SMIRC Topic Synopsis

Combatting government corruption and drug trafficking

**Background:**

Government corruption and drug trafficking are correlated issues with a predicted value of a 32 billion-dollar industry. Drug trafficking is a global issue that surrounds the creation, sale, and purchase of illegal substances. Many of these drugs include amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS), a drug that affects the central nervous system, cannabis, marijuana that affects the hippocampus and orbitofrontal cortex of the brain, cocaine, a powder that causes intense side effects on the body and dopamine cycles, opioids, drugs that disrupt major organs such as the spinal cord, and new psychoactive substances (NPS), substances that are created to mimic legal drugs. Due to the extreme detriments that drugs bring upon the user, many have been banned. However, the illegal trade and use of them has prospered jobs for many criminals. In fact, a recent UNODC campaign determined it as the most profitable field of business for them to partake in. Across the globe, drug trafficking affects several countries since the intercontinental trade reaches many places and can be intricately interwoven into countries. For example, in South Africa, prescription medication usage and the trafficking of over-the-counter medicinal preparations containing narcotic substances have become more prominent. Local pharmacies are the source of many of these medications. The market continues to modernize and change with society, ultimately eroding countries’ social and economic growth. These results in turn lead to increased criminality, unpredictability, insecurity, and HIV transmission.

Another essential facet of the illegal drug trade is government corruption. Organized crime groups not only utilize corrupt officials but also intimidate those who do not cooperate with their agendas. These groups can buy cooperation or an assassination, placing officials in difficult circumstances. Law enforcement focused on deterring drug-related crime is split between thwarting violence, saving victims of intimidation, and resisting corruption themselves. Many deaths of law enforcement and government officials have been tied to resisting corruption efforts from organized crime groups. For those who do accept the large sums tied to corruption, they are indefinitely compromised. With these forces at bay, criminals can run their illegal businesses at a maximum with little to no interruptions. As corruption runs rampant, law enforcement, governments, and criminal justice systems become weaker, hurting national and international safety and durability.

**UN Involvement:**

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) was created in 1997 to manage drug control, criminal activity, and terrorism. Today, the UNODC is still avidly countering major crime and the illegal drug trade. Offering a helping hand, UNODC aids countries with the growth of creating anti-drug legislations, and legal frameworks. It focuses on stopping the spread of HIV, significantly limiting the supply of drugs, fighting money laundering, and assisting governments with illegal drug resistance measures.

The Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) was founded by the UN Economic and Social Council in 1946 as the primary body responsible for drug-related issues. The Commission enables Member States to examine the worldwide drug situation, implement the resolutions made on drug-related matters during the 20th Special Session of the General Assembly, and take global action within the parameters of their authority. The Commission is authorized to intervene in all areas targeted by the three international treaties on drug control, including the addition of drugs to the international control lists. It also oversees the implementation of these conventions.

In addition to these UN initiatives, the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) serves as the sole international anti-corruption initiative with legal validity. Founded in 2003, almost all UN Member States are participants in the Convention and the UNODC stands as Secretariat of the Conference. Every two years, the Conference congregates to implement resolutions. There are several sub-bodies of the Conference in order to target specific areas of the corruption issue, such as The Implementation Review Group or The Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on Prevention. The UNCAC advocates for asset recovery, targeting and regaining stolen money to keep criminals from reaping the benefits of illegal activity, especially money generated from the sale of drugs. Subsequently endorsed is extradition, or the sentencing of a criminal who fled to another country from the one they committed the crime in. They also provide legal support.

**Block Positions/Possible Solutions:**

***North America:*** Throughout North America, the drug fentanyl’s debut has sprouted into the drug market, killing thousands of unsuspecting victims. Since its beginnings in 2014, changes in the use of drugs on the street have begun. Although once seen as a poison, opioids have developed into a popular drug within North America. As stronger drugs such as these continue to make their way into markets, buyers become increasingly attracted to their intense effects. The production of such substances is only predicted to continue, and developers evolve their methods to make even stronger drugs, such as nitazenes and fentanyl-analogues. Within the United States alone, 100,000 deaths have been accounted for on the pretense of overdose, a likely result of ill mental health. The opioid heroin’s replacement with fentanyl is mainly responsible for such high numbers. It is equivalently seventy times more powerful than morphine. Other countries with high opioid usage are not experiencing the same switch to fentanyl and therefore less overdoses, making North America’s issue specific to its region. The possibilities for this reasoning is complicated, and getting to the root of the problem will likely help solve it. A lack of understanding of how certain drugs are produced or spread prevents law enforcement, medical professionals, and legislature from thwarting the disastrous effects of potent drugs in North America. Corrupted officials provide drug traffickers leeway to continue production despite legal investigation. As of 2022, the United States was declared 24th on a list of 180 countries on the Corruption Perception Index, scoring 69 out of 100. Although close to being corruption-free, a stark 31 percent of the country is still afflicted. Slightly better, Canada scored a 74, proving corruption is still rampant in North America. Solutions to the growing problem will need to target its research and procedures. Improving healthcare and response to drugs through the use of extensive research can help target and alleviate health concerns related to drug use. Additionally, training professionals on how to proceed in such a procedure would prove useful. Along with stopping the aftermath of drug usage, prevention is equally, if not more essential. Targeting supply chains, structuring education for youth, or addressing mental health concerns can all contribute to preventing drug trafficking. In terms of corruption, developing anti-corruption measures, promoting community-based approaches, or encouraging and protecting reporters of corruption will help alleviate the issue.

***Latin America*:** A significant drug creator, Latin America accounts for a major supplier to many places, especially the United States. Even though there have been governmental and international attempts to end the smuggling, the drugs continue to be created, moved, and distributed from Latin American countries. Drug cartels and organized crime groups deliver substantial amounts of drugs to other continents, mainly by sea due to manipulating commercial shipping. In South America, cocaine is most commonly exploited, the largest manufacturer being Colombia. It develops 60% of the world’s supply of cocaine, feeding the high demand globally warranted. Much of Latin America feeds the United States’ demand for the drug, accounting for the 5.5 million people who are users there. Business potential for traffickers has greatly increased, pushing many to risk their and others' lives to meet demand. Drug enforcement organizations, anti-drug legislation, and drug education initiatives are just a few of the tactics that the governments of Latin America employ to stop drug smuggling. Drug trafficking is still a significant issue in the area, despite some progress being made in terms of lowering drug manufacturing and transit. The constant trade and travel of drugs is a threat to national safety since traffickers exploit commercial cargo ships and fishing boats. These interactions can lead to unsafe conditions for crews if the drug traffickers choose to use violence to procure hidden drugs within ships. Their concealment of the drugs poses crews in destructive situations, threatening the ship’s integrity or generating unsafe conditions. Besides the security aspect, Latin America’s large exports of drugs can lead to financial consequences. If concealed drugs are discovered, the time it takes for inspections to take place will lose companies time and money, especially if the ship needs to be sanitized from the drugs. Subsequently, corruption in Latin America only fabricates more issues. It delays and prevents criminals from being caught. Corruption is extremely prevalent and a crucial problem in South America. Over half of Latin American citizens claim they have had to pay off a bribe to use public services. The pandemic has only fueled the ongoing rise in corruption over the last twenty years, making Latin America a steadily more corrupt place. With these concerns in mind, targeting corruption plays a key role in stopping drug traffickers. In terms of the drug suppliers themselves, aiming to eliminate the shipping of drugs in this area would be ideal. Finding quick ways to search ships or prevent the corruption of crews would also be productive.

***Europe/Southern Pacific:*** Similar to the United States, cocaine is very popular in Europe, most especially in the past ten years. The increase in drugs has resulted in more violence and overdoses within Europe. The hazards drug consumption in Europe brings have left governments straining to counter drug trafficking. Second to cannabis, cocaine is the most ingested illegal drug in Europe. Many traffickers seek out business in Europe because of the elevated selling prices of drugs and the less intense punishments in comparison to the United States. Drugs can be sold for up to 12,000 to 100,000 US dollars cheaper in certain areas in Europe than in the US. The European Union disburses $3-4 billion to reduce drug supply while the United States spends $17.4 billion on the matter. Due to the limited budget, border security typically only prohibits about 10-12% of cocaine importation. South America furnishes the European drug market. Corruption is widespread but not as extreme as in Latin America. An essential solution for these countries will be to strengthen border security since most supply of drugs comes from external outlets.

***Middle East:*** Throughout the Middle East, Captagon, an amphetamine-based drug, has captivated the area. From 2019-2022, over one billion pills of the substance were captured. The drug is usually trafficked from South-East Europe and is typically found in consumer markets. The pills are especially present in Saudi Arabia. It is estimated that labs along the smuggling route are predicted to turn the substance into pills. Most prevalently, the countries of Turkey, Lebanon, the Syrian Republic, and Jordan are used as points of transportation. Turkey is also a large heroin trading hub. Due to unrest in the region such as the Israel-Palestine conflict, the instability in Iraq and Sudan, and other disputes, governments, security, and economies require a stronger core to stabilize the regions and tackle drug abuse. The vulnerability of countries has led to abuse from organized crime. Along with weak legislature, criminals take advantage of the Middle East’s location to conduct illegal activities. The potential for increased crime and drug trafficking is simply expected to rise if action is not taken soon. Corruption is severe in the Middle East, mainly because of all the unrest. Due to its highly corrupt nature and susceptibility to organized crime, solutions should center on easily implementable initiatives for governments to adopt. Education programs or technology development can help with this cause.

***Africa:*** Predictions established that Africa’s growing population will contribute to a 38% expansion in drug usage from 2018 to 2030. The continent serves as a transit center and a market for illicit drugs. Several types of drugs are grown and sold there. West Africa receives an extreme amount of drugs at an estimated amount of 55 tons every year. Nigeria itself is the continent’s biggest economy and saw 1.8 tons of cocaine seized at one warehouse in September of 2022. The cocaine amounted to $278 million and remains known as the most substantial drug raid in Africa’s history. It is approximated that the confiscation was only 2% of the annual drug flow. Although initially a minor player in the drug trafficking business, Africa has swiftly turned into a transit hub. The transportation business in Africa is heavily corrupted, including airports, seaports, and deserts. A prime example of this heavy corruption is Guinea-Bissau, a country whose economy relies on the illegal drug trade. Since economies are so heavily dependent on trade, disrupting it can make the economy unsteady. Additionally, it would put a strain on healthcare systems. Providing alternative job opportunities or gradual ways to ease the economies of Africa off of illicit dependence would be great solutions.

***Asia***: As of early 2023, the trafficking of illegal drugs in Asia has swiftly expanded. More routes for the smuggling of methamphetamine are becoming more apparent, and ketamine creation is becoming more prevalent. Shan State, Myanmar, is manufacturing large amounts of methamphetamine. It is then trafficked to Thailand, Laos, and routes in central Myanmar. Authorities have confiscated almost 1511 tons of methamphetamine in 2022, with the number of drugs seized lowering due to the development of new routes. A similar pattern took place with ketamine, where 27.4 tons were captured and numbers decreased. The prices of these drugs are getting cheaper leading more to be sold. Many new routes and smuggling opportunities are made possible through corruption in Asia. Outside Singapore, most countries have not scored well on the Corruption Perceptions Index. To alleviate the prevalence of drugs in Asia, it would be necessary to aim at the new drug routes and stop their spread.

***Questions to Consider:***

1. **In what ways can you prevent the link between corruption to drug trafficking from forming in the first place?**
2. How can countries whose economies heavily depend on drugs have a resilient recovery from the illegal drug trade?
3. How can you implement reforms in countries with weak and corrupt governmental systems and legislature?
4. How can you help addicts recover from drug addiction, especially in countries with weak healthcare systems?
5. How can you identify corrupt individuals who are being intimidated and help them without compromising their safety?
6. How can you ensure the solutions you implement have a long-lasting impact on various countries, and don’t lose traction or importance?
7. Can your country operate without illegal drug trafficking?
8. How can you prevent intimidation by drug cartels?
9. How can you ensure there is no room for corruption within your solutions and their execution?
10. What programs can you make to replace corrupt individuals in governments?

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