

# RESEARCH PROPOSAL

AFGHANISTAN'S OPIUM-ECONOMY AND ITS SECURITY  
IMPLICATIONS PAKISTAN'S TRIBAL DISTRICTS: 2001-2020



SUBMITTED BY

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## INTRODUCTION

Ever since the late 1970s, Afghanistan has virtually become the Pandora's Box for the regional and global security. Besides an active theater for regional and global powers' competition, Afghanistan is now the melting pot of various nontraditional security threats.<sup>1</sup> Devastated by nearly four decades long internal strife, Afghanistan has witnessed a continual cycle of conflict, repeated failure of the state machinery and the breakdown of socioeconomic fabric. This has resulted in the Afghan economy becoming heavily reliant on the opium trade and becoming the most notorious member of the Golden Crescent <sup>2</sup>(Shanty, 2011, p.27). However, the total opium-fication of its economy is a recent phenomenon. From opium being cultivated in only eight provinces in 1994, the post-Taliban period saw its cultivation extended to 28 out of the 30 provinces of Afghanistan (Johnson et al., 2004, p. 112). Shanty rightly observes that this drastic increase of the opium cultivation has made it 'an integral part of the rural economy' (Shanty, 2011, p.175). From 1980s onwards, Afghanistan has surpassed the Golden Triangle<sup>3</sup> in annual production to become the principal international producer/supplier of opium and its derivative heroin. Since 2001, Afghanistan opium economy<sup>4</sup> estimated to be 93% of the global share of opium production (comparable to 6% - 11% of Afghanistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)<sup>5</sup> far exceeds the total value of the country's officially recorded legitimate exports of goods and services(Report, 2009). The increasing opium dimension in post-Taliban period has also reshaped the character and dynamics of the Afghan state<sup>6</sup> and the ongoing conflict (Peters, 2010). The narco-mafia is alleged to have coalesced with human traffickers, the insurgents and terrorist organizations operating inside and outside Afghanistan (Peters, 2010; Jalalzai, 2006). However, a number of authors have indicate that these links are simply not limited to non-state actors alone, but drives deep to include state actors,<sup>7</sup> whether they are local, regional or trans-regional (Webb,

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<sup>1</sup>The work of Buzan et al., (1998) is relevant in this regard.

<sup>2</sup> The Golden Crescent is a name given to the border areas of Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan.

<sup>3</sup> The Golden Triangle is a name given to the border area of Thailand, Laos and Myanmar. Together with Afghanistan, it has been one of the largest opium-producing regions in the world since the 1950s. Most of the heroin in the world came from the Golden Triangle; however, by 1980s Afghanistan became the world's largest producer.

<sup>4</sup> The term opium -economy for this research study is defined by its 03 major components, i.e. production of opium/heroin, supply/trafficking and the revenue generated from its sales.

<sup>5</sup> In 2003, opium business was more than 50% of the GDP of Afghanistan, for details see Weiner (2004, p. 3) For this study, the term opium economy is defined by its three components, i.e. cultivation and production of opium/heroin, supply/trafficking and revenue generated from its sale.

<sup>6</sup> A growing scholarship now views Afghanistan as a Narco -State, for details see Weiner (2004).

<sup>7</sup>There is a growing literature detailing the involvement of intelligence organizations of various countries in facilitating the drug trafficking from Afghanistan. From 1980s, the CIA and ISI were actively involved in supporting the mujahedeen and warlords in Afghanistan against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The CIA and ISI are alleged to have directly or indirectly supported the opium trafficking by the mujahedeen. The

1998; Jalalzai, 2006; Scott, 2010). The interest in the drug trade by various actors is evident from the substantial income it generates. In 2003 alone, the global drug trade generated income that was second only to the profits of the global arms industry (Report, 2005).<sup>8</sup> However, the human cost of drugs is more staggering nearly affecting 5.5% of the total world population (255 million people in 2017).<sup>9</sup> But despite the potential security risks posed by the ever-growing opium-economy and drug trafficking from Afghanistan, the regional and trans-regional powers are divided on its potency to be treated as a serious security threat. While Russia and its satellite Central Asian states consider drug trafficking from Afghanistan as detrimental to their security interest (Walker, 2009, p. 12), the USA and its allies have downgraded the opium and heroin production and its trafficking as less important than fighting the Global War on Terror. However, among all the countries in the world, Pakistan is most qualified to be called the immediate affectee of the Afghan opium industry. The 2430 km long border and close geographic, historical and cultural proximity to Afghanistan (93% of the world's illicit opium producer), places Pakistan, an opium free country, in a vulnerable position in terms of drug trafficking. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that more than 0.8 million of the total Pakistan's populations are heroin addicts, responsible for consuming 44 tons of processed heroin annually (Asghar, 2010). Besides the load shedding<sup>10</sup> of 44 tons, an estimated 110 tons of heroin and morphine from neighboring Afghanistan is trafficked through Pakistan to international markets. Furthermore, Pakistan's illegal drug trade is believed to generate up to \$12 billion a year (Jalalzai, 2006). The addiction in Pakistanis across the board that includes every age and gender group, i.e. 78% is male, while the rest 22% are female. More alarmingly, the number of these addicts is increasing at the rate of 44,000 per year, making Pakistan one of the most drug affected countries in the world. But not only is the drug trafficking from Afghanistan poses risk to the social and economic security, but also contributed to the worsening of political instability particularly in the post-Taliban period. The post-Taliban period, particularly in Pakistan's tribal districts (former FATA) (sharing almost 25% of the Pakistan border with Afghanistan,

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revenue generated from the opium trade was diverted to buying weapons and gaining support by the various factions of mujahedeen. But this activity was primarily targeted against the Soviet invaders. In the post-Taliban period, however, the links between state actors and drug trafficking is not apparent. However, the mounting evidence of a possible nexus between opium economy and terrorism and the indecisiveness of USA in curbing the opium production and its denial of linking the current surge of insurgency and terrorism to illicit drug trafficking has raised many questions. Similarly, an interesting fact remains that India, China and few states in Central Asia are the only countries in the region that produces chemical that is required in processing opium into heroin. How this substance ends up in the hands of opium -mafia is also an intriguing matter?

<sup>8</sup> With an estimated world's GDP of US\$36 trillion in the same year, the illegal drug trade was estimated to be nearly one percent of total global trade.

<sup>9</sup> The figure almost rose by 25% in less than a decade.

<sup>10</sup> A term used for local consumption of the transported drugs.

i.e. 600 km) and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA) in the Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, became a major theater witnessing increased sectarianism, militancy, organized crime, religious extremism and terrorist activities. This was particularly evident in the aftermath of the collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which led to the fanning out of the Taliban, Al Qaeda and its affiliate elements in the border areas of Pakistan, noticeably the tribal belt to find sanctuary (Peters, 2010). This period also witnessed surge in the terrorist attacks all across Pakistan, which interestingly correlated with the increase in the drug trafficking from Afghanistan.

This study, the first of its nature with respect to depth, area and timeframe addresses the impact of Afghanistan's opium -economy on the security environment of Pakistan's tribal districts since 2001. This multi case study research is, therefore, directed to address the gap by studying the post-Taliban surge in Afghanistan's opium economy, drug trafficking and its impact on the Pakistan's tribal districts security in particular and the overall national security landscape of Pakistan. In addressing the issue, this study is divided into two interconnected parts. The first part of this research will extensively examine and review the Afghanistan's opium economy and the trafficking component relative to specific actor(s) involvement, i.e. non-state actors, and state actors, whether local, regional or international with the proliferation of opium economy. The second part is divided into two subparts, i.e. the first subpart is based on the premises that if non-state actor's involvement in the proliferation of Afghanistan's opium -economy exists and it sustains and feeds the terrorism and insurgency in Afghanistan, is the condition true for the increase in terrorism and insurgency witnessed in Pakistan's erstwhile tribal region, i.e. former FATA in the post-Taliban period? This proposition will be examined in a detailed case study of the former Khyber district. Finally, if the connection of non-state actors and state actors with drug trafficking is established what is the ramification on the national security<sup>11</sup> environment of Pakistan in general.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This part will briefly cover the literature review since the introduction of this study has already substantially touched upon the research problem. The keywords, i.e. Afghanistan, Pakistan, organized crime, drug trafficking, non-state actors, political and security implications when pooled together, have overtime led to the development of an extensive

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<sup>11</sup> This study takes a nontraditional also known as the contemporary perspective of national security. Afolabi (2015) sees nation security as the protection and preservation of state, its institutions, lives, property and well-being of citizens.

literature. This development, according to Peter's (2010) has made it tremendously hard to summarize the quality of these works for the reason that the disciplines and associated methods vary so much. However, a brief review of the literature on the pooled subject shows that not only each work has its own merits, but also exhibit potential weaknesses in terms of methods and sources of data. Further, a large body of the existing studies has almost exclusively focused on Afghanistan in the context of the impact of drug trafficking or its nexus with insurgency and terrorism. This nexus or the impact of Afghanistan's opium economy is not analyzed, examined or explored in depth in relation to the Pakistan's tribal districts. However, the previous body of research studies can be acknowledged for taking a first step towards a more profound understanding of the drug trafficking and its impact on the security landscape of Pakistan, particularly the tribal districts. In this context the literature review shows that there has been a considerable rise of crime and insurgency in Afghanistan and Pakistan's tribal districts since 2001. Fearon's(2004), notes that crime and insurgency are intrinsically connected. He further remarks that in addition to have mutually beneficial this nexus has the ability to sustain insurgency/terrorism much longer than in those situations where the nexus is absent. Supporting Fearon's assessment, Walker's (2009) cites a World Bank report and remarks that's the non-state actor's ability to control the lucrative drug trade determines its ability to launch and sustain conflict. However, Keen's(2000) suggests that organized crime is not the reason for the initiation of the conflict. In the context of drug trade and conflict, Ross (2002, as cited in Walker, 2009) finds a strong correlation between civil war and the drug trade, in particular opium trade. As regards to security dimension, Peter (2010) observes that the most significant challenge that the crime-insurgency complex generates is its ability to augment and sustain the anti-state activities in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, which not only undermines the political authority of both the Afghan and Pakistan governments but also risks peace and stability of the entire region. Moreover, the overwhelming studies indicate that Afghanistan's opium-economy has evolved to become an extremely complex phenomenon whose financial benefit also pulls in 'a small number of elite state actors' (Haq, 2003; Jalalzai, 2006; Peter, 2010; Shanty, 2011). But to complicate the matters further, the overt support extended by the global and regional powers to the various fighting groups in Afghanistan, i.e. alleged to have links with the drug trade has made the situation extremely complex. Though not empirically collaborated, the role of state actors, however, indeed raises suspicion in view of the Cold War 'narco-politics' or the ever sophistication of hybrid war (Haq, 2003; Rácz, 2017) or the reluctance of the US officials posted in Afghanistan to accept the notion that there is an operational nexus existing between the insurgency and narcotics. Further, though not explored to its fullness, is the logical

question that why in the presence of more than hundred thousand US and its allies troops on the ground in Afghanistan, the post-Taliban period, witnessed a staggering increase in opium cultivation even in regions where US or its allies were in control?. To answer this question, Haq's (2003) takes deviant state actor –heroin complex, Shanty's(2011) rural economic compulsion, Jalazai's (2006) geopolitical angle, Walker's (2009) drug-conflict framework and Peter's (2010) insurgency-crime approach. On the question of the role of insurgents/terrorists and their alleged nexus with the opium economy, Peter's (2010) makes an interesting observation describing drug traffickers as the most forthcoming in their admission of the nexus. This open admission is said to be due to the corrupt government officials and weak writ of government, which does not reach beyond the Kabul (Abbas, 2014). However, drawing from the Central Asian states experience with the drug trafficking from Afghanistan, Walker's (2009) argues that insurgent/terrorist participation within the drug trade is sporadic and more localized; therefore, it cannot be generalized.

A growing literature now suggest that the Taliban and its affiliates, who earlier were taxing the drug business (for providing protection), now they themselves sown sand operates heroin labs on the Pak-Afghan border. In this regard, Jalazai's (2006) and Peter's (2010) estimates that the proceeds from drugs and crime, earns as much as half a billion dollars annually for the Taliban, effectively channelizing it for buying weapons and support. However, in the context of Pakistan and Afghanistan's opium economy's dynamics, the overwhelming body of the western literature seems to suffer from the *Af-Pak* syndrome, i.e., treating the region of Afghanistan and Pakistan as a single unit of analysis. However, the consensus on the extent of challenges posed by the Afghanistan's opium economy to Pakistan has also received a mixed response which is evident from the perusal of the local open source literature, media reports and from the state narrative itself. Ahmad's (2015) observing this trend remarks that despite the considerable logical evidence, Pakistan political leadership and its security agencies still doubts whether a nexus exists between the local Pakistani insurgent groups, particularly those affiliated with what Ahmad describes as '*Taliban narco-mafia*'. Ahmad's (2015) further claims that the proceeds generated from the drug business is much higher than previously estimated., i.e. 70 billion US dollars, out of which 2 billion dollars are pocketed by *Tehrik-i-Taliban* Pakistan (TTP), its affiliated groups and other ideological and extremist groups operating in Pakistan. However, Walker's (2009) disputes such claims, noting that the amount cited by most studies has been overestimated. However, regardless of the actual amount generated from the drug trade, the overwhelming literature seems to point out that it

has led to massive impetus in corruption, organized crime, political, economic and social instability in Pakistan (Haq, 2003).

## **SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH GAP**

In conclusion, after the examination of the available literature on the issue of drug trafficking and its impact on the security in Afghanistan and in particular Pakistan, three things immediately become apparent: First, that the literature relating the research problem treats Afghanistan and Pakistan as a single entity, hence, previous studies have almost exclusively focused on Afghanistan, with little attention paid to the effects of drug trafficking on the Pakistan's national security landscape. Second, the role of the state within drug trade is insufficiently discussed or neglected altogether. Finally, the majority of the evidence cited in support of the narco-terrorism or drug trade- state nexus is often based on circumstantial and anecdotal evidence which is further weakened by repeated dependence on secondary sources (Shanty, 2011).<sup>12</sup> Therefore, this research study intends to fill this gap by primarily focusing on the Pakistan's national security environment *vis-à-vis* Afghanistan's opium-economy, adopting a vigorous research design with a wide range of unit of analysis.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Pakistan, due to its close historical, cultural and geographical proximity, has been for decades the traditional transit hub for Afghan opium and heroin trafficking. However, from 2001 onwards, the dynamics of the Afghan opium -economy has changed significantly,<sup>13</sup> which not only threatens the peace and stability of the region but also presents multifaceted security challenges for Pakistan. This research study aims to bring more clarity regarding the risks generated by the post 2001 complex phenomenon of Afghanistan's opium -economy on the national security landscape of Pakistan.

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<sup>12</sup> This may be due to the complex and clandestine nature of opium -economy, responsible for producing intrinsic difficulties in conducting consistent empirical research. According to Ganapathy et al., (2008, p. 6). "the investigation into the nature, scale and seriousness of organized crime, however, is thwarted by methodological, political and ideological considerations". Furthermore, the growing literature on organized crime, particularly drug trafficking has an inclination to rely mostly on media sources, government reports or accounts given by law enforcement agencies (Mieczkowski, 1990, p. 100). The sources cited are "inherently unreliable and often, sensationalize or decontextualize organized crime activity" (Ganapathy et al., 2008, p. 6). Hence a rigorous methodology involving triangulation of methods and sources is often suggested.



## OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this research study are:

1. To bring more clarity on the post 2001 interrelationship between the drug trade, violence and terrorism witnessed in Pakistan's former tribal area.
2. To understand the post 2001 dynamics of the actor participation within the drug trade, including the motivation for such linkages.
3. To critically evaluate the risks generated from such nexus on the national security environment of Pakistan.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question is:

1. How has the drug economy and trafficking from Afghanistan affected the security landscape of Pakistan's tribal districts since 2001?

The central focal question can be further subdivided into four questions. The sub-questions are intended to demarcated the boundary and provide focus on the principal issue of the investigation. It also delineates a framework which will facilitate a focus approach to data collection. These descriptive and explanatory questions will also serve as a guideline in designing the questions for the interviews.

- i. Is the growth of the Afghanistan's opium -economy, one of the main reasons for the violence and terrorist activities observed in post 2001 landscape of Pakistan's tribal districts?
- ii. Were the local non state actors involved in the drug trade and what was the nature and level of their involvement?
- iii. Is there any empirical or logical evidence to implicate state actors, whether be they local or foreign with the drug trade in Afghanistan and Pakistan? And what would be the motivation for such association?
- iv. What impact these nexuses have on the national security environment of the Pakistan in general?

## RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

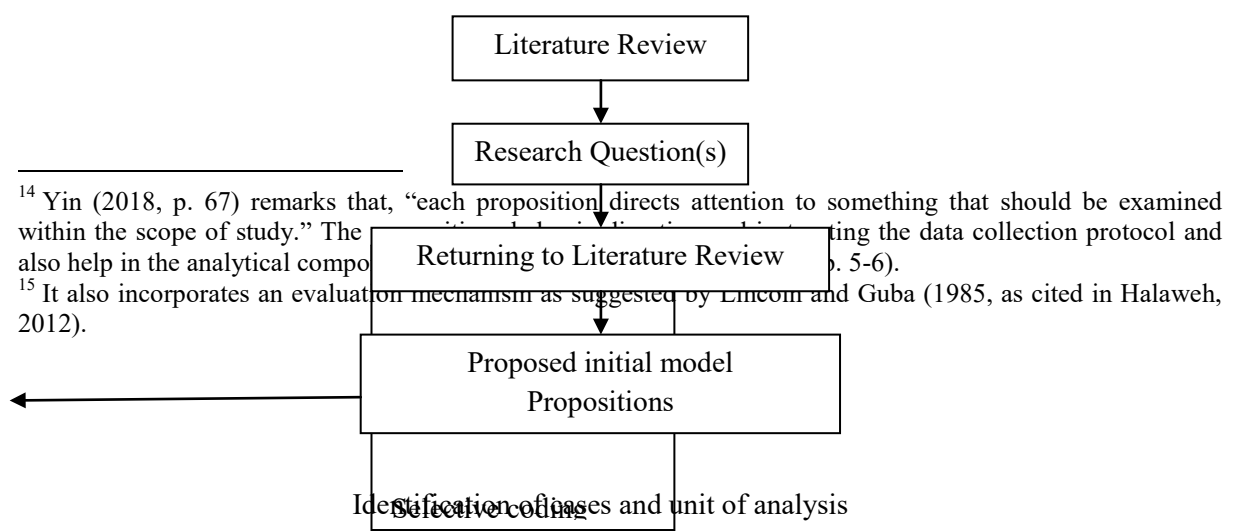
The initial set of propositions is proposed as follows:<sup>14</sup>

Proposition 1): The exponential increase in Afghanistan's opium -economy witnessed after 2001 points towards state(s) or non-state actor(s) in facilitating the opium and heroin trade in Afghanistan; Proposition 2): The state association within the drug trade seems to be both strategic and financial. Strategically, it is best exemplified by the conflict entrepreneurship or doctrine of hybrid war. Financially, the study proposition is that drug trade-state nexus is becoming an integral part of the weak or offensive capitalist state; Proposition 3): The non-state actor's-drug trade nexus in Afghanistan is both political and economic. However, it is not as sporadic and localized as previously suggested in a number of studies; Proposition 4): In view of proposition 3, it can be argued that the close relations that exist between Afghan and Pakistan terrorist/insurgent groups, it is most probable that non state actors on the side of Pakistan's border are involved in the drug trade. Proposition 5): Keeping in view the set of actors involved, its lucrative financial and strategic significance, peace may not be desirable in Afghanistan and Pakistan; Proposition 6): In certain conflict situations, both drug trade and non-state actors can be the instruments of both local and foreign state power, i.e. sustaining the non-state actors through the drug trade and interrupting the non-state actor-drug trade nexus when a relative leverage in the conflict is achieved. This can explain the abrupt end to the terrorist activities in Pakistan tribal belt; and Proposition 7): If instability persists in Afghanistan and drug trade goes unabated, the Pakistan security landscape will be continually affected.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is an interpretive qualitative research in nature utilizing a vigorous case study-grounded theory (Straussian version) methodology. The methodology<sup>15</sup> is illustrated by the following figure below:

**Figure 1: Case Study-Grounded Theory (GT) Methodology (adapted from Halaweh, 2012)**



**Population and Sampling:** The study will adopt a purposive sampling, known as theoretical sampling in GT. The initial proposed population for the theoretical sampling will be local government officials, particularly former political agents and assistant political agents, customs intelligence, border security officials, anti-narcotics force, officials of the government intelligence agency, local crime reporters and any other parties thought to have information on drug trafficking in the setting, i.e. Khyber district. The size of the sample will depend on data saturation (Corbin et al., 2015).

**Data Collection:** Data collection in GT is directed by theoretical sampling, however, this study intends to utilize both primary and secondary data sources. Both in case study and grounded theory, data can be collected through a variety of means. However, interviews will be the preferred choice for this research. The secondary sources will include scholarly books, articles, journal articles, unpublished thesis etc.

**Data Analysis:** The data will be analyzed by the means of a GT process, i.e. constant comparisons (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Corbin et al., 2015). Furthermore, the grounded theory (GT) coding technique, i.e., open, axial and selective coding will be employed. It will be also aided by Computer- Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), i.e. Nvivo.<sup>16</sup>

## SIGNIFICANCE AND JUSTIFICATION

There is a fundamental tendency among the scholastic circles to avoid controversial questions, particularly one pertaining to the nexus between non state actors or state actors and criminal economy and the former tend to focus on questions that excludes the involvement of the latter.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the study on security is regarded as a traditional subject that falls exclusively under the sphere of realist philosophy, meaning security is achieved by the build-up of defensive or offensive military capabilities against a perceived or designated enemy state. However, this concept is now fast eroding with the emergence of more complex nontraditional threats. The drug trafficking is now recognized as one of the major nontraditional security threat that not only has the ability to feed and sustain the non-state actor(s) anti-state activities much longer, but also serve a key component in their asymmetric warfare campaign, i.e., spreading instability and fear. Moreover, the structural instability caused by the criminal economy, such as drug trafficking may also involve an often

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<sup>16</sup> Nvivo CAQDAS has been highly recommended by many researchers for GT investigation to the author of this proposal and it has been also endorsed by leading researchers including Hutchison et al. (2010).

<sup>17</sup> In this regard the work of Barak (1991) is very relevant.

overlooked unit of analysis, i.e., ‘state actors’; lured by its potential financial benefits or be it a part of its wider state’s strategy, i.e. ‘hybrid war’. In this background, the development of society, peace and to a large extent the writ of the government becomes difficult to conceive. In this context, it has become an increasingly imperative area of inquiry which needs to be examined and investigated. This study is significant in two areas. First, it provides in-depth insight on the issue by incorporating a complex research design based on a vigorous data triangulation method with principal emphasis on primary sources of data. Secondly, the research includes a wide range of units of analysis, i.e. state actors, non-state actors and perspectives of the local community.

## **LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

Before conducting this research study, it is necessary to mention that difficulties have been reported by various researchers in obtaining and interpreting adequate and reliable data concerning organized crime in particular drug trade including its covert actors, organization and activities. However, as Walker has rightly pointed out that keeping in view such difficulties “the challenges should not be viewed as insurmountable but rather acknowledgement must be given to the intrinsic limitations of this study and the fact that such limitations are a common factor for general research within this field(Walker, 2009, p. 13).” Furthermore, keeping in view the transnational character and set of actors involved in the drug trade, this research study will incorporate certain delimitation, i.e. primary focus on Khyber district [timeframe included] and the actors, i.e. state actors and local non-state actor’s will be the primary unit of analysis.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THESIS (APPROXIMATION)**

The proposed study will be divided into five chapters with the following contents:

### **Chapter I: Introduction**

Chapter one will include introduction of the topic, problem statement, purpose of the study, objectives, an exhaustive literature review, research model, methodology, and working definitions of terms used in this study.

**Chapter II: The Political Economy of Drug Trade and the Role of State Actors and Non State Actors-** This chapter will focus on the theoretical understanding the dynamics of organized crime in particular drug trafficking and the role of the state and non-state actors

within it. It focuses on the questions why and how state actors and non-state actors are involved in the illicit drug trade? This chapter will draw on material from similar studies in various geographical settings, i.e. the experiences of Afghanistan, Central Asia, Columbia, etc. However, these experiences will be further triangulated with other data sources such as in-depth interviews with the subject and area specialists.

**Chapter III: The Evolution of Afghanistan’s Opium-Economy and its impact on Pakistan’s Tribal Districts Security since 1979-2001.** -This chapter will provide historical context, i.e. prequel to the post 2001 period, by tracing the evolution and impact of Afghanistan’s opium economy on the overall security landscape of Pakistan’s tribal districts from 1979 to 2001. The prime focus of this chapter will be to generalize the security risks generated during this period with secondary focus on the actor's participation within the drug trade.

**Chapter IV: The Impact of Afghanistan’s Opium-Economy on Pakistan’s Tribal Districts Security: A Case Study Of Khyber District (2001-2018)**-This chapter will form the core of this research study, and will completely be dedicated towards analyzing and interpreting the empirical data collected during the investigation. The chapter will examine the nature and motives of the various actors’ participation within the illicit drug trade and its impact on the security landscape of Khyber District. The results will be generalized to include the overall risks to the Pakistan’s national security.

**Chapter V: Conclusion**-This chapter will provide the final conclusion to this research study.

#### TENTATIVE WORK PLAN

Activity	First Year Plan				Second Year Plan		
	1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Refining Research Design							
Review of Literature							
Developing Study Protocols							
Data Collection and entry							
Data Analysis							
Dissertation Writing							
Dissertation Submission							

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