and Pakistan (through so-called Afghan pipeline). 3) The former Soviet Union, focusing particularly on Ukraine 4) South-eastern Europe and the Middle-East, focusing particularly on Lebanon, Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey. 5) Africa, focusing particularly on Nigeria, Zimbabwe and South Africa.¹⁹

The LTTE has also established well-connected traffic routes that are used to transport armaments back to Sri Lanka. Weapons from China, North Korea and Hong Kong are trafficked across the South China Sea, through the Malacca and Singapore Straits to the Bay of Bengal and then to Sri-Lanka. The LTTE established a permanent naval base in Twante, an island off Myanmar, while Phuket in Thailand was an important back- up base for them. Arms from Cambodia, Vietnam and Burma transit through Thailand before being loaded into vessels at the southern port of Ranong for the trip across the Bay of Bengal. Weapons from Eastern Europe, Ukraine and Middle-East pass through the Suez canal, around the Horn of Africa and then on to Sri Lanka. Finally, arms from Africa tend to be smuggled back to the LTTE jungle strongholds, either around the Cape of Good Hope from ports in Liberia, Nigeria and Angola via Madagascar from the Mozambican coastal town of Beira.²⁰

However, what's ironic is that the LTTE had obtained arms from the Sri Lankan government itself. Sources in India alleged that thousands of arms went to the LTTE

in 1989, ostensibly for them to fight against the Indian Peacekeeping Forces in Sri Lanka. There is sufficient evidence to show that purchase of these weapons are primarily funded by the Tamil diasporas based in Switzerland, Canada, Australia, USA, UK and Scandinavian countries. Most of these Tamil people are relied on by the LTTE, to facilitate their integration into the host society for the forged identity papers, jobs and housing etc. It is estimated that the LTTE raises about US\$2 million from Tamil diaspora on a monthly basis, a quarter of it comes from Canadian Tamil expatriates. However, collection of funds from Tamil expatriate sources is insignificant compared to money from narcotics. For instance, the current cost of a single hit of heroin (less than a gram) is around 10 British Pounds, while the wholesale price of a kg sold in New York is estimated to be at least US\$ 250,000.

The other areas which suffer from massive availability of small arms and light weapons in recent years are South Africa and the Southern African region. In Mozambique, arms dealers can purchase AK 47 assault rifles, together with a couple of clips of ammunition, for as little as US\$14, or simply exchange a bag of maize for one. In Uganda, at the same time, an AK 47 could be purchased on the illicit market for US\$10, the equivalent of the cost of a chicken. It has been estimated that as many as 6 million AK47 remain at large in the country.²¹

During the apartheid years, the Government of South Africa began supplying tons of arms and ammunition to its domestic and regional allies for the defence of white minority rule. On the other hand, the opposing forces, the anti-apartheid groups, also smuggled an estimated 30 tons of arms and ammunition into South Africa, besides stockpiling arms at their base camps in surrounding countries. At the end of 1995, there were more than 4 million licensed weapons owned by two million people.

Figures on the number of illegal small arms in South Africa vary between 400,000 to 4 million. However, the extent of the problem can be gauged from the fact that the major portion of the arms has entered the illegal market. In 1999, 4% of all murders and 76% of all robberies in South Africa were committed with the use of firearms.²² The

presence of so many weapons outside government control has undermined law enforcement efforts, contributed to crime and public insecurity, hampered economic growth and caused tragic and avoidable deaths.

The Drug Network

The main drug of interest to transnational criminal groups in the IOR is heroin, which is derived from opium poppy. Opium poppy is cultivated in two main areas referred earlier - the 'Golden Triangle' and the 'Golden Crescent'. The Golden Triangle refers to a roughly triangular zone in the highlands of South East Asia that overlaps Burma, Thailand and Laos. Although divided among the three countries, it is a region that shares significant attributes i.e. opium production, remote upland terrain, mountain minority populations, extreme ethnic diversity, mass Christian conversion, and a long history of insurgency. The area of the 'Golden Crescent' consists of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. It has emerged as the leading heroin producing region in the world.

In the early 1990's, heroin became a leading illicit narcotic, and something of a world 'drug'. Almost 80% of heroin in Europe and 20% of heroin in USA comes from this region. Simultaneously, the end of the Afghan war and repatriation of the refugees led to expanded local heroin production. Heroin production received a boost because of the increasing potential for opium farming by Central Asian countries like Uzbekistan and Tazakistan, through their ethnic links with Afghanistan. Drug trafficking (and the laundering of drug money) accounts for what is by far the most important category of illicit trade flows in the Indian Ocean.

The President of Germany's Federal Office of Criminal Investigation disclosed at a conference in Berlin in 2000, that the 'Golden Crescent' of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan has replaced the 'Golden Triangle' of Myanmar, Thailand and Laos as a major source of illegal drugs for Eastern Europe and the 'silk route'. Afghanistan is the largest opium producing country in the region, producing 4600 tonnes of opium on an estimated 91,000 hectares of land (total world production of opium is 6000 tonnes). It

accounted for 70% of the world's illicit opium production, which is converted to heroin. Although the cultivation of opium poppy was officially banned in 1957, the ban was ineffective because of the weak administration, the inaccessibility of the production areas and the domination of the tribal forces. Pakistan alone has the second largest share of heroin produce amongst the three drug producing countries in the region. In South Asia, the drugs trade out of Myanmar, Afghanistan and Pakistan is estimated to be worth US \$200 billion.

In fact, the Taliban regime of Afghanistan had covertly encouraged opium production and collected 20% tax from opium dealers and transporters, which went straight to the war chest. Over 80% of opium is grown in Afghanistan's northern province of Nangarhar and in the Helmand valley in southern Afghanistan. The ethnic bonds between the Baluchi tribesmen on both sides of the Afghan /Iran border provide the trans-national link which safeguards the traffic. In the backdrop of the disastrous economic condition Afghanistan, drug trade seems to be the lucrative business.

The major cause for concern was that, between 1979 and 1989, for the first time in the history of opium production, between 1979 and 1989, highland drug lords began to act as independent entrepreneurs responding creatively to market opportunities for their product. In Burma, for example, opium production increased exponentially from 550 tons in 1981 to 2,500 in 1989 through the efforts of leading drug lords like Khun Sa. Similarly, the emergence of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar as the dominant rebel leader in Afghanistan created a parallel figure of power that could control much of the country's opium production, heroin processing and export.²³

The success of the narcotics business is heavily dependent on clever illegal trafficking operations, and its lucrative markets are in Europe and North America. According to a source, the narcotics business ranks as the world's most successful illegal enterprise, generating annual profits of approximately US \$200 billion to \$300 billion. Earlier much of these drugs used to travel through the Iran-Turkey route. i.e. the so-called Balkan Corridor. However, after the sanctions imposed by Iran on heroin production,

the most favoured trafficking route from South West Asia to the West is through the Fergane Valley towards Russia and the Baltic States.

It is important to note that Pakistan's ISI supported drug smuggling as a means to laundering huge amounts of money to meet the heavy expenses of war on various fronts, including Afghanistan and India's states of Punjab and Kashmir. The Mujahideen of Afghanistan accelerated production of heroin, which became a lucrative business for them. Besides the land route to Central Europe via the Balkans, the Indo-Pak border is also being used extensively for transporting narcotics first to India and then to other countries. Militancy in Jammu and Kashmir states of India and smuggling of narcotic have mutually complimented each other requirements i.e. need for easy money.

In the context of the proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir, ISI of Pakistan is using the narcotics trade to a) generate funds to sustain militancy, b) weaken the strength of the populace in the border belt, c) win over the local youth to work as informers/suppliers in support of their cause, and d) increase the level of the criminal activities. According to the report, much of the heroin originates in Afghanistan is transported to Peshawar via the tribal areas adjacent to the Afghan border. Most of the Afghan refugees are mainly involved in heroin trade as poppy growers, stockists, middlemen or international traffickers. In the border areas, armed guards of drug mafias acted in the guise of rebels. They used the airport and sea route in Karachi, Pakistan to supply drugs to the northern countries. In fact, every month approximately 20,000 kg of hashish and cannabis leaves from here to different destinations.

Besides heroin, chemical precursors were also reported to be moving in from Central Asia. The chemicals were transported to the refineries in Pakistan and Afghanistan controlled by cartels based in Quetta, which in turn tied up with Turkish and Iranian buyers, to route the heroin to the international market. These major drug traffickers are now associated with a number of factional groups in Afghanistan. Heroin labs were set up not only in Taliban-controlled areas but also in the Uzbek border area, which was

controlled by Dostum. There were also organised drug cultivation areas controlled by Masood. Drugs from these areas left for Russia, China, Tajikistan and Kyrgyztan.

Drug trafficking organisations also have strong linkages with Gulf countries. Dubai seems to be emerging to be as an important centre for drug money laundering. Cannabis is usually transported from Afghanistan through Baluchistan to the Makran coast of Pakistan and from there, by ship to the Gulf States and Europe. Cannabis is also increasingly transported through the Central Asian Republic by rail.²⁴

In Pakistan, opium production increased throughout the 1980's till 1985, then declined in 1990, partly due to poor weather conditions and partly through crop eradication. However, the number of mobile labs producing heroin has reportedly increased to more than 200 in recent years. These labs were set for the purpose of converting opium to morphine and from morphine to heroin. These labs are mainly located in the border areas, particularly in the Khyber region adjacent to Afghanistan, and close to the highway connecting Khyber to the rest of the country. This is the chief production zone for the injectible variety of heroin, or heroin no 4.²⁵

Interestingly, Pakistan's drugs bazaar is located just 7 miles from Peshawar, where US officials from the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and Pakistan's Anti-Narcotics Board have their offices. In this bazaar, heroin is available in 50 kg sacks and hashish by the tonne. There are dozens of small markets just outside the tribal belt in NWFP, where the Pakistan Government's law is not effective. A journalist of the Herald journal has described the situation wonderfully. He writes, "Pakistan's tribesmen, now shopkeepers, sit cross-legged, sipping tea and smoking hashish-filled Benson & Hedges cigarettes, as they display weapons that range from AK47 to anti-tank missiles. But hashish is only pocket money to these tribesmen who have built massive fortress styled homes decorated with Italian marble. The real business is heroin."²⁶

The extent of drug smuggling carried out by the Pakistan militants in the Kashmir Valley can be judged from the fact that 19,450 kg of narcotics (heroin, charas, brown

sugar, etc.) valued at Indian Rupees 20 crore, was recovered from Kashmir during 1997-1998.²⁷ Drugs were also seized from Pakistani nationals by the Border Security Force of India in the western fronts of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Pakistan is also providing shelter to drug lords and criminals who are working against India. Dawood Ibrahim, the criminal wanted by India, is operating from Pakistan, and supports terrorist groups such as Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LET), against India. LET is a Sunni, anti-USA militant group formed in 1989.

According to the report, Dawood Ibrahim has been funding the increasing attacks in Gujarat by Lashkar-e-Toiba (LET). This group, led by Prof .Hafiz Mohammad, was placed in the US State Department's list of officially designed terrorists outfits in 2002. Washington's decision seems to be largely motivated by the arrests in the USA and the Saudi Arabia of members of an Islamic paramilitary unit who received training in small arms machine guns and grenade launchers at an LET camp in north-east Pakistan. LET is said to be active in the Washington D.C. area and nearby Virginia state of USA. Documents released by the FBI in June 2003, state that some of those arrested even fought against Indian troops in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. They were also funded by the Dawood Ibrahim syndicate to conduct terrorists activities in the Indian state of Gujarat. According to the US Treasury Department's fact sheet, the Ibrahim Syndicate is involved in large scale shipment of narcotics to the U.K. and Western Europe. Its smuggling routes from South Asia, Middle East and Africa are shared with Al Qaida and its terrorist network.²⁰

The LTTE of Sri Lanka too has deeply penetrated the drug world, to augment its armed strength against the Sri Lankan Army. It had established a supply network for heroin from India to West Europe. For LTTE, trading in gold, laundering money and trafficking in narcotics brings in substantial revenues needed to procure sophisticated weaponry. The SAM missiles which LTTE has procured from Cambodia, cost the LTTE US \$1million each. The sophisticated arms used by the LTTE, including shoulder-tied surface to missiles, rocket launchers and global positioning satellite systems are all purchased with drug money. What's more, LTTE suicide bombers have

been trained in France and Britain, to fly light aircraft. These ultra lights do not carry sufficient metals for radar detection. Further they could take off from a short runway.²⁸ India that serves as a transit point for smuggling and contraband product, is also emerging as a big producer and consumer of drugs. The north Indian states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh are heavy poppy growing areas, with a number of established heroin production units. New Delhi has been a major consumer and networking centre for the heroin products brought from these neighbouring states and transported to the other countries.

In the African continent, the role of East and Southern Africa in the supply and distribution of drugs has become more prominent in recent years. This was due to the general deterioration of law and order in this region. The growing role of criminal groups of Nigeria in international drug trafficking has also been a factor in this trend.²⁸ In the Southern African region, South Africa is being targeted both as a major end user of narcotics as well as a transshipment point.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is evident that the spread of illegal arms and drugs in the IOR has led to an alarming and volatile situation. It is difficult for a single country to handle and control this situation. As it is, the region has already seen the emergence of some successful regional organisations like the Association of South East Asian Nations (India is a dialogue partner of ASEAN), the ASIA Pacific Economic Co-operation, several regional organisations such as the Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and the Mekong Ganga Co-operation Project. What is noteworthy in this context is that all these organisations have member states which are maritime countries, with the notable exception of landlocked Laos. In such a scenario, the Andaman & Nicobar Islands of India provide the most ideal logistic base from where sea power could extend its reach.

It is all the more significant that all these countries are critically dependent on the key strategic Sea-Lanes of Communication (SLOC) of the Straits of Malacca, which is situated between the Malaya Peninsula and Singapore to the east and Indonesia to the West. It may also be noted that unlike other regions which have formed politico-security cooperation frameworks like OSCE in Europe, the OAS in America, the OAU in Africa, the Asia-Pacific region lacks any overarching security framework at the moment. Until recently, a majority of the states in the region tended to rely on conventional means of ensuring security such as expanding national military strength and accretion to that strength through an alliance; in short, an Asian variant of the balance of power approach.

However, the experiment with the Asian Regional Forum shows that there has been a shift from reliance on bilateral and multilateral military alliances to a more cooperative approach on security. Similarly, India which has always believed in the principal of an independent security paradigm has been a part of the regional co-operation on security matters. India has been conducting regular joint naval exercises and joint military training with the Southeast Asian countries, both bilaterally and multi-laterally.

It is also the manifestation of the “Look-East Policy” that the scope of India’s naval diplomacy has been extended further with the country conducting joint military exercises across the Indian Ocean with countries such as Vietnam and South Korea. India is also proposing that Japan and Vietnam along with it should be strategic partners in anti-piracy operations that will involve other Asian countries for joint military operations

Presently the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC), established in 1971, is the only international body entirely devoted to assisting governments in combating the production of drugs, drug trafficking and use of illicit drugs. The Governments of South Africa and Mozambique, which are the most affected, are aggressively challenging the culture of violence, with strong support from their civil societies and the UN. The governments of both countries undertook joint operations to

curtail flow of apartheid era weapons entering South Africa from former war zones in Mozambique.

The Organisation of African Unity has taken the other significant initiatives in 2000. It met in Bamako, Mali, in 2000, to develop an African Common Position on small arms and Light Weapons (SALW), in anticipation of the 2001 UN Conference. OAU took cognisance of the earlier African initiatives like 1998 ECOWAS Moratorium and the 2000 Nairobi declaration, among other African regional initiatives, as a starting point. The Bamako declaration put demand reduction strategies on the policy map. While carefully reaffirming the values of sovereignty, non-interference, and the right to individual and collective self-defence, it emphasised that ‘ the problem of the illicit proliferation, circulation and drug-trafficking of small arms and light weapons...sustain conflicts...promotes a culture of violence...has adverse effect on the security and development...and is both on supply and demand.’”

One effective way to tackle the increasing proliferation of small arms in the IOR is to get governments in the region to register every weapon produced in their respective countries. This would help them trace the source of the arms seized from terrorists and armed traffickers. Such arms seizures might reveal some politically embarrassing facts, but almost certainly this measure would help reduce the current proliferation of military hardware and its nexus with drugs in the Indian Ocean Region.

Fortunately the organisations like South African Development Community (SADC) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in the region have initiated some programme to counter these issues. For instance, in August 2001, the SADC adopted the protocol on Control of Firearms, Ammunition and other Related Materials in the SADC Region. Like the Bamako Declaration, the SADC Protocol focuses mostly on supply-side interventions, but also acknowledges the key relationships between limiting the availability of weapons and maintaining stable peace processes and post-conflict situations. Two priority areas for SADC are co-operation with the United States in a joint working group on small arms, and continued

cooperation with the European Union. In South Asia SAARC has signed Conventions on Terrorism and Drug Trafficking and Terrorists Offences Monitoring Desk and Drug offences Monitoring Desk.

Thus in the wake of all these initiatives in the global, national and regional levels on proliferation of small arms and drug trafficking and the acrimonious discussion surrounding it, the timing is propitious for a rigorous re-examination of the scope of the problem and the political strategic and economic mechanism for dealing with it. Targeted empirical research could also make a useful contribution to the debate by examining in more detail the nature of then problems caused by this dangerous scourge.

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