

Drugs, A New Destructive Weapon In The Syrian War

Since 2020 the military battles in Syria have stopped. However, this does not mean that the economic and social collapse has stopped. In fact, new types of weapons have entered all areas and multiplied the downsides of the past years of conflict, most notably drugs.

Alarming transformation

Prior to 2011, Syria was known as a crossing point for the drug trade with drugs coming from Afghanistan and Iran. This drug smuggling network was supervised by the Syrian government and some security intelligence branches.

According to "[The Syrian Economy at War, Captagon, Hashish, and the Syrian Narco-State](#)" study issued by the Center of Operational Analysis and Research (COAR) , the amount of drugs coming from Syria between 2013-2015 increased 4-6 times compared to 2011. The amount decreased in the next two years when the most brutal military operations were launched by the Assad regime to regain areas out of its control.

And then between 2018-2020, the size of confiscated drugs coming from Syria increased 6-21 times compared to 2011, and the narcotics coming out from this country, especially the Captagon[1], were shipped towards three main destinations: North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and Europe.

The value of the Captagon pill trade is estimated at approximately \$16 billion annually, which is three times the Syrian government budget for the year 2022, and the market value of the confiscated quantity of Captagon pills is estimated at approximately \$3.46 billion According to COAR research.

The poor economic effects

A local study titled [Drugs in Syria \(production- smuggling- objectives\)](#) states that it spotted 50 current locations of drug manufacturers in the country, with about 14 centers of Captagon manufacturers, 12 centers for manufacturing Crystal Meth, and 23 centers for manufacturing Hashish. The study shows that the Assad regime was able to penetrate areas that aren't under his control using the state of security weakness, recruiting some elements, establishing networks to promote and manufacture drugs, and collecting information as well.

With the economic collapse in Syria, traditional economic activities suffer, parallel with the increase of lucrative drug manufacturing activities that fill the pockets of the modern war princes. For example, an investigation by "the New York Times" revealed that most Syrian drug production and distribution are carried out under the supervision of the 4th Armored Division in the Assad regime's army, Hezbollah militia, and a group of businessmen with close ties to the Assad's family.

This network has benefited from exploiting Syria, including its human resources, transforming pharmaceutical laboratories into workshops for manufacturing and using the country's facilities. In addition to that, new Captagon manufacturing centers were also established in small factories or in abandoned villas under the security protection of the regime's army.

Reshaping society

Drugs in Syria have been circulated in schools, universities, sports clubs, and even sold in the public places, such as cigarette kiosks, gardens, and offered by the itinerant tea and coffee vendors spread on the streets.

On the other hand, drugs have been turned into an indirect means of recruiting young people, and the males of the military service age have become accustomed to the abuse of stimulants including Captagon, after taking them during military operations.

Cheaply manufactured narcotics have now become some of the few painkillers available to the Syrian youth, adolescent and women who face grinding multidimensional poverty. Dealing with these segments will be one of the most challenging problems Syrians should be prepared for. The country needs its people to participate in any future changes or political transitions.

Long term difficulties

From the domestic point of view, the drug trade will prolong the conflict in Syria; it will undermine the rule of law and impede the restoration of integrated economic performance. This dangerous business is transforming local and human resources from useful production to drug production and export. The country will suffer from an even worse name internationally in terms of its export and it might also be suspended from conducting export activities to many countries. And this would only mean depriving the Syrian economy of foreign currency for a long time.

With the absence of any government vision to stop the collapse of the Syrian economy and its preoccupation with illegal economic activities, millions of Syrians live within the cycle of poverty and extreme poverty where all essential and service commodities are absent.

Schools and universities in the Assad-controlled areas have been transformed from a place that is supposed to build people into a place where the energies of young people are wasted and destroyed. Also, the social capital has been systematically squandered. This changes the shape of the current society and its relations and makes the future of Syria bleak unless swift and precise measures are taken and sustainable solutions are provided to solve this problem.

The effect of this trade is hitting not only Syria's neighboring countries and the Middle East, but also European countries, which happen to be one of the main destinations for many Syrian Captagon shipments, and the profit made from this "trade" is used to carry terror operations in the region.

The Syrian people need to mobilize all efforts to stop these illegal activities and punish those involved, and design projects to recover the consequences on the society and the economy. Overlooking and neglecting this problem will only worsen the already grave situation inside Syria, and it will burden the international community in dealing with new problems, which could undermine world peace and makes Syria's recovery and stability impossible to achieve.

-
—

[\[1\] Captagon is a brand name of Fenethylline](#)

—