

Counter-narcotics Efforts in Afghanistan: Recent Progress and European Support for Institutional Stability

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MODERATOR: We are pleased to present today a briefing with Director of the White House Drug Control Policy John P. Walters, sometimes known as the drug czar for those of you who don't like long titles. And we have Tom Schweich, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary from INL of the State Department, who can also talk a bit from the State Department side if needed and wanted. And I'm going to start just by saying, please identify yourself when you ask a question. And without further ado I'll turn this over. Mr. Walters.

MR WALTERS: (Inaudible) to borrow some of your time here. I'll just make a couple of opening observations about my visit to Afghanistan and then take your questions and follow whatever topics you want.

I was there last week and this is the third time I've been in Afghanistan in two years. I was very gratified to see the enormous progress over that two year time. We went from a period when there was an interim government, interim president. The country had just been liberated by combined forces of allied countries. Now it has an elected president, a constitution, a sitting parliament. I visited the multilateral effort to train investigators, prosecutors and judges in the court system to extend rule of law. I visited with Afghan military and Afghan police personnel that have been more and more in the frontlines of security and governing in the country, as well as meeting with President Karzai, parliamentarians and other ministers again.



I was able to visit the governor of Nangarhar during my time there and look at what's been done in that province. As some of you know, Nangarhar has been traditionally one of the major poppy growing provinces of Afghanistan. Last year, by our measures, the overall poppy cultivation in the country had dropped almost 50 percent and in Nangarhar it had dropped 95 percent (inaudible). This happened in Nangarhar with no disruption, nobody starved in Nangarhar, movements to provide livelihoods that were legitimate and consistent with continued rule of law and licit development of the country were evident and that was gratifying to see.

I think there are a couple of dangers that I think it's important to look back on as you look over the last couple of years. The first was a danger to the country posed by al-Qaida and related terrorist groups. Those have largely, while they still are a threat, have largely been attacked successfully and are not an imminent threat to the security of Afghanistan. The second was the warlords who had large amounts of arms and armed personnel, through the demobilization process they have largely been -- while there still are things to do, have largely been reduced as a threat to the future of the country.

And I think the last large threat is, by most people's lights, the opium industry which threatens to reorient the economy, the security and run counter to the kind of rule of law that all of us want for Afghanistan. And that, too, has seen some remarkable changes, although remains a serious and more imminent threat. Obviously, last year when I was there, while places like Nangarhar made great progress, provinces like Helmand did not and the effort to try to have centralized eradication forces in conjunction with the governors bogged down last year in Helmand. It bogged down with farmers and the local religious and political leaders protesting and seeking to stop the eradication force.

This year in Helmand, as some of you know, the government has worked with the new governor there. The governor has asked for and gotten coordinated support from the national government, but the governor using local and provincial forces has also been in the forefront of eradication. There have been no farmers, no religious leaders, no local governments opposing. The opposition there has been Taliban and the Taliban has encouraged farmers; we have reports now -- Taliban has said they would protect people who grow poppy and they would, more importantly, punish those who eradicate it voluntarily as the provincial government asks.

What the government is now showing, and not only the government-led but the central eradication forces -- I was there -- are continuing aggressively, showing that the Taliban can't keep those promises and that the link between those who would oppose the progress in Afghanistan is a link that's on the losing side of this effort as it stands. Now, it's still not done and there's still more to do. But I think it's important to see that today, that where some people believe that the efforts against opium are against the interest of the people that today it's not the people who are opposing but the Taliban and those who stand against the interests of the people of Afghanistan.

I think also the other two dangers I'm concerned about from what I've seen are, first, a kind of misunderstanding of what the situation is. I think it's very important to be clear about the combined efforts in regard to controlling poppy growth and the development that we're doing there. I think the common mistake that's talked about here, in quite a variety of different places, is that alternative livelihoods means in the role of poppy you have to come up with a role of another plant that is equally valuable in order to make this viable. That's obviously foolish. In a criminal environment there isn't such a plant, and that's not what we're doing, I think as a combined effort in Afghanistan.

What we're really doing is rural development. We're bringing roads. We're bringing electricity. We're bringing micro-credit and we're trying to give people who have been chained to the land in a variety of ways, including under poppy, a future. For those who think that the poppy has been enormously valuable, let me just point out that the reality that I saw when I was there is many of the farmers of poppy are not landowners. They're sharecroppers. They're tenant farmers. They're growing what the owner of the land tells them to grow and they're making minimal amounts of money as a result of that. They will remain poor, impoverished people as far as the eye can see if the structure of economic development doesn't allow them to go beyond sharecropping into other kinds of activities and development.

Secondly, those who are small land owners themselves are not becoming wealthy.. Those people have not become wealthy individuals. Many of them have gone into debt more and more by being advanced money to grow poppy and finding themselves more and more indebted as the business goes on. There, too, small micro-businesses, the ability to process, the ability to bring not only agricultural products but other products that they can begin to fabricate and to market to a growing economy

in not only Afghanistan but in the surrounding areas of the region is vital for that to grow.

So I think it's very important that we understand what we're really doing in Afghanistan is an economic alternative, because only that will break some of the cycle down and allow real opportunity. And I think we are on the right track but I don't think many times people fully understand that. And the other is I think the danger that's posed by -- a second risk-- the profits from the opium business. This is kind of talked about I think sometimes in a less than accurate way.

The reduction in poppy cultivation as we measure it of almost 50 percent last year, certainly is gratifying because the large number of farmers that are involved in the business diminished and diminished the extent of that involvement. But of course the money that's made in the opium and heroin business is concentrated not at the bottom where the farmers and workers work but at the high end where at every stage of processing, shipping and movement this becomes vastly more valuable. Right now, certainly some of these profits are being used for the benefit of people who are against freedom and a beneficial future for Afghanistan, but it's a fraction of what it could be. And the importance of reducing this business as rapidly as possible, I think is in part to prevent there from becoming a much greater link between the enormous wealth of the opium and heroin business and those who would take up arms and do violence to, not only the Afghan people and their justly elected government, but also those who would try to help them. So I think with as dangerous as the situation is now, the amounts of money that we look at when we look at the market, could generate even much greater power and danger to the people there.

So we're trying to move urgently, and I was very encouraged by what I saw. I saw people who were working hard and are making enormous progress in two short years and starting from very difficult circumstances. But through hard work and through the work of many nations together, I think the scene there is getting better every day. There will be dangers, there will be difficulties, there will be obviously sometimes some setbacks; this is not an easy task today. I'm not trying to say that. But I do think that if two years ago someone said, now, here, we would be looking at this kind of condition for Afghanistan, it would have been thought to have been impossible; impossibly good and impossible rapid progress, but nonetheless that's where we are.

I'll be happy to take questions on anything else you're interested in.

QUESTION: Phil Kurata from IIP Washington File. Can you give us some numbers -- can you give us some figures for the amount of narcotics two years ago, percentage of GDP today? Also could you comment on the extent of official corruption? How high up does it go in protecting it?

MR. WALTERS: Sure. We can give you the numbers on cultivation and the percent of GDP. There's somewhat different ways of calculating -- or arraying this, calculating it as a part of the GDP, but we'll give you the standard ways from the UN and from what we have. The issue of corruption is a serious one because this has been evident -- and for two reasons: One, of course, it was during the years of Taliban rule that the government actively encouraged poppy cultivation growth, because first of all, the then-existing government not only had this as illegal but actually fostered the cultivation of poppy. And many people were involved with that in the war period when it wasn't illegal because there was no effective enforcement of laws. And some people have become, you know, quite involved in the trade.

What President Karzai has committed to and what I talk to people in the country about is their desire to begin to call people in account for that kind of continuing corruption if it's ongoing. And in addition to removing government officials now working the provinces on the basis of their competence or a basis of failure to be as faithful to the rules of the game, the president has been looking at investigations about corruption. So I think at this point we're at the stage where that will start having a different and beneficial force acting in the Afghanistan Government, too. But I think we are at the stage where that will be helpful.

QUESTION: My name is Munir Mawari from *Asharq Al-Awsat* newspaper. I would like to ask you what did you do exactly to prevent al-Qaida people from benefiting funded money from drug trafficking?

MR. WALTERS: Yeah, I think there are a couple of things. First of all, of course, we're working with the Coalition and the Afghan Government to attack al-Qaida not only inside Afghanistan, but throughout the region, directly as obviously a threat to the security of democracies throughout the world and a threat to the United States.

In addition, we are, of course, working to provide both the necessary security with the Afghan army, and I think that's one of the bright parts in Helmand now, is that the effort to bring lawful order, security and eradication as an Afghan face. It's the governor. It's the Afghan army. It's the Afghan police. And it's not a U.S. or Coalition forces that are in the lead, although they are supporting those efforts. It's a combined effort led now by a newly capable Afghan Government at both the national and the provincial level. And the effort is obviously to sever the relationship between first cultivation, then processing and then the profits from these businesses that are either taxed by insurgent forces, Taliban and others, including potentially al-Qaida in some of these areas. And also to prevent the contribution of these through forces that may want to destabilize areas in order to continue cultivation. So we're directly going after both the terrorist groups and those who support them and this illegal activity which is, in some ways, directly, in some ways indirectly, through buying protection, buying services and other support in the past, and that can be now in some cases become a source of finance for these armed groups.

QUESTION: Jyri Raivio, *Helsingin Sanomat*, Finland. Two things, if I may. You are talking about two years, but the U.S. has been there longer than two years. Why two years? Well -- and the second question is what's the role of this NATO-led force in eradicating the poppy?

MR. WALTERS: Yes. I spoke of two years because of the time that I've personally seen Afghanistan. I went there first two years ago. It wasn't certainly after the liberation of the country. And -- but I was more personally struck by just even the changes I've seen over that period of time. But there is, of course, a longer history to talk about.

In terms of NATO, I came back from Afghanistan and stopped in Brussels and spoke to the NATO Council about what I saw and about the transition that NATO is taking on now for security in a number of the areas of Afghanistan. What we have seen is not NATO doing eradication, but NATO providing support to the Afghan army and Afghan security forces in key parts of the country. What I saw that was going quite well and the effort to bring together the combined efforts of the government there, Afghan Government and the international coalition were proceeding quite rapidly. And I know there's still -- it's still a dangerous environment. They still have dangerous people there. There still are real dangers for the people there. This is not done, and everybody I think knows that. But the progress in, I think both the capacities of Afghan institutions themselves, not only the government, but security forces, and also I think the continued effort by NATO now, to push the security of the country out into more of the provinces and to add government authority and institutional capacity out to those provinces while, on the one hand, it obviously involves some additional risk and probably will involve some -- unfortunately, some casualties. It also will remove more of the danger areas where criminal and terrorist activities and destabilization forces can operate with less threat.

QUESTION: What kind of means does the Afghan Government use to eradicate? Do the Afghan forces go there and use military means to stop the poppy growth?

MR. WALTERS: Well, what's happened is the Afghan military in Helmand province which has been the central area of activity, the Afghan military has provided security protection against attack by Taliban and others. And the police and the provincial eradication forces have used tractors. In some cases, they used individuals who, depending on the state of the poppy plant, they can even go through with sticks and by hitting large numbers of the plants at the stem of a poppy, it will kill it because it breaks it or bends it. And it kills the poppy before it reaches a state where the latex is produced and harvestable. But they've been using tractors in Helmand to plow up these fields of poppy.

QUESTION: I'm Khalil Bughio from the Associated Press of Pakistan. I want to know about the transit of narcotics trade, originating from Afghanistan. That's likely to be routing through either Tajikistan, Iran or Pakistan, maybe. On our side of the border, the Pakistan Narcotics Control Board (PNCB) is active, and the smugglers are afraid of it. How do you rate Pakistan's efforts in controlling the narcotic trafficking? What is the exact position? How do you rate the PNCB? Is it not helpful in controlling this situation? I would like to know as to what is your view, please?

MR. WALTERS: Yes, we've been, of course, working with Pakistan and some of the other governments in the area in an effort to try to provide a greater capacity to go after the trafficking structures that do exit through other countries and move opium and heroin to other parts of the world: Europe, Russia, other parts of Asia. That's growing and we're trying to expand the capacity for meeting. Now we don't have direct contact, as you probably know, with Iran. Some of the other parts of the coalition,

the UK and others, have been in contact with Iranian law enforcement to try to share information. I think that's something that we all look forward to in providing a better exchange of information as the institutional capacity is formed and then work that information with the institutions.

But right now, we are -- and we have had for several years an effort to work in the surrounding transit countries, as well to go after movement of drugs, movement of money, movement of chemicals. It's not where we hope it will be in a few years, but it is beginning and it is focused on, we know, there's the necessity to look at this as a system and to attack all the parts of that system.

QUESTION: Marco Bardazzi with the Italian News Agency, ANSA. The Council on Foreign Relations has just released today reports on Afghanistan and they basically say Afghanistan has received inadequate resources in term of both troops and funds and their conclusion is that the world, thus far, has put Afghanistan on life support, rather than investing in a cure. And they're also talking about growing information about insurgency in Afghanistan. I was wondering what's your comment about this conclusion that the funds, the aid has been inadequate so far?

MR. WALTERS: Well, I think we all have worked to try to increase the aid to Afghanistan through the international community. We've had donor meetings earlier this year to again provide additional funds. I think we all believe that in this year and coming years, additional resources will be needed and we will work very hard to get them. We understand that all governments face competing demands on their investment. We think this is a good investment for the security of the region and we're grateful for the countries that have come forward and increased their contributions here. We're not done yet, but I do think that the other part of that story that's critical is the way in which aid has been used to help move Afghanistan forward at a quite a remarkable rate. We all would like to obviously get even further faster, but to have a nation that, you know, several years ago was under essentially domination, did not have a free government, did not have a constitution, did not have elected officials, did not have supporting institutions of security, of education, of simple basic governance that we take for granted in many of our countries in a national and local government. And to begin to put that in place in a relatively short time is -- I'm not a diplomat -- but pretty unusual, if not unprecedented.

So yes, I think you can look at this as, well, we have a lot further to go. And I agree we have a lot further to go. But I also think that to let that be the final story is not accurate. The truth here is that I think the people I spoke to and I've seen now at several different intervals as well as those I saw for the first time in the provinces, see a future that they've never had before. They want it. They don't want to have the continued killing. They don't want to have the destruction of the future for their children. And I don't think we should let the fact that there's more money, there's more to do, blind us to the fact that what's been accomplished gives us confidence that we can do what remains to be done, and I think that's true.

Will everybody who could perhaps possibly participate in this give as much or be as supportive as they should be? I don't know. I suspect there is always going to be some limitations. But I don't think it's a problem of maintaining the path that we're on, although it is not a path that won't require continued sacrifice, not only in money, but there will be people who will try to harm those who are standing up for a democratic future for Afghanistan, and we have to make sure that we stand with the Afghans, and we stand as an international coalition with the commitments that we've made.

QUESTION: I am from the Voice of America and my name is Syed Shaw. Since we are broadcasting this message directly to the people in Afghanistan as well as in the region, I have some questions. We have hosted several programs on this topic. You have an Afghan finance minister, the minister of counter-narcotics. They are asking the same questions, the questions I am asking you. Is there a fact that -- it's a big fact we can compare to terrorism-- and a lot of money has been spent by the British, by the United States of America, we can eradicate this problem? But here we have, for example, during the past three days there were very, very severe clashes between them, the poppy growers and the security forces and police authorities. Today they had the news that one person died and some government forces were also killed and some were wounded. Where does the problem that you have flow -- enormous flow of money to the Afghan farmers? And then there is persistent complaint from the farmers that nothing is reaching them, only some aid coming down. So keeping in mind the responsibilities of the United States of America's government and some other Western governments to Afghanistan, what steps do you think should be taken because four years have gone and still we have this problem?

MR. WALTERS: Well, first, again I would say that the -- one of the most striking things has been the reduction of poppy cultivation we saw between 2004 and 2005, as a result of the leadership and encouragement of President Karzai, the support of governors that he has appointed that are working in the provinces that had many farmers voluntarily stop growing. Others faced eradication from the provincial authorities and now we have a combination which we haven't had in the previous year, of a central government-led security and eradication force coming into Helmand, which had been the place where the Taliban had challenged directly the efforts to curtail the opium trade. Again, I don't see this year that farmers are opposing. That was true last year.

What we are opposing more directly is the Taliban. So for those who think that this is, you know -- I notice of you -- for some people this is stabilizing because it takes the people we need to get the support of and it pushes them against us. That's not what's happening. I think people understand that the future of democracy is inconsistent with becoming a major ongoing producer of opium. I think all the public opinion effort done by the government to educate and to support standards of right and wrong show that the vast majority of Afghans understand and believe it's wrong to grow opium and to make money off of this product. They want another place to go. They don't want to be, you know, bullied by the Taliban and by residual forces of the old times to grow and to have an alternative.

But again, I think this is a combination of providing security in more and more of the country, of establishing the rule of law as the Afghan nation now has it, where courts and security forces and government institutions bringing things from education to safe water, to economic development projects. And as I said, this is not a role-for-role substitution. We want to help people move out of subsistence farming into being able to have small businesses to fabricate items that can be sold that can help them to gain economic development more rapidly. I saw this in Nangarhar where the request was not for additional crops, the request was for -- we want some additional dams to help -- and we want electricity. We want some additional roads and we want schools. We want more schools so that our young people can learn the skills necessary to advance themselves.

QUESTION: I'm just supporting you (inaudible). I am from Konar province in Afghanistan, and I am also (inaudible) official and diplomat, so I have to (inaudible) years. Now in my province, the current situation of people has improved. The American troops are there. They are not bothering anyone. They are building small roads (inaudible) projects and people are telling me that those who could not earn 50 Afghans, now they are earning 25, 30 of them (inaudible) they work there. And when Taliban -- some people come from across the border they attack. They are destabilized there. I think 95 percent of the population in Konar province. This is just an example, would like this process to continue and they have voluntarily done away with cultivating poppy in Afghanistan.

I have this question. Are you in contact with the neighboring countries Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and maybe Iran also that they should control their own drug smugglers as well, as well as their foreign smugglers as well domestic smugglers?

MR. WALTERS: Yes. We're working to try to better establish a coordinated sharing of information in operations against the traffickers. We have begun to provide for the first time obviously a capability for the institutions that are being created in Afghanistan. I visited the new national (judicial) system where a select group of investigators or prosecutors and of courts will now try major traffickers and trafficking related offenses. They'll be able to collect and manage information, share it not only within the Afghan institutions but with other allied institutions, including the coalition there and nations on the outside. We have been also acting as a conduit working on specific trafficking structures, getting a better picture of how does this move because it is a system that requires, you know, where this starts, as where the drugs become dollars or euros or rubles or other currency in the world and then starts the cycle for production.

So we are working to more aggressively go after the money systems. We're looking at better controls on chemicals that are used to process opium. We have had efforts to go after the structures of refining as they've existed, both in Afghanistan and in other places. And we are trying to provide that information so when these traffickers, like terrorists, use nations that are fundamentally friendly to us and to each other, as a shield where they can find places where there's not law enforcement presence, where there may not be as stable or governable environment in order to conduct their criminal activities. So we are now working with those governments to be able to go after those parts, and also where they're more vulnerable. But we have a little more work to do in that regard, no question.

QUESTION: Do you have any information about the presence of people from European criminal organizations in the country and links between the drug traffickers in Afghanistan and European criminal organizations?

MR. WALTERS: In the briefings that I got, I did not see an enormous amount of information about Europeans being present. I think a lot of the information suggests that there are some non-Afghans involved here but that a lot of the inside Afghanistan operation is -- involves Afghans and then the link to others, certainly those do exist, is done outside. You know, it's what we're trying to do. We're using our DEA and its liaison with many nations as well as the coalition of nations working on security and development, their police forces and security forces to share information. We're trying to better integrate that so that these boundaries between nations do not become a hindrance to bringing these people to justice.

QUESTION: Have you noticed any changes in the global flows of opium if -- or when you said that you have been fairly successful in Afghanistan cutting down production, a major supply country, is use of opium going down or is somebody else supplying?

MR. WALTERS: Yeah, it's a very important question and, unfortunately, sir, it's a question that we do not have as rigorous and as extensive real time measures of. The United States probably has more extensive survey, epidemiological look at consumption of illegal drugs. My office now gets information also -- we do a lot of, as you probably know, workplace drug testing here where as a condition of employment or as a part of working in major corporations drug testing occurs. We get, without any information about the individual, we get that information shared by the industry so we can look at trends.

That almost -- first of all, very little of our heroin in the United States today comes from Afghanistan and many of the nations that now face the threat of production of opium and heroin from Afghanistan don't have those same kinds of measures. Now, some European countries do have some measures. I spoke -- on the way back I stopped in the Netherlands and spoke to Dutch officials again. We've had a very, very good relationship with them in my tenure here. And while they have some indications, the indications are not as extensive regarding opium.

We believe there has been certainly much opium and heroin that's been from Afghanistan that's come into Europe. I certainly talk to Russian counterparts. I've talked to Chinese officials posted here about the danger. I know this is also a danger to other countries in the region, Pakistan. Of course, while we don't have direct contact with Iran, everybody I think that has had contact with them understands how dangerous this has been to Iran and other parts of the region.

Also, in speaking with Afghan officials, they've seen more danger and consequences of consumption inside Afghanistan. I mean, sometimes in drug threats, whether they're in South America or in Asia or in other parts of the world, many countries that have been initially production or transit sites have thought that, well, this is going to be too expensive to be a problem for our country, but over time I don't think there's a single one that hasn't developed its own domestic consumption, addiction and problems of self-destruction of their own citizens. So I think we do see that and there certainly is plenty.

The amount of, for example, when some of these production amounts went up dramatically, how much is being stored as dried opium, which has a very long potential storage life, we don't have precise knowledge of. We're trying to get a better understanding of how that works through, for the first time, the institutions that the Afghans are putting in place, and we're working with them in terms of better investigative measures about these organizations, how they operate, how their infrastructure works, what they have on hand and what they're able to mobilize. So it's too early to give you a precise answer on that.

QUESTION: I'd like to ask a little more about the incentives for the farmers not to engage in poppy production and the structure of the rural economy. Is there any such thing as land to the tillers? Are you -- are part of the big land holdings being broken up and given to each farmer as an incentive to discourage poppy production?

MR. WALTERS: Well, I think one of the issues that I talked to officials about there that Afghanistan faces as other countries, but I think specifically because of their history, is the issue of land titling. One of the issues going forward in the future for both investment and development but also for larger concerns about the future of the country is going to be how land titling is handled. And of course it's complicated by the fact that there have been years of war, there have been different regimes that have come in and then taken land from one group and given it to another group. So in many cases, the precise status of ownership of land is not clear.

Now, in some places we can control land and so we're able to -- you know, they're the land owner, they can hire share croppers, they control it now, but as the government becomes stronger and able to establish security and government control, I think one of the things that I talked to some Afghan officials about is they're going to face an issue, not tomorrow but not so far from now, of land titling and land reform. But that will help, I think, also give some options in terms of policies in rural development. That'll be important.

QUESTION: You mentioned Netherlands. They have, like legal drugs over there. What do you think of the idea of making marijuana legal here in the U.S.? And second one regarding the (inaudible) community, maybe Ambassador Duncan (ph) knows that over there they (inaudible), it's kind of drug and they bring it here (inaudible) to Michigan, New York, sometimes California.

MR. WALTERS: Baltimore.

QUESTION: Baltimore? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: Do you consider this a problem in the U.S.?

MR. WALTERS: Yes, khat's illegal here and we think it's a drug that should remain illegal, as is marijuana. Again, let me just say one point. Not to quibble, but marijuana is not legal in the Netherlands. In fact, while there has been licensing of sale in coffee houses that have been famous, in fact over 70 percent of the municipalities do not have such a coffee house. In fact, the trend has been to contract these because of the dangers the Dutch Government has seen.

I know frequently the old view was that the United States and the Netherlands are two poles of drug policy: the United States is, for some people's minds, extremely concerned and extremely active on trying to control this; the Netherlands is extremely free and unconcerned. What I've seen and what I've tried to continue in my relationship with Dutch officials is a very, very rapid convergence of our views. We don't agree on everything, but we see that the danger of high-potency marijuana is a real one. As bad as marijuana was ten years ago, it's worse today because its psychoactive ingredient, THC, has increased dramatically. The Netherlands has faced that as well.

They are also going after, while there are systems in the Netherlands that allow the distribution in coffee houses, they've seen and they've gone aggressively after enforcing sale situations to minors, sale in some cases a concern that they've become a site for drug tourism from other countries. Some of their municipalities are trying to prevent people who are not resident from being involved because they see thousands and thousands of individuals who they believe are damaging their country, coming there to consume drugs as far worse-- in addition to the health consequences.

In addition, they've seen that, you know, cascade into other dimensions of drug control. We have been working with them on the control of cocaine flow into Schiphol airport and through commercial shipping, through ports like Rotterdam. We've been working aggressively and they continue to work with us. They have worked with us aggressively on Ecstasy.

When I came to this job a little over four years ago now, Ecstasy was an enormously threatening problem in the United States, as it has been in other parts of Europe. It was thought to be, as many drugs have begun in the past, harmless, it just makes you more social when you go out to socialize and to dance and enjoy your time with your friends. It's deadly. Its consequences to especially young people were minimized or not really discussed.

Today, through a combination of our efforts to educate parents and young people, and frankly the cooperation of the Dutch and the Belgian governments in cutting off the supplies that have been linked from there into the United States, we've seen a 60 percent reduction in teenage involvement with Ecstasy. That's the combined effect of supply and demand.

Overall, young people in the United States have diminished their consumption of illegal drugs by 19 percent over the last four years. That's where substance abuse starts in the United States, whether it's cigarettes or alcohol or illegal drugs. If you don't use it in our country as a teenager, you're unlikely to go on and use it later on, and if you use it later on you're much less likely to become addicted. All these substances depend on the heavy user to keep that business going.

So we are not only trying to go after supply, we're trying to go after demand. And I think that's what you also see with the Dutch Government. We have been sharing epidemiological information and information on addiction treatment and on tracking consumption as well as supply, because this is a business and we want to attack both the supply and demand side of that business to not only cause reductions but to sustain those reductions most of all.

So -- and I think while we don't have exactly the same policies as the Netherlands does on some of these things, what they've seen increasingly -- I've visited treatment centers in the Netherlands -- is when you allow these to -- these dangerous substances to expand in the population, not only does it become more dangerous for individuals but particularly young citizens get trapped in addiction and destruction of self, family, futures and it causes enormous consequences. So today I would say we're both moving in the same direction to shrink the problem down. They start with a different set of circumstances, but we are now cooperating on a broad front with the Dutch, which was not true in the past.

QUESTION: How about khat here in the U.S.?

MR. WALTERS: Everything I've seen -- again, we depend on the science. We depend on the laws which govern our control and prohibition of these substances require information about their dangers, addictive substances, whether or not they have a beneficial use either in medicine or in other -- where they have a beneficial use, we even allow them, as you know, to be regulated and it can be prescribed as medications where they have a beneficial use or if they have a beneficial use outside of medicine and that can be demonstrated, we allow their use and control. I've seen no such demonstration with khat, and it continues to be a prohibited substance on that basis. We don't make this up. We have actual criteria that established this.

And I recognize there are places where people use this, but of course I'll point out there are places where people use opium, places where people use hashish and cannabis, where there are terribly destructive things done but they're accepted. And I recognize we also have substances we try to control, like alcohol and tobacco, where we nonetheless are concerned about the damage that they do. Fortunately, we've not only had drug use go down by young people, but also alcohol use and cigarette smoking.

So you know, once you let these things open up -- we have 19 million Americans who use an illegal drug once a month or more frequently. We have roughly 50 million that smoke cigarettes and we have 120 million that drink alcohol. That's an enormous price that we pay for a, you know, somewhat different attitude about different substances, but today, of the 19 million that use illegal drugs, 7 million are dependent or need treatment. Of the 120 million who use alcohol, roughly 13 million need treatment. These are much more dangerous substances and what kind of a country would we be if we had 50 or a 100 million Americans using either marijuana or other addictive substances? It would be a terrible tragedy.

QUESTION: My name is Yongbom Heo. I'm a reporter for a daily newspaper in Seoul, *Chosun Ilbo*. I'd like to ask one question about North Korea and their drug trafficking. As you may know, that it is well broadly reported that North Koreans are also involved in cultivating opium there and they are -- they have been trafficking drugs in the world under the sponsor by -- of the government and they have been laundering the money from the trafficking. My question is how much serious is this and where in your opinion is it in the context of worldwide drug issues, and secondly what kind of policy do you have against alleged North Korea drug trafficking and cultivating opium?

MR. WALTERS: Well, we take these reports very seriously and we have worked with other nations in investigations and in enforcement against traffickers involving North Korea. We follow up on reports both in the press and elsewhere about that trafficking, but our process of examining those countries that get special attention that's in our law requires certain demonstration of amounts or quantities and certain conditions of involvement. In some cases we have mentioned and discussed this in public, but the levels of evidence we've had for the actual overall amounts have not triggered the kind of reporting that you see from other countries that are more major source or transit countries.

Again, we continue to watch this. We don't look the other way on any of this, but as you know, getting precise information from North Korea is extremely difficult. So while we do follow up with investigative material, I would say that we don't have an awful lot to work from on some of these matters and we require, you know, a pretty solid body of evidence to proceed in some of these reporting requirements and other kinds of matters such as the certification process that we have here. So we continue to watch that. It's troubling whenever you see reports of governments being involved in this kind of activity, so we remain vigilant and we remain allies working with some of the countries that have been seizing and working cases.

QUESTION: Have you asked some kind of specific measures to South Korean Government to prevent North Koreans from exporting those drugs from ports especially in South Korea?

MR. WALTERS: I have not personally had contact with South Korean officials on this issue. Some of the press reports, some of the others I've seen, hasn't suggested that these have gone through South Korean ports, so I don't know that those direct efforts would be the way to interdict the drugs if they're not coming through South Korea. (Inaudible) of Korea.

QUESTION: Is there any system of enforcing penalties on those who -- rather than in a way use money on providing compensation not to grow poppy and not to transit in narcotic drugs moneymaking through illegal means? In Afghanistan, I mean, are there some penalties or so that you enforce?

MR. WALTERS: Oh, I see. Yes. The Afghan Government today has a criminal code that includes a series of delineated crimes for drug trafficking and facilitating drug trafficking. In fact, it allows serious trafficking to be brought to a national court that's centralized. I visited it -- it's what I was referring to earlier, where investigators, prosecutors and judges can be housed and made safe, because we suspect some of them may be under risk as they go ahead with this enforcement action and adjudication, for major traffickers and for those who may engage in corruption from a government position. So that court is now in existence. They're continuing to get training. I visited with an international group of personnel that are training. Norway, the UK, Germany and, of course, Italy has also been involved in training core personnel in Afghanistan. This has also been an international effort, but it's led by the Afghans because this is ultimately a court system and a law enforcement system that is theirs and their country's to implement. I think that's what's also I think very important and also somewhat surprising in a relatively short number of years that not only do these institutions exist but that many Afghans have lent their hands and with some considerable risk to themselves, put themselves on the line to make a better future for their country.

QUESTION: My last question. (Inaudible) chief of intelligence (inaudible) was here. He was there (inaudible) and it was very close to (inaudible). But he was taking (inaudible) some provinces as creating (inaudible) conditions for his people and enabling the smugglers to spread money among the people. He wants all the villagers to be able to get bottles of drinking water because there is no system so that they can get water from (inaudible) never can be channeled and utilized by these people. And he told me that he saw people just for the sake of being able to bring drinking water to their families they helped the poppy growers and they have created some special system to hide it from the (inaudible). And they bought water for his people in that area for 100 Afghani or maybe 85, not more than that, which is a very small sum keeping in mind the cost of living there. So do you think there is a system or some monies channeled toward projects for channeling water from, for example, from Helmand (inaudible) in eastern Afghanistan (inaudible)?

MR. WALTERS: Well, that was part of the rural development strategy. I didn't visit Helmand this time but I visited, as I said, Nangarhar and one of the issues we discussed with aid personnel as well as local officials was the desire to add water projects: dams and projects that would help to expand irrigation and preserve groundwater. I think the other foreign part of this is as we have gone into a number of provinces with efforts to move them to alternative activities, and it's been geared with eradication in the last couple of years, we have brought with us projects that quickly employ people right then and so that they're not left without an income and building roads, building schools. I was there last year and I did visit Kandahar and Helmand where workers were repairing irrigation canals, some of which had been in disrepair for years, in order to bring greater potential to the farming regions there.

I think that is a very important -- I have not seen the reports of widespread -- and this trip again, not (inaudible) people from everywhere. I did not see widespread reports, though, of drought or of major dislocations right now but certainly there are parts of the country where that may be the case. But, yes, we're trying to both in the interim give people a stake to be able to take care of their families and take care of their needs, give them a future path through infrastructure building in rural development as the government institutions stand up to be able to manage and govern the country in the future. So there are a number of things happening at the same time, as they must, but they are moving forward.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much.

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