

## TRANSCRIPT

# Where Democracy's Greatest Enemy is a Flower

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KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

In his inaugural address on Tuesday, President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan laid out his priorities for the next five years. Chief among them was stopping the country's growing drug trade. Mr. Karzai knows well that drug wars are often declared, but rarely won. In the 1990's, the United Nations tried to give Afghan farmers incentives not to grow opium, but the plan was not backed with adequate force. In 2001, the Taliban tried force without financial rewards. Neither approach convinced Afghan poppy farmers to give up opium cultivation.

Similar efforts elsewhere have met with mixed results. In Colombia, brutal military campaigns against drug-cultivating communities have devastated local economies, setting off violence, which in turn has led to further repression. Drug production in Colombia continues to rise.

Meanwhile, Thailand has significantly dented the narcotics trade by balancing tough enforcement with equitable and farsighted economic policies. While the drug economy was being dismantled, Thailand managed to recover from the economic crisis of 1997 and has enjoyed fairly steady economic growth since then.

Having underestimated Afghanistan's narcotics problem since 2001, the international community now recognizes the connection between drugs and terrorism, and believes that urgent action is essential. But lessons from other nations show that today's quick wins can sow the seeds of future poppy harvests. Afghanistan's war on drugs will not be won quickly -- nor can it be won without economic growth and political stability. Crop destruction "victories" will prove pyrrhic if Afghan farmers cannot find other ways to make a living and do not understand why drugs threaten their future.

Today, many Afghans believe that it is not drugs, but an ill-conceived war on drugs that threatens their economy and nascent democracy. The drug trade is worth more than \$2.8 billion to our economy -- more than a third of our gross domestic product. Destroying that trade without offering our farmers a genuine alternative livelihood has the potential to undo the embryonic economic gains of the past three years. The likely results would be widespread impoverishment, inflation, currency fluctuations and capital flight.

In the United Nations survey on Afghan drug production published this month, farmers cited "poverty" as their main reason for cultivating poppy; an acre of poppy can bring in 20 times the profit of an acre of wheat. Eradicating the poppy will threaten the livelihood of more than 2.3 million Afghans. Unless the new administration can deliver tangible reconstruction benefits to farmers, eradication will stir resentment against the government and its international partners.

President Karzai has been clear that nothing threatens Afghanistan's long-term political and economic health more than narcotics. We cannot fulfill our sovereign and democratic destiny if a drug mafia chokes political freedom. We cannot move beyond our dependence on foreign aid without a healthy and legal private sector generating tax revenues. We cannot open our borders and our economy to attract private investment if fighting a narco-mafia requires increasing repression.

Afghans understand that drug production is fundamentally un-Islamic; they know that our political leadership cannot serve them and also the interests of the drug mafia; they see that drug profits do not stay with the poor (last year, while the value to farmers of opium production went down by more than 40 percent, traffickers increased their profits by almost 70 percent).

So how can Afghanistan and its international partners win this war in the long term? There are four key elements to a winning strategy:

First is a long-term plan for training, equipping and deploying national police, border police and counter-narcotics officers that will arrest and otherwise disrupt the high-value targets (the traffickers and processors) while also controlling our borders and enforcing the rule of law throughout the countryside. These forces will not come cheap -- at least \$1 billion per year for five years, over and above the current investment in building the national army.

We also need to stimulate economic growth in a way that decreases the proportionate influence of the drug economy. This will depend in great part on rebuilding the country physically: investing in energy production, improved water systems and highways -- a 10-year, \$20 billion challenge.

Next, we need an agricultural strategy that links farming households to domestic and international markets. With grain worth so little in comparison to opium, and agricultural productivity in Afghanistan only one-eighth that of middle-income countries, a short-term plan to substitute wheat for poppy will not work. We need market-based land reform; credit programs for small farmers and cooperatives; and government investment in light industry to fulfill the potential of our irrigable land. Preferential trade agreements that help our farmers and small businesses become part of world markets would also be vital. All this will cost at least \$1 billion a year for at least five years.

Last, the government must improve our judicial system, our financial institutions and provincial governments. Arbitrary arrests and detentions of poppy farmers will bring only widespread resentment; trials and imprisonment of alleged drug traffickers without due process will undermine the credibility of the state and strengthen the drug mafia. Public institutions committed to the rule of law will not come cheaply or quickly in Afghanistan, and may take as much as \$1 billion a year over 10 years.

President Karzai, having demonstrated his gifts for consensus building, must now be given the space and support by his foreign allies to prepare Afghans for an Afghan solution to our narcotics problem. He and his government will use our *loya jirgas* (or great councils), radio (the preferred news medium for most Afghans) and personal meetings with Afghans from all walks of life to lay the foundation for this strategy. The issue is not whether strict enforcement and economic support are both required, but how they are sequenced, balanced and communicated.

In the long term, success demands that average Afghans understand why we must defeat the narcotics industry -- for our country, for our faith and for our children. But poppy farmers will accept the loss of their crops, their land and their livelihoods only if they believe in an alternative future, and if they see commensurate punishments for those at the top of the drug pyramid. They will strive for an alternative economic future only when given the skills and resources to help forge a legal agrarian economy.

Above all, they will join a national consensus for drug eradication only when they believe that their government and its international partners care about their long-term well-being, and not just the war on terrorism.

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