

IEPS MASTER THESIS OPPONENT REVIEW

STUDENT NAME: Liudmila Zhaliapava

THESIS TITLE: Afghanistan: Role of the Drug Business in the Internal Conflict

OPPONENT NAME: Mgr. Hrishabh Sandilya, MCom.

OPPONENT GRADE: 2 *Very Good*

The title of the thesis itself is misleading, the author while naming it 'Afghanistan: Role of the Drug Business in the Internal Conflict' has tended to provide a general description of the Drug situation in Afghanistan. The thesis therefore lacks a clear research hypothesis, something that is essential at the MA level. Other clear failings include a 38 page (half the thesis) introduction to the topic rather an analysis of data and presentation of findings of how the drug trade has impacted the conflict in Afghanistan in the past and the present.

Apart from its poor structure the thesis seems to have a few grammatical inconsistencies, the author makes constant references to 'cannabis' but uses its many colloquial synonyms like 'grass' and 'marijuana', something that is not expected from a scientific work.

The author fails to analyse effectively Economic data from various sources she has used for referencing and therefore loses the chance to exploit the what could have been an important aspect of the thesis, by using direct financial data, she could have explained its impact on Weapons funding and compared and contrasted with increased spending and deployments from NATO forces against militia benefiting from the drug trade as well as those involved in the direct eradication of the crop. Another missed opportunity to use international relations theory in relation to its discourse on terrorism funded by the Afghan drug trade.

In conclusion the author tends to analyse the history of the Drug trade in Afghanistan, rather than arriving at solid concurrences, the only one perhaps being that Opium eradication programs of the Government currently are a failure (the only known success was the 4 years the Taliban managed to shut it down), the simple lack of viable alternative livelihoods as well as the lack of institutional will and mechanism to restrict production, mean that it is difficult to see Afghanistan "*rising as a phoenix from the ashes*" as the author quotes the Aga Khan.

The saving grace of this thesis is the amount of work done in terms of a compilation of data and sources, from the UN, electronic archives and limited theoretical perspectives. Unique to this thesis is an analysis of a vast majority of related secondary sources; Liudmila has come as far as someone can get without primary sources, yet it is difficult to evaluate this work as more than 'Good' or 'Very Good' depending on how she is able to defend it.

Suggested Questions

1. What are the direct and financial implications of the last decade of drug production on the conflict? Has the Taliban's retreat into south forced them to accept Opium cultivation and its sale as a valuable source for an already beleaguered group?
2. How successful has the US and NATO been in pressuring the current Afghani administration into ending cultivation of the crop and what direct measures have they taken in this regard?

Sincerely

Mgr. Hrishabh Sandilya, MCom.

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