

# China Confronts Afghan Drugs:

*Law Enforcement Views of “The Golden Crescent”*

Dr. Murray Scot Tanner

CNA CHINA  STUDIES



CRM D0024793.A1/Final  
March 2011

CNA is a non-profit research and analysis organization comprised of the Center for Naval Analyses (a federally funded research and development center) and the Institute for Public Research.

The CNA China Studies division provides its sponsors, and the public, analyses of China's emerging role in the international order, China's impact in the Asia-Pacific region, important issues in US-China relations, and insights into critical developments within China itself.

Whether focused on Chinese defense and security issues, Beijing's foreign policies, bilateral relations, political developments, economic affairs, or social change, our analysts adhere to the same spirit of non-partisanship, objectivity, and empiricism that is the hallmark of CNA research.

Our program is built upon a foundation of analytic products and hosted events. Our publications take many forms: research monographs, short papers, and briefings as well as edited book-length studies. Our events include major conferences, guest speakers, seminars, and workshops. All of our products and programs are aimed at providing the insights and context necessary for developing sound plans and policies and for making informed judgments about China.

CNA China Studies enjoys relationships with a wide network of subject matter experts from universities, from government, and from the private sector both in the United States and overseas. We particularly value our extensive relationships with counterpart organizations throughout "Greater China", other points across Asia, and beyond.

Dr. Albert S. Willner, Director of the China Security Affairs Group, is available at (703) 824-2883 and on e-mail at WILLNER@cna.org. Our Program Coordinator is Ms. Tamara Hemphill, who can be reached at (703) 824-2106 and on e-mail at hemphit@cna.org.

Approved for distribution:

March 2011



Albert S. Willner, Ph.D.  
Director  
China Security Affairs Group  
CNA China Studies

Distribution Unlimited

This document represents the best opinion of CNA at the time of issue.  
It does not necessarily represent the opinion of the Department of the Navy.

**Copyright © 2011 CNA**

This work was created in the performance of Federal Government Contract Number N00014-05-D-0500. Any copyright in this work is subject to the Government's Unlimited Rights license as defined in DFARS 252.227-7013 and/or DFARS 252.227-7014.

# China Confronts Afghan Drugs:

*Law Enforcement Views of “The Golden Crescent”*

*Dr. Murray Scot Tanner*

CNA CHINA  STUDIES



## Table of Contents

<i>Table of Contents</i> .....	i
<i>List of Tables, Maps, and Figures</i> .....	iii
Executive Summary.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chinese Assessments of Smuggling and Trafficking Golden Crescent Drugs into Western China.....	6
Chinese Assessments of the Growing Seriousness of Golden Crescent Drug Trafficking in Relation to China’s Overall Illegal Drug Patterns.....	10
Chinese Analysis of Key Drug Shipment Routes.....	16
Chinese Assessment of Problems in Counternarcotics Work.....	24
Chinese Assessments of Links between Drug Trafficking and Terrorism.....	30
Final Thoughts.....	36



## List of Tables, Maps, and Figures

<i>Map One: Golden Crescent Countries and Golden Triangle Countries.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Figure One: Chinese Graphic of Golden Crescent Trafficking.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Map Two: Major Chinese Highway and Rail Ports Used by Drug Smugglers.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Map Three: The Karakorum Highway.....</i>	<i>20</i>



# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The rising flow of illegal drugs from the “Golden Crescent” region—Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran—into western China’s Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) has caused increasing concern to Chinese law enforcement officials and analysts.

This study seeks to strengthen understanding of Chinese law enforcement perceptions of the Golden Crescent drug problem by making use of previously underexploited Chinese law enforcement publications.

## Key Findings

- Chinese law enforcement officials and analysts now see Golden Crescent trafficking as a major and rapidly growing threat to society. This view reflects a major shift from China’s earlier exclusive focus on the “Golden Triangle” region drug threat.
- Chinese law enforcement analysts blame the rise in Golden Crescent drug smuggling on the increase in foreign supply rather than Chinese demand. These analyses tend to understate Chinese domestic problems, such as police corruption, ethnic tensions, and rising drug prices and demand, which may have made China a more attractive drug shipping route.
- Chinese analyses of popular Golden Crescent smuggling routes emphasize highway, air, and rail routes through Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. If correct, these analyses indicate that these four important security partners of Beijing may be failing to prevent trafficking into China across their territory.
- The Chinese law enforcement writings reviewed indicate that China has serious weaknesses in its counternarcotics intelligence capabilities and is anxious to overcome them. Problems include meager clandestine intelligence on Asian drug networks, weak data on trafficking by ethnic separatists, and poor intelligence networking and sharing across jurisdictions.
- Increasingly sophisticated trafficker techniques coupled with greater linguistic diversity among traffickers are frustrating Chinese law enforcement officials, who find these traffickers more difficult to investigate, detect, and interrogate.
- Even though law enforcement analysts confidently assert a significant link between terrorism and drug trafficking, sources reviewed for this study provide very little solid evidence that the two are connected.



## Introduction

The rising inflow of heroin and other illegal drugs from the “Golden Crescent” region—which includes Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran—into western China’s Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) has caused increasing concern among Chinese law enforcement officials and analysts. Between 2005 and 2009, Chinese police sources estimate that Golden Crescent heroin rose from a very small percentage to nearly one-third of all the illegal heroin seized by Chinese police nationwide.

This study draws upon previously underexploited publications of China’s public security and other law enforcement departments to provide a better understanding of how Chinese officials and analysts view the trafficking patterns for Afghan heroin and other illegal drugs into China. In the writings analyzed for this study, Chinese law enforcement officials and analysts discuss their concerns about the Golden Crescent drug problem, often in significant detail and with unusual frankness. These publications yield important insights, but have yet to receive extensive attention in Western analyses of China’s drug problems.

This introduction provides the outline and the main research questions addressed in this study. It also includes a brief introduction to the report’s research approach, the law enforcement publications that are its main data source, and some of the research challenges that these data present.

### **“Golden Crescent” and “Golden Triangle”: Chinese Terms for Drug Producing Regions**

Chinese police analyses of drug trafficking into China often refer to two major Asian drug producing regions near China’s borders:

**“Golden Crescent”** (*jin xinyue*; 金新月) is formally defined in Chinese police publications as the drug producing regions of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran, although in their analysis, these publications usually treat the term as though it were really synonymous with Afghanistan. This region borders China’s Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in the west-northwest.

**“Golden Triangle”** (*jin sanjiao*; 金三角) is formally defined in police publications as the drug producing regions of Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos, although in publications examined for this study the term is treated as largely—though not exclusively—referring to Myanmar. The Golden Triangle countries primarily border China’s Yunnan Province (and a small portion of Tibet) in China’s southwest.

## Map One: Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle Countries



Golden Crescent Countries:  
Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan



Golden Triangle Countries:  
Myanmar, Thailand, Laos



### *Study Outline and Main Research Questions*

The remainder of this study is divided into six sections:

- Section One analyzes how Chinese law enforcement analysts and officials assess the patterns of smuggling and trafficking of Golden Crescent drugs into and through China over the past decade.
- Section Two examines how serious these analysts and officials believe the problem of Golden Crescent illegal drugs is in relation to China's overall drug problem.
- Section Three examines Chinese police analyses of the key drug shipment routes from the Golden Crescent into and through China.
- Section Four analyzes how law enforcement officials and analysts assess the problems in their own counternarcotics work concerning Golden Crescent drugs.
- Section Five examines how Chinese analysts and officials assess the links between drug smugglers and terrorist or armed extremist groups.
- Section Six offers final analytical thoughts about some shortcomings in Chinese assessments of the Golden Crescent drug problem.

### ***Research Approach and Materials Used in this Study***

In order to analyze Chinese law enforcement views on drug trafficking from the Golden Crescent, this study draws primarily on a content analysis of specialized Chinese-language law enforcement publications. The majority of these materials are published by China's civilian police system—specifically its public security organs. Other materials used in this study draw on publications by China's other legal institutions, such as the procuracy (the prosecutors' offices), the court system, or prominent government-run law schools.

Law enforcement analytical materials analyzed include:

- Public security analytical studies and training books about China's illegal drugs problem issued by publishing houses under the Ministry of Public Security.<sup>1</sup>
- Academic and policy studies journals from Ministry of Public Security think tanks and from China's national- and provincial-level public security universities. Three police universities whose publications figure most prominently in this study are:
  - The Chinese People's Public Security University (CPPSU) in Beijing, China's top national police academy
  - The Xinjiang Police Officers Academy in Urumqi, the top policy academy in the XUAR
  - The Yunnan Police Officers Academy in Kunming, the top police academy in Yunnan province. Although Yunnan is located along the "Golden Triangle" drug region (Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos) and not the "Golden Crescent," its police academy appears to have emerged as one of the public security system's leading policy research centers on all illegal drug and counternarcotics issues.
- Internet-based articles, documents, and statistics published on the websites of Chinese law enforcement institutions, or reports by Chinese government press outlets citing Chinese law enforcement officials.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> These publishing houses include Masses Press (*Qunzhong chubanshe*; 群众出版社), directly under the Ministry of Public Security; the Chinese People's Public Security University Press (*Renmin gongan daxue chubanshe*; 人民公安大学出版社); and the Police Officers Educational Press (*Jingguan jiaoyu chubanshe*; 警官教育出版社), which merged with the Public Security University Press about 10 years ago.

<sup>2</sup> To strengthen our confidence in the veracity of the provincial public security department reports used in this study, these websites were identified by perusing the list of provincial public security and law enforcement department links offered on the home pages of the official sites of China's Ministry of Public Security ([www.mps.gov.cn](http://www.mps.gov.cn)) and the Chinese Communist Party's Central Commission for the Comprehensive Management of Social Order ([www.chinapeace.org.cn](http://www.chinapeace.org.cn)). Where other Chinese government-controlled press outlets are cited, the online source of the report is noted in the footnote.

These specialized journals provide a unique window into the views of China's law enforcement officials and analysts. The officials and analysts who contribute articles to these publications frequently demonstrate that they have access to hard-to-obtain law enforcement data, case materials, analytical materials, and policy discussions. A good example is the Ministry of Public Security's flagship monthly *Policing Studies* (*Gongan Yanjiu*; 公安研究): every issue since the journal's inception in the 1980s has included a section entitled "Bureau Chiefs' Forum" (*tingjuzhang luntan*; 厅局长论坛) that includes detailed policy articles by China's national and provincial public security bureau chiefs and other top police officials. In addition, many of the journal's other authors are scholars or policy analysts at China's national and provincial public security universities who, it should be noted, usually hold rank as police officers and often carry out field studies to help them better understand the challenges and concerns of regular police officers.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the authors whose works are cited here are high-ranking public security department officials or public security department analysts. One noteworthy article used here is a 2009 analysis of the challenges and failures of China's counternarcotics intelligence system that was co-authored by Li Yanming, who at time of publication was a Deputy Chief of the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau. The majority of the authors cited here are think tank analysts, police university scholars, and other law enforcement scholars.

Because tracking the rise in Golden Crescent illegal drugs is both a specialized topic and a relatively recent trend, the amount of focused and detailed law enforcement literature on the topic is still relatively limited. This study draws most heavily on about 30 journal articles and seven books that focus on China's overall drug trends and the emergence of Golden Crescent drugs. On other, more sensitive topics—such as the shortcomings of China's counternarcotics system, or the links between drug traffickers and terrorists or religious extremists—only a few relevant and detailed articles and book chapters are available and this study relies upon these.

### ***Data Challenges: Assessing China's Drug Trends***

Using the data in these law enforcement publications to assess China's changing drug trafficking patterns presents an important methodological challenge: how should analysts evaluate Chinese police claims about how quickly Golden Crescent drug trafficking into China has risen in recent years? The law enforcement writings reviewed for this study rarely publish even rough estimates of the actual total supply of illegal drugs or total drug usage in Chinese society, and this study found no evidence that law enforcement analysts have ever performed or published yearly statistical estimates of the true supply of drugs and drug usage in Chinese society. Nor do law enforcement writings offer any direct

---

<sup>3</sup> The results of these field visits are often written up in reports and research articles in these law enforcement journals.

estimates of what percentage of those drugs come from foreign countries, or which countries those might be. The only statistical data related to drug crimes and drug usage that Chinese authorities offer annually appear to be statistics on the number of drug crime cases undertaken and resolved by Chinese police, the number of persons arrested for drug crimes, the total amount of drugs that authorities seized in these cases, and the total number of officially registered drug users in China.

Although statistics on the number of crimes, the number of arrests, and the volume of drugs seized may be related to the real level of drug trafficking or drug usage in society, these law enforcement figures can be affected by many other factors that are unrelated to the actual level of drugs in Chinese society. For example, these figures may fluctuate greatly depending on how vigorously and effectively the police focus on drug crimes. The rapid increase in police seizures of drugs from the Golden Crescent may also reflect, in part, an increase in the Chinese police's emphasis on counternarcotics operations directed at the Xinjiang region, or a corresponding de-emphasis on counternarcotics operations in Yunnan and other regions of China closer to the Golden Triangle region (i.e., Thailand, Myanmar and Laos).

Despite these problems with Chinese law enforcement drug crime data, law enforcement officials and analysts still frequently cite these figures on crimes, arrests, and drug seizures as though they were direct measures of the level of actual drug trafficking and usage in Chinese society. This study addresses this problem by treating these statistics on drug crimes, arrests, and drug seizures more as indicators of how Chinese law enforcement officials perceive the drug trends in their society—not as valid and reliable measures of the underlying trends themselves.

An additional challenge in some of these data sources is the language that law enforcement analysts use to describe illegal drugs and drug trafficking. In many cases, instead of precisely specifying the types of drugs being trafficked (i.e. heroin, opium, marijuana, etc.), these authors use the vague, collective Chinese term for illegal “drugs” (*dupin*; 毒品). Wherever the original Chinese documents have been specific, this report uses terms such as “heroin” and “opium.” But wherever the original Chinese terminology and context in these writings make it impossible to be more specific, this report has faithfully translated the Chinese as “drugs” or “illegal drugs.”

## I. Chinese Assessments of Smuggling and Trafficking Golden Crescent Drugs into Western China

This section analyzes the factors to which Chinese law enforcement specialists attribute the rapid rise of the Golden Crescent drug threat. Most significantly, analysis of the data shows that law enforcement writings overwhelmingly attribute the rise in Golden Crescent drug smuggling into western China to external drug supply-related forces that have pushed traffickers to ship more drugs out of the Golden Crescent and into China. Specifically, they stress the impact of rising opium production in the Golden Crescent in the 1990s-2000s, and the concurrent decline in drug production in the Golden Triangle region. Law enforcement analysts put far less emphasis on the impact of domestic Chinese factors that tend to “pull” drugs into western China, such as rising Chinese demand for drugs or law enforcement corruption.

### *The Increase in Golden Crescent Drug Smuggling into Western China*

Chinese law enforcement analysts contend that as opium production in the Golden Crescent region overtook production in the Golden Triangle in the 1990s-2000s, Central Asian drug rings increasingly sought new markets and new shipment routes to move their opium and heroin out of Central Asia. Xinjiang has emerged as one of these routes. In the words of one of these analysts, as illegal drug production in Myanmar and Laos fell, production in the Golden Crescent “climbed steadily year after year” (*zhunian pansheng*; 逐年攀升).<sup>4</sup>

Law enforcement analysts attribute this shifting balance between the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent in part to what they see as the successes of Chinese anti-drug diplomacy in reducing opium production in the Golden Triangle. According to these analysts, since at least the early 1990s, China has cooperated with at least two of the Golden Triangle governments—Myanmar and Laos—to encourage opium growers in the traditional poppy-growing northern regions of these countries to switch to planting other

---

<sup>4</sup> The quote is from Guo Jie and Mei Songlin, “Overall Trends in the Smuggling and Infiltration of ‘Golden Crescent’ Illegal Drugs into Xinjiang” (*Jinxinyue dupin dui Xinjiang zuosi shentou zongti taishi*; 金新月毒品对新疆走私渗透总体态势), *Journal of the Xinjiang Police Officer’s Academy (Xinjiang jingguan gaodeng zhuanke xuexiao xuebao*; 新疆警官高等专科学校学报), January 2009, Vol. 29, Issue No. 1, pp. 8-10; See also Hu Xunmin, “Situational Analysis and Evaluation on China’s Drug Control” (*Zhongguo jindu xingshi fenxi pinggu*; 中国禁毒形势分析评估), *Journal of the Yunnan Police Officer Academy (Yunnan jingguan xuexuan xuebao*; 云南警官学院学报), Issue No. 3, 2010, pp. 13-14; and Li Yanming and Zhang Kun, “Reflections on The Trend of Infiltrating ‘Golden Crescent’ Drugs into Xinjiang and its Investigation” (*Jin xin yue’ Dupin dui Xinjiang Shentou Taishi ji Zhencha Silu*”; 金新月毒品对新疆渗透态势及侦查思路), *Journal of the Xinjiang Police Officer’s Academy (Xinjiang Jingguan Gaodeng Zhuanke Xuexiao Xuebao*; 新疆警官高等专科学校学报), November 2009.

crops. By the end of the 1990s, the acreage sown with poppies in this region had decreased sharply.<sup>5</sup>

Police analysts note that the drawdown in Golden Triangle drug production coincided with an increase in Golden Crescent production, and some analysts believe that the Golden Triangle decline is a direct cause of the Golden Crescent increase. In 1994, according UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) statistics as cited by Chinese police, Afghanistan for the first time surpassed Myanmar in drug production, producing 3,000 metric tons of opium.<sup>6</sup> Between 2005 and 2006 Afghanistan's annual opium production rose nearly 50 percent, from around 4,000 metric tons to a record 6,100 metric tons. In the three years from 2006 through 2008, production totaled more than 22,000 metric tons.<sup>7</sup> In the word of three Xinjiang police scholars, by the late 2000s the Golden Crescent had emerged as the “most serious, ferocious” drug production and shipping region on earth.<sup>8</sup>

Some police analysts argue that the reason Xinjiang became a major destination for trans-shipment and sales is that Afghan and Pakistan-based drug rings began aggressively pursuing new export markets and routes for a large portion of these drugs. As a result, police analysts assert that their counter-narcotics efforts in China's west have come under “enormous pressure” (*juda de yali*; 巨大的压力) from these new sources.<sup>9</sup> These analysts forecast that the rising trend of smuggling Golden Crescent narcotics into western China will continue “for a fairly long time to come.”<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Hu Xunmin (2010); Li Yanming and Zhang Kun (2009).

<sup>6</sup> Hu Xunmin (2010) pg. 11; Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10.

<sup>7</sup> Li Yanming and Zhang Kun (2009); Hu Xunmin (2010), pg. 11. Another article that argues that the decline in Golden Triangle opium planting spurred a dramatic rise in Golden Crescent opium cultivation and trafficking into China is Liu Ting and Wang Haijun, “Research on the Illegal Drug Problem Under the Perspective of Non-Traditional Security” (*Fei chuantong anquan shiyexia de dupin wenti yanjiu*; 非传统安全事业下的毒品问题研究), *Journal of the Yunnan Police Officer Academy (Yunnan jingguan xueyuan xuebao*; 云南警官学院学报), Issue No. 2, 2010, pp. 45-49. See especially pg. 48.

<sup>8</sup> Du Wei, Guo Jie, and Mei Songlin, “The Effect that the ‘Golden Crescent’ Drug Problem is Having on Our Country” (*Lun ‘Jin Xin Yue’ Dupin Wenti Dui Woguo de Yingxiang*; 论‘金新月’毒品问题对我国的影响), *Fazhi yu Shehui* (Legal System and Society), August 2009, pg. 201. In making this statement, these scholars cite statistics from international counternarcotics officials that by 2006, Golden Crescent heroin already accounted for 92 percent of the world's total. Their article contains no footnote to these statistics, which they attribute to the “国际禁毒组织”—literally the “international counternarcotics organization.” A Google search of this Chinese phrase strongly suggests that the term refers to the UN-subordinate International Narcotics Control Board.

<sup>9</sup> Li Yanming and Zhang Kun (2009).

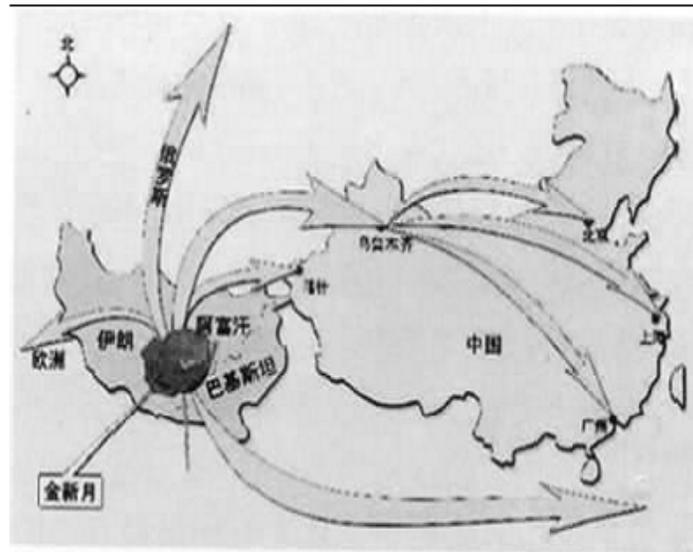
<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Chinese law enforcement specialists devote little attention to other factors that might have contributed to the rapid increase in Afghan drug exports and the emergence of western China as a prominent shipping route. Some analysts briefly note the impact that Afghanistan's long period of war, domestic warlordism, and political and economic collapse had on encouraging drug production. Xinjiang Police Academy analysts Guo Jie and Mei Songlin briefly state that the rise in drug exports was also "spurred by violence [in Afghanistan] and [market] demand."<sup>11</sup> By and large, however, Chinese police analysts emphasize supply-based factors outside of western China as the key drivers for the rapid increase in drug smuggling in the region.

Of note, Chinese law enforcement analyses of Golden Crescent drug

trafficking make little note of the shortcomings of their own law enforcement work as important contributors to increased trafficking. In particular, these writings make no assertion that Chinese law enforcement corruption or unprofessionalism plays an important role in facilitating Golden Crescent trafficking, even though other Chinese law

**Figure One: Chinese Graphic of Golden Crescent Trafficking**



This graphic by a Xinjiang security analyst depicts opium flows out of the region labeled "Golden Crescent." The areas within the "Crescent" are labeled "Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan," with opium flowing out to "Europe," "Russia," and "China" (a large unlabeled arrow heads out to Southeast Asia apparently through India). Within China, drugs are shown flowing to "Kashgar" (smaller arrow), to "Urumqi" (larger arrow), and from Urumqi on to the east coast cities of "Beijing," "Shanghai," and "Guangdong."

Pan Zhiping, "Analysis of Central Asia's Geopolitical Situation (2008-2008)" (June 2010), pg. 39.

<sup>11</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 9-10; Li Yanming and Zhang Kun (2009). Although these law enforcement writings briefly note the impact of war on opium production in Afghanistan, they do not engage in any "finger-pointing" to lay the blame for rising drug production on the US/NATO military operations in Afghanistan. This is in contrast to some Chinese national security analysts with whom the author has had conversations in the past 2-3 years, who blame US/NATO actions in part for causing the Taliban to promote drug production. The Chinese law enforcement writings reviewed for this study also give the Taliban little or no credit for having suppressed opium production during the years when they ruled Afghanistan. When these writings discuss the Taliban at all, they tend to treat the Taliban as an extremist organization engaged in drug trafficking (see Section Five), and not as an organization that has ever had any moral qualms about the production and sale of opium and heroin.

enforcement publications describe corruption by police and local governments as one of the most common contributing factors to drug trafficking and other crimes throughout China.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> A 2009 study on all types of police crimes of “malfeasance of duty” written by a Shanxi police scholar and published by the Chinese People’s Public Security University Press lists counternarcotics police officers as having one of the higher rates of these crimes among all types of police. The book cites specific examples which include corrupt police engaging in drug trafficking. See Guan Shaojing, *Research on Police Crimes of Malfeasance of Duty* (*Jingguan zhiwu fazui yanjiu*; 警官职务犯罪研究), (Beijing, Chinese People’s Public Security University Press, 2009), pp. 36-39; Other examples of police writings on police and local government corruption and other abuses are cited in Murray Scot Tanner and Eric Green, “Principals and Secret Agents: Central vs. Local Control Over Policing and Obstacles to ‘Rule of Law’ in China,” *The China Quarterly*, September 2007, pp. 644-674; Another interesting, but probably non-authoritative source is a June 2010 report in a Sichuan commercial newspaper that includes a purported interview with a Ministry of Public Security Counternarcotics Bureau official, Wang Gang. In this interview, Wang asserts that in 2009 alone, more than 40 county and municipal-level public security officials in charge of counternarcotics investigation bureaus were found guilty of drug-related malfeasance of duty crimes. *Chengdu Commercial Post* (*Chengdu shangbao*; 成都商报) on Sichuan News Network (*Sichuan xinwen wang*; 四川新闻网), June 22, 2010, <http://www.sina.com.cn>.

## **II. Chinese Assessments of the Growing Seriousness of Golden Crescent Drug Trafficking in Relation to China's Overall Illegal Drug Patterns**

This section assesses Chinese perceptions of the growing seriousness of the Golden Crescent drug threat over the past decade and how it compares to China's overall illegal drug problem. Most significantly, analysis of the data indicates that since 2005 Chinese law enforcement analysts and officials have begun to regard Golden Crescent drug trafficking as a major and growing threat to Chinese society. Chinese police data indicate that between 2005 and 2009, Golden Crescent heroin rose from a very small percentage to nearly one-third of all the illegal heroin seized by Chinese police nationwide.

The data also indicate, however, that law enforcement officials may have been late in recognizing the emerging Golden Crescent drug threat, and were still overwhelmingly focused on the Golden Triangle drug threat through the late 1990s-early 2000s. Finally, the police writings analyzed here indicate that Chinese law enforcement analysts have devoted a much more modest level of attention to the smuggling of drug precursor chemicals out of China and into Central Asia.

### ***A Belatedly Recognized Threat?: Trends From the Early 1990s to 2005***

Chinese police analyses of illegal drugs published before about 2005-2006 focused overwhelmingly on the threat of drug trafficking from the Golden Triangle region, and paid far less attention to the Golden Crescent. More recently published police analyses, however, have acknowledged that as early as 1994 Golden Crescent drug production was beginning to rival or surpass production from the Golden Triangle, and that Afghanistan was already emerging as a major drug source. This pattern in the Chinese police analyses may suggest that police analysts were slow to recognize the Golden Crescent as an emerging threat to western China, or that on counternarcotics issues, law enforcement officials were overcommitted to the Golden Triangle region.

Police analyses through at least the late 1990s did not regard Xinjiang's illegal drug problem as anywhere near as severe as that in regions closer to the Golden Triangle, such as Yunnan or Guangdong. These analyses, moreover, judged that most of the illegal drugs in Xinjiang were coming from other domestic sources in China's west, and from foreign sources other than Afghanistan. Xinjiang police analysts report that the region uncovered its first case of drug smuggling from the Golden Crescent as early as June 1991.<sup>13</sup> According to another police journal article, by the early 1990s drug traffickers had already opened a drug transport route to Xinjiang (Kashgar and Ili), to Ningxia and Gansu, and from there on to Shanghai.<sup>14</sup> But Chinese legal officials in the 1990s estimated that only about 10 percent of the drugs coming into Kashgar were coming from

---

<sup>13</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pg. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Hu Xunmin (2010), pg. 13.

the Golden Crescent, while 90 percent were being transported to that city by back routes from the Golden Triangle.<sup>15</sup>

The problem of drugs coming from the Golden Crescent into Xinjiang was also treated as a secondary threat in a carefully-researched and influential 1999 police study of drug crime trends written by a senior police scholar at the Chinese People's Public Security University in Beijing (China's national police academy). Although this study, which was directly supported by the Ministry of Public Security, reported on regional drug trends nationwide, its major emphasis continued to be on the Golden Triangle.<sup>16</sup>

Between 1991 and 2004, Xinjiang law enforcement officials cracked more than 20 cases involving illegal drugs from the Golden Crescent. Available Chinese police publications, however, do not provide a clear year-by-year statistical breakdown that would permit us to determine exactly when smuggling cases from the Golden Crescent really took off. They also cite only the following aggregate figures concerning the quantity of illegal drugs from the Golden Crescent region that Xinjiang authorities seized during this period:

- 127.550 kilos of heroin, opium, and marijuana (*mayan*; 麻烟)<sup>17</sup>
- 800,000 tabs of the psychoactive drug amfepramone (*jingshen yaopin anfeilatong*; 精神药品安非拉酮).<sup>18</sup>

Although no data are available that would permit Western analysts to evaluate whether the amfepramone seized is a large share of the national total, available data on heroin and opium seizures suggest this seizure was only a very small percentage of the national total.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 13-14.

<sup>16</sup> This scholar provides a detailed breakdown on drug crime cases in Xinjiang during this period. He reports that during the four and a half years between 1990 and late 1994, Xinjiang authorities had handled only 29 drug cases—about six per year—and detained 58 persons for trafficking. During that time, police seized a total of just 8.2 kilos of heroin, 24.5 kilos of opium, and 118 kilos of marijuana. Illegal trafficking of Ma Huang (ephedra) was also a significant problem at this time. But according to this scholar, most of these drugs came into Xinjiang not from Afghanistan but by highway from Sichuan, Tibet, Gansu, and Qinghai. He reported that the main foreign source of these drugs was Nepal. See Cui Min, *Drug Crimes: Their Development Trends and Countermeasures for Halting Them* (*Dupin fazhui: fazhan qushi yu e'zhi duice*; 毒品犯罪发展趋势与遏制对策), (Beijing: Police Officers Educational Press, 1999), pp. 252-253, 256. Cui is a senior professor of criminal investigation at the Chinese People's Public Security University, and his book is apparently regarded as one of the most influential Chinese police studies of China's drug problem. The book is a comprehensive and detailed analysis of China's drug problems, and is widely cited by many of the police analysts whose work is used in this study. The book indicates it was produced with official support under China's National Social Science Support Program and the Ministry of Public Security's Ministry-Level Research Program.

<sup>17</sup> Statistics and types of drugs as quoted in Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009). This source does not break down how much of each type of drug was seized.

<sup>18</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pg. 9.

<sup>19</sup> According to Chinese government statistics cited in Hu Xunmin (2010) page 10, between 1991 and 2004 Chinese police seized a total of more than 88 metric tons of heroin nationwide and 22 metric tons of opium

### *Changing Trends Since 2005*

Since 2005, Chinese reports of Golden Crescent drug cases in Xinjiang spiked dramatically. From 2005 to October 2007, Chinese authorities reported cracking a total of 267 cases involving illegal drugs that had come in from the region.<sup>20</sup> Xinjiang police report that the number of Golden Crescent-affiliated drug cases they solved rose from 9 in 2005, to 24 in 2006, to 29 in 2007. The number of suspects detained increased from 14 in 2005 to 76 in 2006, and then fell to 50 in 2007. Of the 50 suspects detained that year, police report that 29 were foreign citizens, although their nationalities are not noted. These totals still constitute a small portion of all drug arrests in China during these years. Far more noteworthy is the increase in the volume of heroin seized, which shot up from 14.215 kilos in 2005 to more than 147 kilos just two years later. Although this total was still just a small portion of nationwide heroin seizures, it was also a first sign of more rapid increases in heroin seizures to come in subsequent years.<sup>21</sup>

Among the cases solved during this period, police analysts highlight one incident on the Chinese-Pakistani border in September 2008. A People's Armed Police (PAP) border defense brigade (*zongdui*; 总队) inspection station in Kunjerab (Hongqilapu (红其拉甫) in Chinese) was carrying out a counternarcotics enforcement campaign and discovered 17 kilos of illegal drugs inside a passenger car crossing the border from Pakistan. This single haul amounted to more than twice the total amount of heroin seized in Xinjiang from 1990 to 1994. Two Xinjiang Police College scholars who wrote about the case clearly regarded this single incident as a landmark, and observed that "from this case we can clearly see the seriousness of the trend of smuggling and infiltrating Golden Crescent illegal drugs into Xinjiang."<sup>22</sup>

In the past, traffickers have used Xinjiang overwhelmingly as a transfer point to move drugs to other parts of China such as Guangdong or Shanghai. And Xinjiang continues to be a major conduit for moving drugs to eastern China. According to these analysts, traffickers in the Golden Crescent in recent years have favored four major international routes to get their drugs out of Afghanistan to world markets. As a result of the increase in drug trafficking through Xinjiang in recent years, Xinjiang has emerged as one of those four major international routes.<sup>23</sup>

---

nationwide (Hu does not cite year-on-year marijuana statistics). The combined 1991-2004 Golden Crescent figure for heroin, opium, and marijuana cited above is less than one ton.

<sup>20</sup> Du Wei, Guo Jie, and Mei Songlin (2009), pg. 201.

<sup>21</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10.

<sup>22</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10.

<sup>23</sup> These analysts did not identify the other three, but other Chinese police writings suggest they may include routes through India, Kazakhstan, and Russia, and/or Iran, the Southern Caucasus, and Turkey.

But police analysts also contend that in addition to transporting drugs through Xinjiang, traffickers are now also increasingly treating Xinjiang as a final distribution and consumption market for their drugs arriving from the Golden Crescent. These analysts attribute this change in behavior to the length of time it can take to complete these transfers. They note that “if the time spent waiting becomes too long, then [the drugs] end up being consumed” (*jiu dai lai xiaofei*; 久带来消费).<sup>24</sup> As a result, one group of police analysts now describe Xinjiang as “bearing the brunt of the attack” in China’s ongoing efforts to stop trafficking from the Golden Crescent. They characterize the current illegal drug situation in the Golden Crescent and Central Asia region as “constituting an ongoing and present threat to Xinjiang.”<sup>25</sup>

### *A Rapidly Growing Part of China’s Overall Drug Problem*

Chinese police reports and official statistical data indicate that over the past decade, Golden Crescent-sourced drugs have come to constitute an increasingly large percentage of all illegal drugs seized by Chinese authorities. Indeed, this trend has accelerated very rapidly in just the past four to five years. In an article that was published as recently as 2009, three Xinjiang police analysts characterized the “overall amount of drugs coming across the [Central Asian] border” as “not that great” (*dupin..zongliang hai bu da*; 毒品...总量还不大) and as constituting “a relatively small percentage of the total amount of heroin seized in the country.” But they also stated that these imports were increasing at a “rather fierce” rate.<sup>26</sup>

By combining available Ministry of Public Security (MPS) statistics on heroin seizures nationwide with the data on Golden Crescent heroin reported by Xinjiang police analysts, we have generated some estimates on what proportion of all Chinese heroin seizures involve heroin from the Golden Crescent, and how much this proportion has changed over time. These statistics indicate that in just the past several years, Golden Crescent heroin has risen markedly from an almost inconsequential percentage of all heroin confiscated by Chinese authorities to constituting a very large share.

- **2005—less than 1 percent:** The MPS reports that in 2005 Chinese officials seized a total of 6.9 metric tons of heroin nationwide. Xinjiang police analysts report that Chinese police confiscated just 14.2 kilos (0.0142 tons) of Golden Crescent heroin in 2005—equivalent to less than 1 percent of heroin seizures nationally.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Du Wei, Guo Jie, and Mei Songlin (2009), pg. 201.

<sup>25</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10.

<sup>26</sup> Du Wei, Guo Jie, and Mei Songlin (2009), pg. 201. Given the official data reported in the following paragraphs of this report, it seems likely that Du, Guo, and Mei had not seen nationwide data more recent than 2008 or even 2007 when they drafted their analysis.

<sup>27</sup> The national figures are from Hu Xunmin (2010), pp. 6-15. The Golden Crescent figures are from Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-9.

- **2006—rapid increase, but still just over 1 percent:** In 2006 Golden Crescent-sourced heroin seizures more than quadrupled over the 2005 rate, to more than 65 kilos (0.065 tons). As a percentage of the nationwide total, this was 5.5 times higher than in 2005, but it was still equivalent to just over 1 percent of the 5.8 metric tons of heroin confiscated nationally that year.<sup>28</sup>
- **2007—more than 3 percent:** In 2007 the MPS reported that police nationwide had seized 4.6 metric tons of heroin—a nearly 20 percent decline from the amount seized during 2006. Reported amounts of Golden Crescent-sourced heroin seized by police, however, more than doubled from the previous year, to 147.4 kilos (0.147 tons), causing Golden Crescent heroin to increase to 3.2 percent of all heroin seizures nationwide.<sup>29</sup>
- **2008—closing in on 10 percent:** Police statistics reported in the MPS’s annual National Counternarcotics Reports indicate that for the entire year of 2008, China seized 4.33 metric tons of heroin, with 8.8 percent of that coming from the Golden Crescent.<sup>30</sup>
- **2009—MPS estimates 30 percent:** The MPS’s 2010 Counternarcotics Report noted an explosion in seizures of Golden Crescent heroin: “In 2009, our country all totaled seized 1.5 metric tons of ‘Golden Crescent’ drugs, which exceeded by double the total amount of ‘Golden Crescent’ heroin that we had seized in the preceding four years; and the amount of ‘Golden Crescent’ heroin we have seized as a percentage of all the heroin we seized has increased from 8.8 per cent in 2008 to 30 per cent in 2009.”<sup>31</sup>

In summing up this rapid increase, the MPS’s 2010 Counternarcotics Report underscored the growing scale and sophistication of the threat:

In recent years, the scale of drugs infiltrated into our country from [the Golden Crescent], and methods used, have clearly gone up a level (*minxian shengji*; 明显升级). At the same time that there has been no decline in small-scale infiltration such as using airline routes and concealment in people’s bodies, there has been an increase in the use of concealment within shipping containers, transport via open maritime shipping, and large volume smuggling, and the danger to our country has clearly increased.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> The national figures are from Hu Xunmin (2010), pp. 6-15. The Golden Crescent figures are from Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-9.

<sup>29</sup> The national figures are from Hu Xunmin (2010), pp. 6-15. The Golden Crescent figures are from Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-9.

<sup>30</sup> *China National Counternarcotics Report 2010 (2010 nian Zhongguo Jindu Baogao; 2010 年中国禁毒报告)*, June 28, 2010, accessed at the Ministry of Public Security website, [www.mps.gov.cn](http://www.mps.gov.cn).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

This section of the 2010 China National Counternarcotics Report clearly indicates that China now regards the drug threat from the Golden Crescent—in particular the heroin threat—as one of the premier challenges to its counternarcotics efforts. Its wording also reflects police concerns that traffickers not only are increasing the volume of drugs shipped, but also might be improving their techniques faster than law enforcement officials can respond.

### ***Drug Flows in the Other Direction: Smuggling Precursors Out of China into Central Asia***

The bulk of Chinese police writing about the Golden Crescent focuses on the shipment of illegal drugs *from* the Golden Crescent *into* China. But some police publications also note that the rise in Golden Crescent drug production has spurred an increase in criminals on the Chinese side smuggling (presumably Chinese-made) chemicals that can be used as precursors in illegal drug production out of China and into Afghanistan and Central Asia.<sup>33</sup> The UNODC has recognized this trend for several years and describes it as serious.<sup>34</sup>

According to Chinese police analysts, in the late 1990s drug gangs in the Golden Crescent began turning to criminals within Xinjiang to purchase and export large quantities of precursors, in particular the chemicals required to produce heroin. They report that historically, Golden Crescent gangs had relied primarily upon illegal suppliers in India, Russia, Turkey, and other countries in the region to obtain acetic anhydride and related precursors. After these countries tightened their regulation of precursor chemicals, these gangs turned to western China for additional supplies. In December 1996, for example, some Pakistani businessmen reportedly arranged a deal to purchase 98 metric tons of acetic anhydride from sources in Shanghai, Jilin, Zhejiang, and Xinjiang, which they attempted to ship out of China illegally—presumably back to Pakistan—using fraudulent certificates. Some 27 metric tons were stopped and seized by Chinese customs authorities on the China-Pakistan border at Hongqilapu, Xinjiang—at that time China’s largest ever precursor chemical seizure.<sup>35</sup>

All totaled, Chinese authorities report seizing more than 66 metric tons of the heroin precursor acetic anhydride (*cusuangan*; 醋酸酐) that traffickers were attempting to smuggle out of Xinjiang between 1991 and 2004.<sup>36</sup> Although precise nationwide figures on total precursors seized during this period are not available, the figures that are

---

<sup>33</sup> Cui Min (1999), pg. 257; Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10

<sup>34</sup> United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Targeting Precursors Used in Heroin Manufacture: Outline Action Plan* (2007), esp. pg. 5, available at [www.unodc.org/.../Microsoft%20Word%20-%20red\\_paper\\_%20no%20maps%20v%20May%2007.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/.../Microsoft%20Word%20-%20red_paper_%20no%20maps%20v%20May%2007.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> Cui Min (1999), pg. 257.

<sup>36</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10.

available suggest that the amount of precursors seized in Xinjiang does not constitute more than a few percent of all such chemicals confiscated nationwide.<sup>37</sup>

Chinese police analyses reviewed for this study, however, were unanimous in perceiving a terrific increase in drug trafficking from Afghanistan and Pakistan in the past six years, and in believing that their counternarcotics operations are facing a major challenge of increasing complexity. The next section of this study examines how Chinese police analysts assess the increasing challenge that these changing drug smuggling patterns pose for law enforcement operations.

---

<sup>37</sup> Although nationwide figures on the total amount of precursors seized during 1991-2004 are not available, we do have access to the figures for most of this period, the years 1992-2004. During those years, Chinese officials seized a total of 2,447 metric tons of precursors (all types). The 66 metric tons of acetic anhydride seized in Xinjiang during 1991-2004 would only constitute about 2.7 percent of this nationwide total. The MPS data on precursors seized 1992-2004 are from Hu Xunmin (2009), pg. 7.

### III. Chinese Analysis of Key Drug Shipment Routes

This section analyzes police research on the major highway, air, and railway shipment routes that Golden Crescent traffickers use to move drugs into Xinjiang.<sup>38</sup> Chinese police writings indicate that some of the most popular Golden Crescent smuggling routes are highway, air and rail routes through Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan into Xinjiang. These police analyses imply that China may be facing a significant problem in its law enforcement cooperation with these four important neighbors and security partners if these countries are failing to effectively fight trafficking into China across their territory. These drugs are shipped primarily into Kashgar and Urumqi before they are either transshipped to Guangzhou, Shanghai, and Beijing, or are sold in western China.<sup>39</sup> Law enforcement analysts differ, sometimes greatly, in their estimates of the relative volume of drugs that are shipped by air, rail, and highway routes as avenues for moving drugs into Xinjiang.<sup>40</sup> Law enforcement officials already see signs of traffickers adapting their routes in response to police efforts to better control the borders. Moreover, as growing Chinese-Central Asian economic ties expand, the number and variety of transport links from western China into Central Asia will further increase, and heighten the challenges faced by Chinese counternarcotics officials.

#### *China's Recent Recognition of Central Asian Shipping Routes*

Less than a decade ago, some Chinese police analysts treated shipment routes from Central Asia as secondary compared to the several key shipping routes from the Golden Triangle. Writing in 2002, a Gansu provincial police drug enforcement analyst identified three major cross-border routes for large-scale drug smuggling into China, all of which crossed the border from the Golden Triangle into Yunnan rather than from the Golden Crescent into Xinjiang. The analyst listed these major drug-smuggling routes coming in through Yunnan, and then noted, almost as an afterthought, one route entering through Xinjiang and going on to China's large east coast cities.

In 1998, nationwide, there were 119 large scale drug cases in which ten kilograms<sup>41</sup> or more of heroin were seized, and of these, nearly 100 cases were in China's southwestern region...The southwest region's large scale drug networks are already basically formed. Of these, there are three major routes: One is from Yunnan—to Guangxi—to Guangdong. One is from Yunnan—to Sichuan—to Shaanxi—to Gansu. And one is from Yunnan to Chongqing or Yunnan to Guizhou. There is also a route that goes from Xinjiang—to Gansu—to Shanghai

---

<sup>38</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Instead of using the more common Chinese expression for kilograms, the Chinese unit of measure here is literally ten-thousand grams (*wan ke*; 万克).

and Guangzhou and other places. In Gansu, places such as Lanzhou, and Linxia are also turning into centers for illegal drug processing, distribution and sales, and trans-shipment.<sup>42</sup>

But Chinese police now assert that Golden Crescent drug traffickers move growing volumes of heroin and other drugs into China via highway, rail, and air links not only directly from Afghanistan and Pakistan, but also via the former Soviet Central Asian republics and even from the Middle East.<sup>43</sup>

### *Highway Routes*

A 2009 Xinjiang Public Security Academy article stressed public highways through Xinjiang's western border entry points as major drug-smuggling routes. The authors report that since 2000, Xinjiang's Border Defense, Customs, and other departments have uncovered more than 20 cases of drug smuggling through border entry points via public highways.<sup>44</sup>

These Xinjiang analysts stress five major public highway routes that are used extensively by drug smugglers:

- From Pakistan—to Kunjerab / Hongqilapu (红其拉甫) border pass—to Kashgar (*Kashi*; 喀什)—to Urumqi.
- From Tajikistan—to Karasu (*Kalasu*; 卡拉苏)—to Kashgar (*Kashi*; 喀什)—to Urumqi.
- From Kyrgyzstan—to Tuergate (吐尔尕特)—to Kashgar—to Urumqi
- From Kyrgyzstan—to Irkeshtam [also spelled Ilkshtam, Ilkstan]<sup>45</sup> (*Yierkeshidan*; 伊尔克什坦)—to Kashgar—to Urumqi.
- From Bishkek (*Bishekaike*; 比什凯克) to Urumqi.<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Xu Yongsheng, "An Cursory Discussion of the Grim Trend of Illegal Drug Crimes in the Southwest Region and of the Policy Direction in Counternarcotics" (*Shi lun Xibu diqu dupin fazui de yanjun xingshi ji Jindu Fanlue*; 试论西部地区毒品犯罪的严峻形势及金毒反略), in China Criminal Law Society, ed., *A Collection of Essays on Public Security Work During the Policy of the Great Opening Up the Western Region (Xibu Da Kaifa yu Gong'an Gongzuo Lunwenji*; 西部大开发与公安工作论文集), (Beijing: Chinese People's Public Security University Press, 2002), pp. 410-418. This quote is on page 411.

<sup>43</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>45</sup> A Chinese government website notes that the highway port of Ilkshtan: "is opened for the last ten days of every month. It is anticipated that annually 300,000 [tons of] goods and 200,000 people can pass the port after the port has been built." <http://www.xjdcp.gov.cn/english/environment/p-Ilkshtan.htm>.

<sup>46</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10.

**Map Two: Major Chinese Highway and Rail Ports Used by Drug Smugglers**



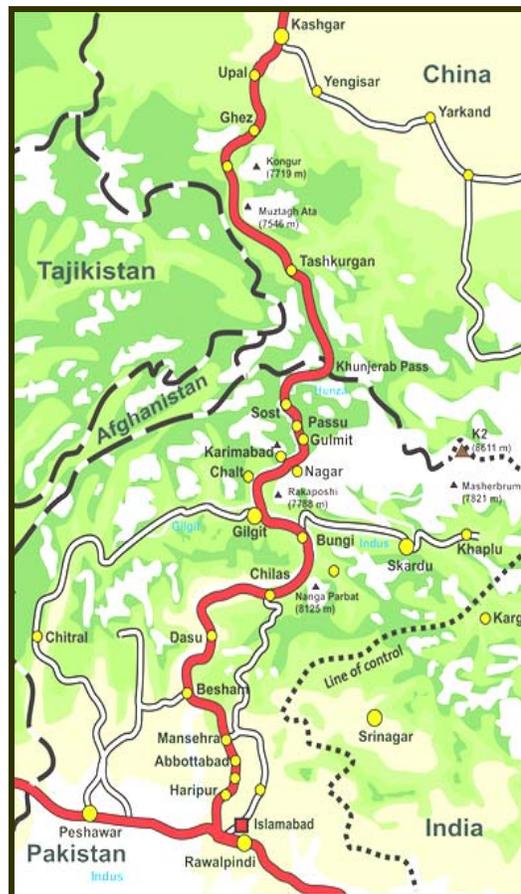
Some police articles report that a key border entry points for drug smugglers has been the Kunjerab Pass (also spelled “Khunjerab” or “Konjirap”) through the Chinese border post of Hongqilapu along the Karakorum Highway that transits the China-Pakistan border. Analysts stress recent efforts by Golden Crescent traffickers to establish new routes into China, and emphasize Kunjerab, where authorities have seized illegal drugs coming in

from Pakistan on numerous occasions. In the words of border police specialists writing in 2009:

In recent years, drug production in the Golden Crescent has increased terrifically...Drug-smuggling rings outside of our borders are plotting to open-up drug routes to enter China, and the border crossing at Hongqilapu [across from Kunjerab] in particular is one of their top land routes.<sup>47</sup>

In recent years, according to one police journal, the border inspection post at Hongqilapu has detained 14 persons for smuggling drugs, although they only note having seized a total of 22.6 kilos of heroin. Traffickers have hidden heroin in numerous articles, including porcelain and other handicraft gifts, plastic containers, luggage, and car bodies.<sup>48</sup> Police journals have spotlighted some large arrests and confiscations at this station in recent years:

- According to two Xinjiang Police Academy academics: “On October 5, 2006, the Customs Department in Kunjerab, while doing an inspection of some goods being brought across the border from Pakistan, seized 6.406 kilos of heroin concealed in 12,384 bottles within ten cases of depilatory cream.”<sup>49</sup>
- Another article reports that this border post’s largest-ever seizure occurred on September 20, 2008, when police discovered 17.39 kilograms of what they termed “high purity” heroin hidden within the air conditioning system of a Pakistani car attempting to cross the border.<sup>50</sup>



**Map Three: The Karakorum Highway**

<sup>47</sup> Li Demo, Zu Fangfang, Liu Hang, and Liu Zhangguo, “Cutting Off the Golden Crescent” (*Zujie Jinxinyue*; 阻截金新月), *Frontier Defense Police China*, January 2009, pp. 58-59. Hongqilapu’s role as a drug smuggling entry port is also noted by Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 9-10.

<sup>48</sup> Li Demo et al. (2009), pp. 58-59.

<sup>49</sup> The original Chinese on this report is “cangni zai 10 xiang tuomaoshuang neide 12,384 ping dupin hailuoyin 6.406 qianke; 藏匿在 10 箱脱毛霜内的 12,384 瓶毒品海洛因 6.406 千克.” See Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10.

<sup>50</sup> Li Demo et al. (2009), pp. 58-59.

China has reportedly sought and obtained additional support from Pakistan to deal with trafficking through the Karakoram Highway. In 2008, for example, Pakistan reportedly deployed unspecified “special forces” to the town of Sost (Sust), one of the last major Pakistani towns on the Karakoram Highway before the Kunjerab/Hongqilapu border post, to help prevent criminals from smuggling drugs across the border. The journal reports that these forces have much more strictly searched goods and persons crossing the border.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Railway Routes***

Two Xinjiang Public Security Academy scholars have summarized the two major railway routes through which illegal drugs have been shipped from Central Asia into Xinjiang in recent years:

At present, there are two international railway lines that transit Xinjiang—one route is via the Western Spur of the Lanzhou-Xinjiang Railway in our country and the connecting line in Kazakstan; that is, from Urumqi through Alashankou to the Kazakh capital of Almaty all the way to the end of the line in Rotterdam (*Lutedan*; 鹿特丹) in Holland. The second route is the Asia-Europe Railway (*di er tiao ya ou tielu*; 第二条亚欧铁路). On March 25 2001 the Customs Service in Alashankou seized 2.95 kilos of heroin on an international train on this line; the drug traffickers confessed that they had already transported 9 kilos across the Chinese border on four previous trips.<sup>52</sup>

Researchers at the Ministry of Public Security’s Railway Police College in Zhengzhou, Henan, have devoted significant research to uncovering these major rail trans-shipment routes, and some of their writings publicly identify specific train routes and numbers favored by drug smugglers.<sup>53</sup> According to a senior scholar at the college, smugglers moving drugs by rail typically use passenger trains T948 or T8874 through Kashgar on to Urumqi, or they take an international through train to Urumqi. From Urumqi, smugglers

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10.

<sup>53</sup> See for example Jia Yongsheng, “Research on Illegal Drug Detection Methods by Railway Police” (*Tielu shengjing chaji dupin fangfa yanjiu*; 铁路乘警察及毒品方法研究), *Journal of the Railway Police College (Tielu jingguan gaodeng zhuanke xuexiao xuebao*; 铁路警官高等专科学校学报), 2010, Issue No. 3, pp. 20-29; Cao Zhe, “A Humble Opinion on the Characteristics of Railway Drug Transshipment Cases and Countermeasures for Dealing with them” (*Chuyi woguo tielu yunshu dupin anjian de tedian yu duice*; 刍议我国铁路运输毒品案件的特点与对策), *Journal of the Xinjiang Police Officer’s Academy (Xinjiang jingguan gaodeng zhuanke xuexiao xuebao*; 新疆警官高等专科学校学报). November 2009, Volume 29, Issue No. 4, pp. 20-22. Jia Yongsheng is an associate professor and director of the Railway Police Affairs Research Institute at the Railway Police College, and Cao Zhe is a lecturer at the Railway Police College. The Railway Police College was established in 1950 and is subordinate to the Ministry of Public Security.

may transfer to trains T70, T54, or T193 on to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, or other regions.<sup>54</sup>

There appears to be some difference of opinion among police analysts concerning the importance of railway lines as a shipment route. Writing in 2009, two Xinjiang Police Academy professors asserted that “by looking at the situation of Golden Crescent drug smuggling cases cracked in Xinjiang in recent years, we can see that the use of railroad lines to smuggle drugs has not been especially prominent.”<sup>55</sup> But a scholar at China’s Railway Police College apparently disagrees with this assessment, noting that because rail is “convenient, quick and direct, has masses of people, and has relatively densely concentrated passengers,” drug smugglers “have always seen railway trans-shipment of illegal drugs as a convenient route.”<sup>56</sup>

But even analysts who question the importance of railway trafficking overall express concern that a newly opened China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan rail extension will present new challenges for law enforcement. In the words of two Xinjiang Public Security Academy scholars:

Another route is the Southern Xinjiang Railway’s western extension project’s China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railroad (*zhongjiwu tielu*; 中吉乌铁路). Once it has opened, this will inevitably become a new problem that Xinjiang will encounter in trying to investigate and shut down the smuggling of drugs across the border.<sup>57</sup>

Railway Police College scholars have also tried to uncover the profiles of drug smugglers who use international railway lines. According to their research, smugglers from foreign countries who use Chinese railway lines tend to come from the same few locations. These scholars note that this may be because others from a region who see a smuggler succeed and rake in substantial profits are tempted to engage in the same behavior (Although these scholars do not say so, this motivation could presumably apply to smugglers who transit by air or highway as well).<sup>58</sup>

Another scholar from the Railway Police College sees a trend toward increased use of female smugglers, at least in China’s Yunnan region. It is unclear from this scholar’s

---

<sup>54</sup> Jia Yongsheng, “Research on Illegal Drug Detection Methods by Railway Police” (*Tielu shengjing chaji dupin fangfa yanjiu*; 铁路乘警察及毒品方法研究), *Journal of the Railway Police College (Tielu jingguan gaodeng zhuanke xuexiao xuebao*; 铁路警官高等专科学校学报), 2010, Issue No. 3, pg. 20.

<sup>55</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10.

<sup>56</sup> Jia Yongsheng (2010), pg 20.

<sup>57</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10. This appears to be a reference to a future railway link from Xinjiang through Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Afghanistan on into Iran. From Iran this railway would link to railways through Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and on to Europe based on a “Trans-Asia Railway” (TAR) network sponsored by the United Nations. “Tajik, China, Iran, Afghan, Kyrgyz ministers sign declaration to build railway.” Dushanbe Tajik Television First Channel, October 29, 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Jia Yongsheng (2010), pg 20.

writing whether or not this trend toward increasing use of women also applies to the Golden Crescent as well. Citing MPS statistics, this scholar notes that in 1998, out of all the railway drug smugglers detained by police in the Kunming (Yunnan) Railway Police office, about 16.8 percent were female. By ten years later (2008), that figure had nearly doubled, to upward of 30 percent of all smugglers detained.<sup>59</sup> These same MPS figures estimate that about 70 percent of all drug smugglers either are unemployed or are peasant farmers, and that most of them under 35 years old.<sup>60</sup>

### *Air Routes*

Xinjiang public security analysts report that since about 2005, airport security officials in Urumqi, Kashgar, and other airports in Xinjiang have “continually” uncovered and confiscated illegal drugs that were being transported by air from Kabul, Afghanistan, directly into China, or via flights into China from Islamabad, Peshawar, Lahore, or even Dubai.

Between June and September of 2005, Xinjiang police at the Urumqi International Airport and the Kashgar International Airport cracked five cases of smuggling illegal drugs, detaining 12 suspects, and seizing 6.5 kilos of heroin, all of which were being brought in by persons flying in from Islamabad (*Yisilanbao*; 伊斯兰堡) and Peshawar (*Baishawa*; 白沙瓦) in Pakistan. The air routes from Islamabad and Peshawar in Pakistan to Urumqi and Kashgar have become a keypoint air route involved in drugs. At the same time, drugs have been repeatedly discovered being smuggled into Xinjiang from such airports as Karachi and Lahore in Pakistan, Kabul in Afghanistan, and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.<sup>61</sup>

According to these analysts, beginning in 2007, international drug smuggling groups responded to a wave of counternarcotics crackdowns and arrests in the airports noted above by developing new air routes. Many of these have gone through intermediary countries in Central Asia or even the Middle East. One of the new preferred routes is from Dushanbe in Tajikistan to Xinjiang.

During just the period from June 11 to June 28 2008 the Urumqi Customs Bureau Anti-Smuggling Departments discovered three cases of moving drugs from Dushanbe to Urumqi, detaining 3 people and seizing 10.167 kilos of heroin. Moreover, the mode of transport for moving the drugs was in each case stowing the drugs in the carry-on luggage rack (*xinglixiang jiaceng*; 行李箱夹层).<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> Cao Zhe (2009), pg. 20.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

## *Summary*

Law enforcement analyses of air trafficking routes and the profiles of railway-bound smugglers make clear that even though drug trafficking from the Golden Crescent is relatively new, Chinese authorities are already seeing signs that traffickers are capable of adapting their routes and methods in response to China's border policing operations. In addition, as the new railway route connecting China to both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan demonstrates, China's transport links with Central Asia are expanding rapidly in response to the increasing economic links between China and Central Asia. Chinese law enforcement analysts appear to recognize that as the number and variety of these transport links expand, they will inevitably heighten the challenges faced by Chinese counternarcotics officials.

## IV. Chinese Assessments of Problems in Counternarcotics Work

This section examines five major challenges that Chinese law enforcement officials and analysts claim they are facing as they try to cope with the rise in Golden Crescent drug trafficking into China. Most significantly, analysis of the data indicates that law enforcement officials feel their counternarcotics intelligence work, particularly their sources in Central Asia, has not provided them with adequate or timely information. Law enforcement officials and analysts are also troubled by what they see as the growing sophistication in trafficker techniques, and they are having difficulty coping with the increasing national and linguistic diversity of the traffickers they are encountering (the Chinese label this trend “internationalization”). As a result of these problems, law enforcement officials feel they are increasingly stuck in a reactive or passive position vis-à-vis the drug traffickers.

### *Increasing “Internationalization” of Drug Traffickers*

Some Xinjiang law enforcement analysts believe their work is increasingly challenged by several shifts in the organization of this traffic, which they describe under the umbrella term “internationalization.” These analysts contend that large-scale international drug-smuggling rings have increasingly come to dominate the drug traffic into western China. These international rings have supplanted what used to be the common practice of small-scale, piecemeal drug trafficking that police more typically encountered during the 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>63</sup> Instead, Chinese law enforcement analysts indicate that these large-scale international rings are employing persons to transport the drug who come from a much more diverse array of national and linguistic backgrounds. Moreover, law enforcement experts see international drug rings increasingly linking up with domestic Chinese drug traffickers, who trans-ship these drugs from Kashgar and Urumqi in Xinjiang on to the major cities of China’s east coast—Shanghai, Beijing, and especially Guangzhou. From there the drugs are either sold domestically or are further processed (often by Africans, according to one article), or are shipped back out of China, and sold by gangs operating in Southeast Asia.<sup>64</sup>

An article by two Xinjiang Police Academy scholars stresses the problems that the growing linguistic diversity of drug smugglers coming into Xinjiang is creating for the police there.<sup>65</sup> The authors assert that Central Asians and Africans—especially

---

<sup>63</sup> These same police analysts address the increasing scale and changing organization of Golden Crescent trafficking in somewhat more detail in another recent article: Du Wei, Guo Jie, and Mei Songlin, “The Effect that the ‘Golden Crescent’ Drug Problem is Having on Our Country” (*Lun ‘Jin Xin Yue’ Dupin Wenti Dui Woguo de Yingxiang*; 论 ‘金新月’ 毒品问题对我国的影响), *Fazhi yu Shehui (Legal System and Society)*, August 2009, pg. 201. See also Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10.

<sup>64</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pg. 10.

<sup>65</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10.

Nigerians—are playing an increasing role in smuggling drugs into and back out of China. By 2006, they report, the largest share of the foreign drug smugglers encountered by Xinjiang police were from Pakistan and Nigeria. Others came from Afghanistan and the other Central Asian countries, Ghana and other African states, and Southeast Asia.<sup>66</sup> This increased diversity is creating serious linguistic obstacles for Chinese police in their investigations and interrogations. The authors see this “internationalization” of traffickers as a calculated move by international drug gangs. These scholars complain that what they call the increasingly “obscure” languages spoken by these traffickers are “deliberately creating a linguistic obstacle to prevent [traffickers] from confessing” their crimes. They are “delaying the progress of [our] interrogations, and setting up barriers to in-depth investigation of cases.”<sup>67</sup>

Xinjiang Deputy Public Security Chief Li Yanming echoes this frustration with the challenges his police are encountering because of their weak foreign language skills. Li and his co-author report that getting foreign language translation related to Golden Crescent cases has been difficult, and as a result, “the quality of our interrogations has not been high, and this has undermined the forcefulness of our investigations.”<sup>68</sup> A related problem is that the foreign suspects they have captured who were involved in Golden Crescent trafficking cases were, for the most part, just the “mules” who actually moved the drugs, and police have not yet been able to deal a serious blow to the entire network across the border in Central Asia.<sup>69</sup>

### ***Growing Sophistication of Traffickers***

Law enforcement officials and analysts also assert that drug traffickers are demonstrating increasing sophistication in concealing, processing, and packaging drugs that transit the Chinese border. They believe this sophistication is increasingly reflected in the methods traffickers use to conceal drugs inside the bodies of human “mules,” within the frames of vehicles, and among large shipments of commercial commodities. Xinjiang Public Security Academy scholars Guo Jie and Mei Songlin note what they call the increasingly “professional” quality of drug packaging used by traffickers, including packaging that is resistant to detection and physical deterioration as it is carried within the human body.

Law enforcement analysts report that they are also seeing signs of constant adaptability in the techniques used by Golden Crescent drug smugglers, similar to the changes in transport links that were noted in the previous section. One analyst notes that traffickers are constantly making “active inquiries” concerning “the investigatory and inspection methods and tactics used by [Chinese] departments” so that they can alter their techniques to avoid detection.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Li Yanming and Zhang Kun (2009).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Guo Jie and Mei Songlin (2009), pp. 8-10.

### *The Rise in Domestic Drug Networks, Especially Among Xinjiang Citizens*

Some police scholars have also increasingly conceded that large networks of Xinjiang citizens are playing an increasing role in trafficking Golden Crescent drugs throughout China. Xinjiang Public Security Academy scholars Guo Jie and Mei Songlin, for example, cite nationwide and provincial figures that indicate a sharp increase in the number of Xinjiang residents who have been arrested for trafficking in other provinces from 2000 onward. They attribute this trend to a variety of factors, including economic difficulties in China's impoverished interior, ethnic tensions, and recidivism and drug addiction among ex-criminals.

### *Problems with Counternarcotics Intelligence and Police "Reactiveness"*

In an especially frank 2009 article, Xinjiang Public Security Deputy Chief Li Yanming criticized what he called the "reactiveness" and "passivity" of China's efforts to block Golden Crescent drugs from entering Chinese territory at the border.<sup>71</sup> Li expressed frustration that police have not seized the initiative and uncovered a large number of cases that shed light on the underlying management operations of Golden Crescent narcotics trafficking. Specifically, he complained that police had not identified trafficking networks and shut them down at their source in Central Asia. In Li's words, "The current investigatory model on which we still rely—that of 'when there is a case, we discuss that case'—is clearly inadequate to the trends in the struggle against illegal drugs."<sup>72</sup>

According to Li and other officials and analysts, weak counternarcotics intelligence work is one of the major reasons that police find themselves in this "passive position."<sup>73</sup> Li and his co-author, police scholar Zhang Kun, contend that police forces must "strengthen intelligence work" in order to "grasp the initiative in the attack on 'Golden Crescent' region drug smuggling activities."<sup>74</sup> In their words, it is the "universally acknowledged experience" of the world's police forces as well as China's police that to do successful counter-narcotics work, "intelligence work must be in the vanguard." Xinjiang public security analysts contend that they must improve several dimensions of their intelligence work, including both foreign and domestic information gathering.<sup>75</sup>

Li and Zhang are especially harsh in criticizing China's clandestine and overseas counternarcotics intelligence work, describing the information that police receive as

---

<sup>71</sup> Li Yanming and Zhang Kun (2009).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, pg. 18.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* For additional police writings that are critical of intelligence work in counternarcotics, see the references cited in footnote 72 below.

<sup>74</sup> Li Yanming and Zhang Kun (2009).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

“lagging behind.” They also rate as “very sparse” the volume of information that China is able to obtain from intelligence work in foreign countries regarding the “production and sales distribution by illegal drug gangs.” They also criticize the current “establishment and arrangement of our secret [intelligence] forces” as “very irrational,” and dismiss the so-called “special intelligence” they receive about Golden Crescent drug trafficking operations as “small in volume and weak in quality” (*liangshao zhiruo*; 量少质弱). Their criticism also extends to the handling and interpretation of intelligence, which they say does not receive “systematic analysis and adjudication.” On balance, Li and Zhang rate the current state of intelligence work regarding Golden Crescent narcotics as “extremely inadequate to meet the requirements of our grim situation and present trends regarding illegal drugs.”<sup>76</sup>

Within Xinjiang, public security officials indicate that another weak point in their information gathering is a lack of adequate understanding of and control over street-level social activities (“our basic level fundamental work is weak”). Specifically, some police believe they do not have an adequate knowledge of the presence and activities of foreign citizens and organizations within their territory. They need better intelligence on commercial enterprises and activities, foreign companies operating in the area, home and building rentals by outsiders, and intermarriage between locals and outsiders.<sup>77</sup>

### **Chinese Police Reliance Upon United Nations Drug Estimates**

The police writings analyzed for this study raise questions as to whether Chinese public security officials have the inclination or the capability to generate their own statistical estimates of illegal drug production in the major drug-growing regions on China’s borders. In these writings, all statistical data on Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle opium and heroin production for which a source is provided is sourced to the United Nations, suggesting either that Chinese police do not generate their own independent estimates or that their own estimates are classified and they do not want them in the public domain, so they use United Nations data.

Chinese police officials and analysts have, for decades, criticized the manner in which weak bureaucratic cooperation among public security departments, and between public security and other government departments, has hampered the sharing of intelligence and information that is critical for counternarcotics and other law enforcement operations. They have stressed the need to strengthen intelligence sharing among the various public security units involved in fighting drug trafficking—the criminal investigation, counternarcotics, border security, prison management, and operational technology units—as well as the affiliated security organs for railways, transportation, aviation, and customs. They have also called upon their fellow public security units to improve counternarcotics intelligence sharing with other military and ministerial systems,

---

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

including the PLA, the State Security system, and the Financial, Communications, Posts, and other departments.<sup>78</sup>

Specific suggestions by these analysts and officials for improving counternarcotics intelligence work include:

- **Improving intelligence collection capabilities.** Li Yanming and Zhang Kun call for developing a “broader range of intelligence sources and “expanding the coverage range” of those sources.<sup>79</sup>
- **Developing stronger clandestine intelligence gathering capability (what the Chinese also call “secret forces”).**<sup>80</sup> Li Yanming and Zhang Kun proposed four objectives for strengthening secret counternarcotics intelligence work: increasing its volume, raising its quality, making its organizational structure more rational, and making the management of this work more standardized. They called for establishing and developing China’s special intelligence systems—including “foreign citizen special intelligence, special intelligence outside of China’s borders, and professional special intelligence” so that China can extend its intelligence contacts beyond China’s borders. These contacts, police hope, will assist law enforcement in discovering the activities of foreign narcotics groups that pose a threat to China, and more precisely targeting China’s counternarcotics operations.<sup>81</sup>
- **Improving intelligence sharing and mutual exploitation capability.** In addition to calling for enhanced sharing with the numerous public security and non-public security departments listed above, police officials and analysts have endorsed specific systems to strengthen counternarcotics-related intelligence. One specific innovation they have endorsed is the creation of a “counternarcotics informaticized network” (*jindu xinxihua wangluo*; 禁毒信息化网络). This network would be entrusted to the Ministry of Public Security’s Counternarcotics

---

<sup>78</sup> Two other police articles that discuss the problem of counternarcotics information sharing across police jurisdictions are Zhen Yonghong and Li Boyang, “On Counternarcotics Intelligence Cooperation in China’s Western Regions” (*Lun xibu diqu de jindu qingbao xiezu*; 论西部毒品的进度情报协作), *Journal of the Guizhou Police Academy*, Issue No. 1, 2005, ppl 81-84; also Yang Xijun, “On Service in Counternarcotics Intelligence” (*Lun jindu qingbao fuwu*; 论禁毒情报服务), *Shanghai Public Security Academy Journal*, Issue, February 2005, pp. 66-69, esp. pg. 67. This problem of cross-jurisdictional intelligence sharing is discussed in Murray Scot Tanner and Eric Green, “Principals and Secret Agents: Central vs. Local Control Over Policing and Obstacles to ‘Rule of Law’ in China,” *The China Quarterly*, September 2007, esp, pg. 666.

<sup>79</sup> Li Yanming and Zhang Kun (2009).

<sup>80</sup> Although in western terminology there is a distinction between “clandestine” and “secret” intelligence sources, Chinese security officials consider underground or so-called “secret forces” (*mimi lilian*; 秘密力量) to be part of what they refer to as “clandestine” or “covered” (*yanhu*; 掩护) intelligence sources. The Chinese police materials referenced for this report do not provide enough detailed information to permit us to distinguish whether this intelligence-gathering should be described as “covert” as opposed to “clandestine.”

<sup>81</sup> Li Yanming and Zhang Kun (2009), pg. 18.

Information Center. The Xinjiang Regional Counternarcotics Office would form the core of the system, and link together the counternarcotics offices of public security bureaus at all levels throughout Xinjiang.<sup>82</sup>

### ***The Need for Stronger Regional and Global Law Enforcement Cooperation***

Because the origins of Xinjiang's drug problem lie outside the country, police officials and analysts stress the critical importance of regional cooperation. Since 2007 in particular, Chinese authorities have stressed their increased intelligence exchange cooperation with Russia and the other members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), as well as Afghanistan and Pakistan. They report that this expanded cooperation includes the area of counternarcotics intelligence exchange. This issue was a major focus of the 2007 and 2009 SCO summits and the SCO security ministers' conference in May 2009.<sup>83</sup>

But Deputy Bureau Chief Li Yanming and co-author Zhang Kun argue that the "limitations of international police work exchange institutions and channels" have been another prominent problem in western China's counternarcotics work. As a result of this lack of cooperation, they state "we have not been able to deal a mortal blow to drug traffickers and major drug lords outside of our borders" and have not been able to economically destroy their networks outside China.<sup>84</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> In his 2009 Speech to the SCO Summit in Yekaterinburg, Hu Jintao stated "China proposes close cooperation with Afghanistan and concerned national and international organizations to step up the effort against drug production and smuggling." "Text of Hu Jintao's Speech at SCO Leaders' Meeting," Beijing Xinhua Domestic Service in Chinese, June 16, 2009, OSC report CPP20090616072006. Hu likewise stressed stronger counternarcotics cooperation at the 2006 and 2008 SCO summits. See also Liu Yang and Zhang Yachen: "The First Meeting of the SCO Member Countries' Public Security and Interior Ministers Opens in Russia," *Xinhua Asia-Pacific Service* in Chinese May 18, 2009; Li Xing and Wang Linyan, "Economy, Security Top SCO Agenda," *China Daily Online*, June 15, 2009; "China, Russia Vow To Boost Cooperation on Law Enforcement," *Xinhua* in English, May 20, 2009.

<sup>84</sup> Li Yanming and Zhang Kun (2009).

## V. Chinese Assessments of Links Between Drug Trafficking and Terrorism

This section analyzes Chinese assertions of about the relationship between Golden Crescent drug smuggling and terrorism. To the extent China can demonstrate a link between drug trafficking and the groups it regards as “terrorists, separatists, or extremists,” it can strengthen its case for closer cooperation with the US and other countries against all of these threats. But even though Chinese law enforcement officials and analysts are very confident that there is a link between drug trafficking and terrorism, to date they have presented relatively little concrete evidence to demonstrate this link. Moreover, police analysts have offered widely diverging analyses of how the relationship between drug trafficking and terrorism works, a fact that raises further questions about the quality, consistency, and reliability of their information sources.

Since 2001, Chinese law enforcement officials have rarely referred to the threat of “terrorism” all by itself. Instead, they have tried to rhetorically link Uyghur and other ethnic independence movements with terrorism by referring to the interlinked “three evil forces” of “terrorism,” ethnic “separatism,” and religious “extremism.” Among China’s law enforcement specialists, it is an article of faith that a close relationship exists between drug trafficking and these “three evil forces.” In the words of two police scholars from Yunnan, “the ‘Golden Crescent’ and the ‘Three Evil Forces’ are tightly bound up together, and they are threatening the stability of our country’s western border region.”<sup>85</sup>

### *A shortage of evidence linking terrorism to drug trafficking*

Despite their confidence in the relationship, Chinese law enforcement analysts rarely cite the kind of concrete, persuasive evidence of a linkage between terrorist organizations and drug trafficking that would strengthen their international case for cooperation against these threats. Even when discussing specific criminal cases of persons charged with “terrorist, separatist or extremist” activities, Chinese analysts rarely provide detailed evidence that was used to convict these individuals. This shortage of solid evidence is apparent in a 2010 article by a Xinjiang legal scholar that was published in the *Journal of*

---

<sup>85</sup> Liu Ting and Wang Haijun, “Research on the Illegal Drug Problem Under the Perspective of Non-Traditional Security” (*Fei chuantong anquan shiyexia de dupin wenti yanjiu*; 非传统安全事业下的毒品问题研究), *Journal of the Yunnan Police Officer Academy (Yunnan jingguan xueyuan xuebao*; 云南警官学院学报), Issue No. 2, 2010, pp. 45-49. According to this article, both Ms. Liu Ting and Mr. Wang Haijun are presently lecturers on the faculty of the Yunnan Police Officer Academy in Kunming, and both have a research specialty in the illegal drug issue. Ms. Liu is also completing a Ph.D. at the CPPSU, focusing on border security problems and the illegal drug issue. See also Zhu Yingliang and Liu Fangbao, “Urumqi: A Few Reflections on Attacking the Entry of ‘Golden Crescent’ Drugs into the Border” (*Wulumuqi daji ‘jinxinyue’ dupin rujing sikao*; 乌鲁木齐打击‘金新月’毒品入境思考), *China Criminal Police (Zhongguo xingshi jingcha*; 中国刑事警察), Issue No. 6, 2008, pp. 49-51, esp. pg. 49.

*the Chinese People's Public Security University (CPPSU)*. The scholar reviews three criminal cases, attempting to demonstrate a link between criminal activities and terrorist activities in the records of the suspects who were implicated.<sup>86</sup>

- In October 2001 Xinjiang police arrested a man suspected of trafficking 4.5 kilos of illegal drugs during six trips from Central Asia to Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou. He allegedly earned 34,000 yuan that police say he used to promote his political activities. The major piece of evidence this scholar cited to connect the man to terrorism is the allegation that in 1997 he helped foment a “deadly incident of separatist social unrest.”<sup>87</sup>
- In September 2006 police arrested a gang of 29 suspects in possession of more than seven kilograms of illegal drugs who were allegedly working for a Kazakhstan-based drug lord and who had “close ties to” “terrorist, separatist, and extremist” forces both inside and outside of China. The leader of the drug-smuggling gang was also alleged to be establishing a training base in Kazakhstan, and was inviting Xinjiang separatists there to receive training.<sup>88</sup>
- According to the Xinjiang legal scholar, the case files of several tens of prisoners in Xinjiang’s No. 1 Prison who were arrested for illegal drug trade activities also indicate that they were instructed by leaders of the “Uyghur People’s Party” based in Kazakhstan to develop the drug trade across the Xinjiang-Kazakh border in order to generate money for the organization.<sup>89</sup>

Although this article reviewed specific cases in more detail than any other research material used in this study, in none of these cases did the analyst put forward much more than unsourced allegations that the suspects were involved in both drug trafficking activities and alleged terrorist or armed extremist activities. The level of specificity in the author’s analysis suggests he may have referenced police or court case materials, and thus may have access to more detailed evidence, but he does not cite or allude to any such evidence in his article.

---

<sup>86</sup> Adilijiang Abulaidi, “The Internationalization of the Central Asian Illegal Drug Problem and its Impact on Our Country’s Regional Stability,” (*Zhongya dupin wenti de guojihua ji qi dui Woguo Diqu Wending de Yingxiang*; 中亚毒品问题国际化及其对我国稳定的影响), *Journal of the Chinese People’s Public Security University* (Social Sciences Edition), 2010, Issue No. 2, pp. 133-142, at pg. 135. The author is apparently a Chinese citizen and is identified as a scholar at the Xinjiang University Political and Public Management Academy. His work on terrorism and narcotics received national funding support under a government grant as part of China’s 2009 National Social Science Research Foundation program examining “Cross-Border Crime from Central Asia and its Impact on the Stability of Our Country’s Northwestern Border Region.”

<sup>87</sup> Adilijiang Abulaidi, (2010), pg. 137.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

### *Divergent views of the links between terrorism and drug trafficking*

Chinese law enforcement analysts agree that strong links between drugs and terrorism exist. None of these writings questioned that Xinjiang independence groups in particular rely upon drug trafficking for an important portion of its funds. And none of the writings reviewed for this study doubted that these links between drug trafficking and terrorist groups in Central Asia constituted a powerful threat to China.

Beyond these areas of agreement, however, the articles reviewed for this study reflect a significant divergence of views about a number of fundamental questions concerning how terrorist, separatist, and extremist forces might be linked to the Golden Crescent drug trade.

- Analysts differ in particular about which terrorist or separatist organizations play leading roles in drug trafficking (e.g., Al Qaeda, the Afghan Taliban, or various Uyghur independence groups) and how much they collaborate with each other.
- Analysts also differ about how serious a threat to China drug trafficking by these organizations is. One scholar particularly chastised his colleagues for failing to appreciate the seriousness of the Afghan Taliban's role in the world opium and heroin trade and the threat it could pose to China.

One analysis portrays several major “terrorist, separatist, and extremist” groups as cooperating broadly in trafficking drugs in order to finance their political activities and weapons purchases—including Al Qaeda, Xinjiang independence, and others. These groups’ cooperation with drug networks inside and outside China’s border is permitting them to raise large sums of money selling drugs to all of the countries in the Central Asian region. China, however, has emerged as one of their preferred targets.<sup>90</sup> He contends that these extremist groups have a reciprocal understanding with drug trafficking networks whereby they can “rely upon drugs to foster terrorism, and rely upon terrorism to protect the drugs.” Smuggling Central Asian illegal drugs, moreover, not only advances these extremist groups by providing them with financial support, it is also a critical force that erodes the social order of China and its neighbors over the long term. His assessment is pessimistic: “The Central Asian drug problem...has been transformed into a serious problem that challenges the national security of China.”<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Adilijiang Abulaidi (2010), pg. 137. The author states that “In the ‘Golden Crescent’ region, the ‘East Turkestan’\* and ‘Al Qaeda’ terrorist organizations traffic Central Asian drugs together, obtaining huge profits from China, in order to accumulate funds to underwrite their activities. It can be seen that drug crimes, religious extremism, and terrorism are mutually interlinked...and constitute a major threat to the political stability and national security of the countries that border this region, including China.” The phrase ‘East Turkestan’ is used by pro-independence groups to refer to Xinjiang. Chinese government analyses place it in quotation marks to underscore that it is the self-selected name of these movements, but that they do not recognize the legitimacy of the “East Turkestan” concept. Chinese sources employ the same form of reference for “Taiwan independence” and “Tibetan Independence.”

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., pg. 137.

Other law enforcement analysts argue that Xinjiang independence forces were driven to dramatically step up their drug trafficking activities after Al Qaeda and the Taliban lost the capacity to provide them with major support after 2001. Two Yunnan police scholars specializing in counternarcotics contend that as Xinjiang independence (“East Turkestan”) forces have been compelled to rely more heavily upon drug trafficking, the result has been the rise of a new sort of “narco-terrorism” (*dupin kongbu zhuyi*; 毒品恐怖主义) characterized by closer organizational links among Xinjiang independence and other terrorist, religious extremist, and drug trafficking gangs.<sup>92</sup> Prior to 2001, these scholars assert that Al Qaeda, Xinjiang independence forces, and other unnamed terrorist groups had a longtime working relationship in selling drugs, and the Xinjiang groups received much more extensive financial support from Al Qaeda. But the post-September 11, 2001 attacks on the Taliban and Al Qaeda undermined their capacity to directly support Xinjiang independence, leaving the Xinjiang forces little choice but to rely more heavily on drug trafficking.<sup>93</sup>

These scholars assert that the amount of money that drug trafficking and other criminal activities generate for Xinjiang independence organizations has increased greatly, from originally constituting just 20 per cent of their funds to making up more than one half of their funds today. If true, one implication of these scholars’ work would be that since September 11 the Xinjiang independence forces would have been forced to develop a funding base that is much more independent from Al Qaeda than was the case in the past.<sup>94</sup>

These Yunnan scholars concede the weakness of their evidence, however. They note that it is still “not terribly clear” how many and which of the recent drug cases in China are “directly related with terrorist activities.” They note vaguely that “there are signs that indicate” that the ethnic separatist and religious extremist organizations inside China have already established links with the extremist and terrorist forces outside of China in Afghanistan and Central Asia, and they are working in common to carry out drug smuggling and drug trafficking to accumulate funds in order to support their “anti government, split-the-country” activities.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Liu Ting and Wang Haijun (2010), pg. 48.

<sup>93</sup> “Prior to ‘9-11,’ the largest source of funding for the ‘East Turkestan’ [organization] was assistance from Bin-Laden (la-deng; 拉登) and other terrorist forces; their second was income from drug trafficking, and nearly all of the ‘East Turkestan’ organizations participated in illegal drug exchange in Western Asia (xiya; 西亚) as well as inside of the border [e.g., within the Chinese border—mst]. After ‘9-11,’ ‘Al Qaeda’ and the Taliban suffered serious attacks, and the ‘East Turkestanis’ lost the mountain on which they had relied for financial support. So they transferred over to illegal drug crimes as their primary path for accumulating finances.” Ibid., pg. 48.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., pg. 48.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., pg. 48. Like the Xinjiang scholar noted earlier, these Yunnan scholars claim that these drug funds are also being used to support the establishment of terrorist training units on China’s northwest border, which have already carried out multiple bombing attacks, even killing and harming government officials and average citizens.

Another law enforcement specialist takes a very different line and argues that it is the Afghan Taliban that represents the predominant illegal drug threat to China and the rest of Central Asia. This analyst argues that over the past five years the Taliban have worked hard to hoard large supplies of opium which they intend to use to establish a global cartel that would permit them to manipulate the global opium and heroin markets and maximize their profits. Citing international drug cultivation and drug market reports by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), this analyst contends that since 2008 there has been an unusual pattern in global heroin production and heroin prices that can most plausibly be explained by large-scale hoarding of these drugs by the Taliban.

The author criticizes some Chinese law enforcement departments for exaggerating the effectiveness of their multi-year domestic “people’s war” against drugs, and ignoring the impact of the Taliban and international drug market forces. Chinese law enforcement authorities, he contends, have inappropriately claimed that their enforcement efforts resulted in an increase in the domestic drug price followed by a temporary price stabilization from 2004-2008. Instead, he points to UNODC analyses and asserts that Taliban international efforts at hoarding and price manipulation are at least as much a reason for recent pricing patterns in the Chinese drug market.

In closing, this analyst characterizes the Afghan Taliban’s drug-hoarding efforts as “a new and enormous threat” to China and the world. He cites estimates that the Afghan Taliban has now stored up “more than ten thousand tons of opium, which is the (chemical) equivalent of one thousand tons of heroin, and also equivalent to two years worth of the entire global consumption of heroin.” Whenever the Taliban decide it is profitable to do so, they will begin “ferociously hurling those drugs onto the market.” When that happens, he believes that “the threat they will constitute to...Afghanistan’s neighbors is enough to make one tremble with fear.”<sup>96</sup>

Clearly, the range of views about the nature of the links between drug trafficking and terrorism reflected in these law enforcement writings is broad, and some of these interpretations about the respective drug-trafficking roles played by these extremist groups seem difficult to square with each other. The lack of detailed evidence and documentation offered by these analysts makes it even more difficult to evaluate these writings. Most importantly, this lack of detailed evidence or consistent interpretations further underscores the questions raised in the previous section of this study about the quality of the information on Golden Crescent drug trafficking organizations that is available to Chinese counternarcotics specialists.

---

<sup>96</sup> Hu Xunmin, "Situational Analysis and Evaluation on China's Drug Control" (*Zhongguo jindu xingshi fenxi pinggu*; 中国禁毒形势分析评估) *Journal of the Yunnan Police Officer Academy (Yunnan jingguan xueyuan xuebao*; 云南警官学院学报), Issue No. 3, 2010, pg. 13.

## VI. Final Thoughts

This final section re-considers two of the most important questions raised by this study: Why was Chinese law enforcement apparently late in recognizing the Golden Crescent drug trafficking problem? What could these causes of late recognition mean for China's ongoing counternarcotics efforts?

The analytical materials reviewed in this study clearly indicate that over the past decade, the drug threat from the Golden Crescent emerged much more rapidly than Chinese security officials recognized. The tone of recent documents such as the *2010 National Counternarcotics Report*, and the criticism by officials and analysts of intelligence work all indicate strongly that China's law enforcement community belatedly took note of the problem and was left "backfooted" by this new challenge.

The limited scope of this report and the reference materials used can not support a fully documented analysis of why the Golden Crescent drug challenge emerged so quickly and why Chinese law enforcement was apparently caught off-guard. But after reviewing some problems with the most common explanation offered by Chinese police, this final section offers some speculation on alternative factors that could help explain China's slow response.

The most common Chinese explanation for the rise of Golden Crescent trafficking into western China is that trafficking was largely driven by rapidly expanding production of opium in the Golden Crescent, and drug traffickers' need for new shipping routes and markets for their product. Xinjiang became an increasingly attractive route for traffickers looking to export drugs from the region.

But China's supply-driven explanation is not entirely persuasive, mostly because it does not offer a compelling reason as to why Xinjiang became a preferred drug exporting route rather than other routes. Golden Crescent traffickers, as Chinese analysts note, have several alternative routes for moving their product out of China into Southeast Asian and European markets, including through India and southern Pakistan, Iran, or the Southern Caucasus and Turkey, or through Kazakhstan and Russia. The western China trafficking routes identified in this report offer a very limited number of access points, some of which, such as the Kunjerab pass and the Karakorum Highway, are very difficult to access, and owing to weather conditions are open only about half of the year. After the drugs reach Kashgar and Urumqi they must transit a lengthy cross-country air or rail trip through China—a country that is policed by a larger and more powerful law enforcement and domestic intelligence system than traffickers would face on almost any of their alternative routes. All of these challenges of transiting western China seem likely to increase the risks and losses for drug traffickers, and raise questions about why Golden Crescent traffickers would favor this route.

It seems more likely that several other domestic factors in China may have made it more attractive for traffickers to attempt the western China route. But many of these domestic

factors would be much more sensitive explanations for Chinese law enforcement analysts to bring up in their writings, because they do not reflect well on Chinese law enforcement or Chinese society. At least four factors that might have made trafficking more attractive are notable:

- Chinese law enforcement analysts may be understating the attractiveness of the China drug market for traffickers and the impact that China's rapidly growing economy has had on both the price and the demand for Golden Crescent drugs. The markup for drug sales in China may now be great enough that traffickers believe it is worth the additional risk and cost of taking the western China route.
- Chinese police on the front lines of stopping Golden Crescent drugs may be far more corrupt and less professional than Chinese law enforcement analysts are willing to admit—in particular such forces as the border police, the railway, aviation, and traffic police, and the counternarcotics police.
- Ethnic tensions in Xinjiang may have undermined the willingness of Uyghurs to cooperate with Chinese police against drug traffickers. Indeed, if links between Uyghur separatists and drug traffickers are anywhere near as close as Chinese police analysts often charge, it may even be the case that local Uyghurs regard some of the traffickers almost as renegade “folk heroes” and would be hesitant to report them to local police. Conversely, drug traffickers may be sufficiently powerful that local Uyghurs are unwilling to risk crossing them to cooperate with Chinese police.
- Chinese law enforcement officials may have ignored the rise in Golden Crescent trafficking longer than was wise because they were much more focused on other duties, such as fighting drug trafficking along the Golden Triangle border, or focusing on the suppression of Uyghur dissent in Xinjiang. If police were primarily focused on ethnic tensions, that might be in keeping with earlier historical precedent. A prominent Western historian of Chinese policing has argued that when police become excessively focused on suppressing political dissent, they often fail to do an effective job of regular crime-fighting.<sup>97</sup>

Chinese police analysts, however, have largely preferred to focus publicly on other external forces in trying to explain the rise in Golden Crescent trafficking, while paying little attention to these domestic issues that could prove far more intractable for Party and police officials to handle. But these alternative possible explanations as to why law enforcement officials were slow to recognize the Golden Crescent threat could have important implications for China's current and future counternarcotics work. Any of these four explanations could still be undermining law enforcement counternarcotics work against the growing Golden Crescent threat by weakening police attention or drawing resources away from needed intelligence and enforcement efforts. And Chinese law enforcement authorities are unlikely to strengthen their effectiveness in confronting

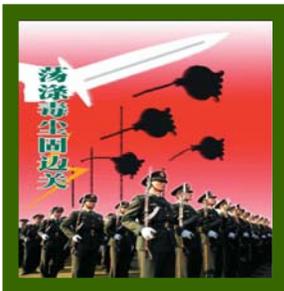
---

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995).

Golden Crescent drug trafficking until they address these alternative factors more directly. Monitoring whether they are able and willing to do so will remain an important challenge for Western analysts of Chinese counternarcotics work.







Cover: Police propaganda poster from Chinese police journal article. The title reads “Wash away the poisonous dust. Reinforce our border passes.” (*dangdi duchen gu bianguan*; 荡涤毒尘固边关), from *Frontier Defence Police China* (*zhongguo bianfang jingcha*; 中国边防警察), June 2010, pp. 32-35.

