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BOOK REVIEW: THE AFGHAN DRUG INDUSTRY AS A LIMITING FACTOR IN THE COUNTRY'S POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION

Jana Lasicová – Juraj Kalický*

ČECH, L.: *The Afghan drug industry as a limiting factor in the country's post-conflict reconstruction [Afganský drogový priemysel ako limitujúci factor postkonfliktnej obnovy krajiny]*. Bratislava: EKONOM, 2020. 92 p. ISBN 978-80-225-4759-8.

Lubomír Čech, university lecturer at the *University of Economics in Bratislava, Faculty of International Relations*, focuses his research on several dimensions – security, history, policy as well as geography. This multitude of research areas is reflected also in his professional works, which are marked by interconnection of various dimensions. The author focuses on crises situations in the regions with Islamic identity, analysing them through the prism of political security studies, especially at the turn of 20th and 21st centuries. In a useful and pragmatic fashion, he presents various internal problems of countries incorporated in the Central Asian region but also its wider area, including Turkey and former Soviet Union republics, e.g., Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

The central theme of the reviewed volume is the identification of one central problem that provides clear explanation of the origins and development of selected crisis events, which in the conditions of specific region or country gradually formed a complex of causes leading not only to the emergence of

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conflict or war, but also to their continuation over time. Afghanistan presents a unique case where, in an attempt to gain influence, several states engaged in power politics through interim rulers, who engaged not only in political, but often in outright criminal activities. To further complicate the situation, we need to take into account also religious influences in a close connection with the persistent clan or tribal social structure.

Therefore, Afghanistan, a country which in the 19th Century presented itself as a subject of adventure literature, due to its strategic position rose to prominence as an object of interest of the great powers in the course of 20th and 21st centuries. The geopolitical factor thus determined the fate of Afghanistan. However, there was also another factor – a strong link to the long-established drug "industry", which changed dramatically under the new conditions of transport and overall "product" distribution. The growing financial interest in the products of drug industry made international drug trafficking, drug related crime as well as threats posed by this phenomenon one of the global challenges for humanity (p. 5).

The author particularly emphasizes this aspect – so far it appears to be a global threat – the consequences of which seem not to be fully taken into consideration by humanity – i.e., drug problems are increasingly affecting the countries of the world, regardless of national borders and social order.

It is this aspect that is the qualitative added value of the book, which goes beyond traditional aspects of illicit drug trade, i.e., effects on the human health, its ethical connotations, etc., but it emphasizes the fact that the areas of illegal manufacture and distribution of narcotics increasingly coincide with zones of armed conflict. This, together with the arms trade and international corruption, is a major factor in criminalisation of the international relations.

Afghanistan is a country where the critical state of its economy and drugs as a limiting factor in its recovery, is of interest to research by many international organizations. The author deals with this issue in detail in Part 1 of the book (pp. 7-11). Afghanistan, as the world's largest producer of opium, is being subjected to a double 'curse' for this very reason. The first one, analysed in Part 2 (pp. 12-15) concerns the internal political developments in Afghanistan at the end of the 20th Century, when opium became the substitute for other agricultural products. Some positive changes were made by the Taliban, but after the collapse their rule, the increase in poppy cultivation resumed.

The second "curse", that is, the incapacity to restore social and economic

relations, was to be eliminated in the manner that the author analyses in Part 3, 4, 5 (pp. 16-32). This primarily concerns the failure of international aid to address internal Afghan stability and provide solutions to domestic issues. Although the internal political changes had some positive aspects, the overall situation did not improve much (p.17), since the most important political reforms were not carried out (the electoral system and its connotations were not reformed). There were also foreign policy problems, such as the relationship with the US, but also the increase in tensions at the regional level – problems with Turkmenistan and other countries.

Political events in recent years – such as the 2019 presidential elections – have also contributed to the destabilisation of Afghanistan. In the aforementioned parts 4 and 5, the author discusses in detail the development and increase in the monetary value of opium poppy production in 2008-2018.

Part 5 also contains an analysis of the agricultural structure of the country, analysing the different regions and their suitability for cultivating opium poppy. The author also presents various attempts to provide farmers with alternative programs to cultivate other crops instead of opium poppy, such as providing them with the seeds and necessary starter packs to change the structure of the traditional “poppy farm”. Several partners from the United States as well as from Europe engaged in these programs, including UNODC’s contribution, however, not one of them managed to change the traditional cultivation structure.

Parts 6 to 12 are devoted to the analysis of narco-business as part of the economic structure of the country. The logical conclusion in Part 12 (p. 51) is the explicit need to terminate the crucial problem facilitating the narco-business in Afghanistan: the ease with which it is possible to move illegal financial flows. This requires the need to create and establish a new banking system in order to gradually eliminate money transfers from illicit drug trade, as well as to curb massive corruption (p. 51). In this context, the *hawala* system is specifically mentioned in the text, as it has been, despite its good reputation, impacted by the problems of the Afghan economy and social ethics.

The conclusion of the book is dedicated to the analysis of the impact of the issue of national borders on the drug industry (Part 13), measures to improve the situation in the border issue (Part 14), bilateral and multilateral cooperation (Part 15) and the issue that the author aptly titled: *The importance and search for ways of cooperation between global and regional actors* (Part 16). In this part, the author appeals to the political leadership of the US and Russia to come to an

agreement about continued cooperation. In his view, in case the relations between the two great powers deteriorate in the future, it should not lead to a deterioration in cooperation between governments and the states in Central and South Asia. Although this cooperation is quite limited, it can be improved. This step is particularly important for successfully curbing illicit drug-related financial flows in the region and beyond. Cooperation and exchange of information between the competent authorities of the US and Russia is essential.

The book, published in 2020, therefore concludes on a positive note of the need for increased cooperation between the powers. In this respect, the situation in 2022 changed dramatically – Russia, United States and Europe are all part of global crisis in connection with the war in Ukraine, which effectively hampers the discussion on cooperation between the parties involved. However, the idea of continued cooperation between the powers as a means to stabilize and improve situation in the regions engulfed in long-term crises should not be discarded despite the current circumstances.

To conclude, the reviewed work of **L. Čech** is small in scope but broad in depth of presented ideas, complexity of analysed relationships and possible perspectives.