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Methamphetamine trafficking in Southeast Asia

Abstract

There has been a shift in the illicit drug market in Southeast Asia, with non-synthetic drugs such as opium and heroin taking second place to synthetic drugs such as methamphetamine and ecstasy. This paper will analyse the current status of methamphetamine trafficking as the main synthetic drug in South-East Asian drug trafficking, looking at regional and sub-regional trends, specifically in the so-called 'Golden Triangle' of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand (and to a lesser extent China). Current factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the lack of governance in the Mekong countries will be highlighted, as well as the dangers to global and regional security posed by an expansion of methamphetamine trafficking by means of determining its current and proximate scope. Last, it will examine the current state of international drug trafficking legislation and what it means for the pursuit and prosecution of those involved in drug trafficking networks through regional cooperation.

Keywords

Drug trafficking, methamphetamine, Southeast Asia, Golden Triangle, security.

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Introduction

There has been a shift in the illicit drug market in Southeast Asia, with non-synthetic drugs such as opium and heroin taking second place to synthetic drugs¹ such as methamphetamine and ecstasy. In this text, we will address the current situation of methamphetamine trafficking in South-East Asia given that methamphetamine production has soared in South-East Asia in recent years, displacing other substances from the top production positions.

The first two sections will present data on the numbers and scope of this shift in drug trafficking, identifying potential dangers to global security in relation to the drug route. These pages will focus on the so-called “Golden Triangle” area as the main current drug route in Southeast Asia, an area along the borders of Myanmar, Laos, Thailand and China, corresponding to the Mekong River route.

In the following section, the current situation of the COVID-19 pandemic will be examined as a catalyst for this phenomenon. Later, we will examine the three Golden Triangle countries and, in particular, point out how Myanmar and Thailand are two sides of the same coin, establishing entirely differentiated measures to address the fight against drug trafficking, to conclude that Myanmar is the key player in the Golden Triangle region.

Last, regional cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking will be examined in two sections: the first will focus on the study and critique of the Mekong Memorandum of Understanding as a frustrated initiative whose international significance (given that it is framed as a UN initiative) distances it from other initiatives. The second section will aim to review the current state of international anti-drug trafficking legislation and how different Southeast Asian states are establishing security cooperation networks through bilateral or multilateral agreements.

Figures

On 31 May 2022, UN News released disturbing news: in 2021, a record number of methamphetamine seizures were made in Southeast and East Asia, reaching “172 tons, or one billion tablets seized”². According to a study conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in 2019 the percentage of methamphetamine seized in Southeast Asia reached 78.3% of the total (the rest corresponds to production in East Asia), an estimated 115 tons³. In 2020 and 2021, the percentages grew to 84.8%

1 UN news. (2022). Synthetic drug trade grows in Asia, more than 1 billion methamphetamines seized in 2021. Available at <https://news.un.org/es/story/2022/05/1509542>

2 Un news. (2022). *Op. cit.*

3 ONUDD. (2022). Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia Latest developments and challenges. P. 5. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/scientific/Synthetic_Drugs_in_East_and_Southeast_Asia_2022_web.pdf

and 88.6%, reaching a figure of approximately 155 tonnes out of the above-mentioned 172 tonnes⁴.

Within Southeast Asia, special mention should be made of the figures achieved in the so-called “Triangle of Art” or “Golden Triangle”, which covers parts of the states of Myanmar (formerly Burma), Thailand, China and Laos⁵, and especially the border area between these states. According to UNODC data in its report *Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia. Latest developments and challenges* of 2021, these are the figures for methamphetamine seized in each of the Golden Triangle countries:

- Thailand:
 - 368,798,198 units of methamphetamine tablets (the lowest quantity since 2017).
 - 25,072.6 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine (the highest in recent years)⁶.
- Laos:
 - 18,602,900 units of methamphetamine tablets.
 - 5,564.4 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine (the largest amount in years)⁷.
- Myanmar:
 - 328,410,692 units of methamphetamine tablets (the largest quantity in recent years).
 - 17,363.9 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine (the highest figure in recent years)⁸.

The importance of this cross-border area lies in the fact that, despite not being a common trade route, it has long been used as one of the main hubs for the production of synthetic substances in Southeast Asia, including methamphetamine, heroin and opium⁹. The lack of governance in these areas and their consequent instability, in addition to their jungle geography and the route provided by the Mekong River,

4 ONUDD. (2022). *Op. cit.*, p. 5.

5 Sen, S. (1991). Heroin Trafficking in the Golden Triangle. *Police Journal*. Volume: 64 Issue: 3 Dated: (July-September 1991). Pp. 241-248. Available at <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/heroin-trafficking-golden-triangle>

6 ONUDD. (2021). *Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia. Latest developments and challenges*. P. 92. Available at https://www.unodc.org/roseap/uploads/documents/Publications/2021/Synthetic_Drugs_in_East_and_Southeast_Asia_2021.pdf

7 ONUDD. (2021). *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

8 *Ibid*, p. 72.

9 Arana, I. (2020). Asia's Golden Triangle leaves heroin behind to become a huge synthetic drugs laboratory. *La Vanguardia*. Available at <https://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20200522/481317922513/el-triangulo-de-oro-asiatico-deja-atras-la-heroina-y-pasa-a-ser-el-gran-laboratorio-de-las-drogas-sinteticas.html>

which flows through these three countries, are factors that can lead to the Golden Triangle being considered one of the main drug routes in Southeast Asia, as supported by the UN¹⁰.

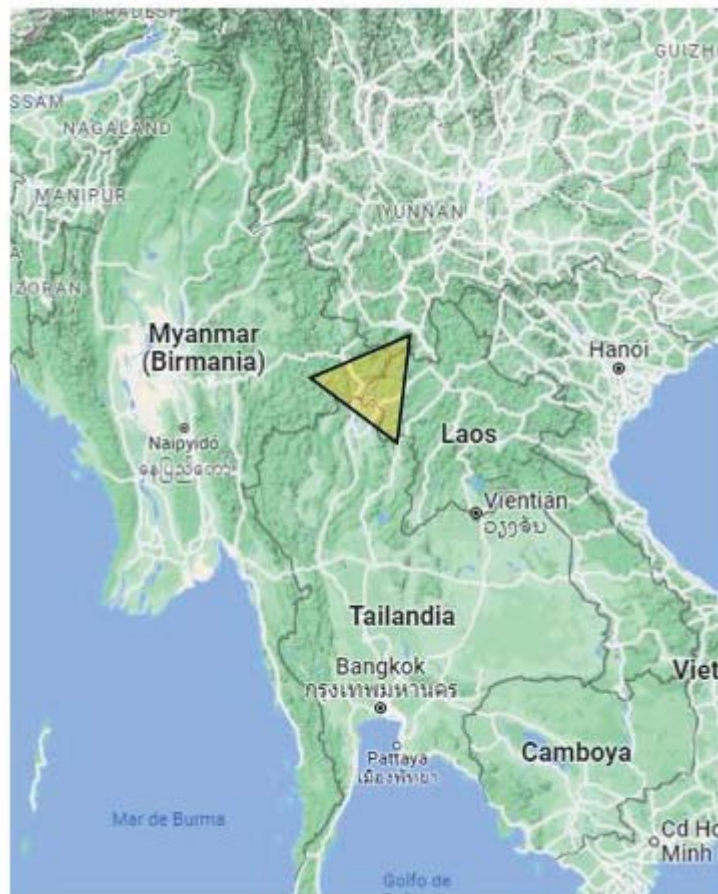


Figure 1: Golden Triangle (own elaboration with Google Maps).

Scope and possible dangers to global security

In relation to the methamphetamine routes under study, they cannot be said to be global in scope (at least directly) as the routes of this substance are framed within the South-East and East Asian region and Oceania, although an emerging route to India is of concern. In this regard, the Indo-Burma border is a new *hotspot* in the fight against drugs in Southeast Asia¹¹. This new route has a similar characteristic to the “Golden Triangle” route, namely the lack of governance in these border areas. In India, national documents attest to the presence of armed violence in the states of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur (these states can be seen in Figure 2), which are referred to as “insurgent”

¹⁰ UN news. (2022). *Op. cit.*

¹¹ GlobalScenario. (2021). Mixed perceptions of India’s plan to tackle drug trafficking on Myanmar’s border. Available at: <https://www.escenariomundial.com/2021/08/13/percepciones-encontradas-por-el-plan-de-india-para-enfrentar-el-narcotrafico-en-la-frontera-de-myanmar/>

groups by the Indian authorities themselves and which benefit from the trafficking of small arms¹². For their part, the inter-ethnic conflicts in Myanmar, in what is Chin State and Sagain (states in the north and west of the country, both bordering India) and their confrontation with the Tatmadaw¹³ (Burmese Armed Forces), have reinforced this factor, turning the Indo-Burma border into a real “sieve”.



Figure 2: Myanmar-India border (own elaboration with Google Maps).

The shift of the methamphetamine route to West Asia is a major issue, as it is not known what effects the collision of two major drug routes, the “Golden Triangle” route with the “Golden Crescent” route, the latter consisting of the states of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan and dominated by the former and its gigantic opium production, could have. In contrast to the “Golden Triangle” route, this route does reach Europe, with heroin being one of the main commodity substances¹⁴.

12 Masferrer, B. (2006). Political Violence and Terrorism in Contemporary India. *Asia-Pacific Yearbook*. No. 1, p. 225.

13 Gcr2p. (2022). Atrocity Alert No. 299: Myanmar (Burma), Democratic Republic of the Congo and Accountability. Available at <https://www.globalr2p.org/publications/atrocity-alert-no-299/>

14 Rosselló, D. (2016). Intravenous gold: the geopolitics of opium (2/2). *The World Order*. Available at <https://elordenmundial.com/ii-la-media-luna-dorada-afghanistan-narco-estado-la-sombra-del-hindukush/>



Figure 3: Representation of the Golden Crescent (own elaboration with Google Maps).

To this effect, and although it does not form part of the largest percentage of drugs seized, the trend in Europe towards methamphetamine use appears to be clearly upward, according to data from the *European Drug Report* published in 2021¹⁵; therefore, a shift “in production and trafficking” (which could happen if the main route from West Asia is joined by one of the main routes from Southeast Asia) could “highlight the risk of increased use”¹⁶.

The threat posed by the expansion of the Golden Triangle route into West Asia will therefore also require cooperation between the two existing regional organisations, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), the latter made up countries such as India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Pakistan, among others. In fact, the two organisations have already established cooperative relations in the fight against terrorism and crime, including drug trafficking¹⁷.

The COVID-19 crisis and its impact on methamphetamine trafficking in Southeast Asia

Methamphetamine is a *psychostimulant* which, as such, stimulates the central nervous system and produces effects related to pleasure, euphoria, well-being and

15 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. (2021). *European Drug Report 2021: Trends and developments*. Publications Office of the European Union. Luxembourg. P. 15.

16 European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. (2021). *Op. cit.*, p. 22.

17 Gordon, S. (2009). Regionalism and Cross-Border Cooperation against Crime and Terrorism in the Asia-Pacific. *Security Challenges*. Summer 2009, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Summer 2009), p. 84.

excitement; however, its effects are much longer lasting than other substances and can cause serious damage to the central nervous system¹⁸. Nonetheless, this has not prevented criminal networks and drug cartels from thriving and being able to continue expanding their market in a situation marked, almost globally, by the COVID-19 pandemic. By 2021, virtually all South-East and East Asian countries have confirmed methamphetamine as the main substance of concern, while ten years earlier in 2010, only a few countries such as Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, the Philippines, South Korea or Japan confirmed the same¹⁹.

The prioritisation of state measures aimed at controlling the pandemic has opened the way for these cartels to continue their activities; however, while these organisations have shown to be resilient and have been able to adapt to these measures, they have also suffered the consequences of the restrictions, especially those affecting mobility and transport. First, while the price of commodities has been rising, the price of methamphetamine has been on a downward trend²⁰, meaning that its supply and demand dynamics have remained stable in this severe economic environment. Methamphetamine has thereby become a much more affordable product for those who could not afford to use the substance in the recent past.

Second, these organisations and cartels were able to adapt to the mobility restrictions imposed by the respective governments. Although mobility and transport restrictions made some routes unusable, including air routes²¹, and the transport of some licit products with which methamphetamine and other substances were transported has been reduced²² according to UNODC, the use of online methods has increased and the use of the Andaman Sea or Burma Sea maritime routes²³ continue to be used²⁴. A special feature of methamphetamine trafficking is that methamphetamine is often transported by air, which is why in 2020 the UNODC predicted a strong impact on its transport due to restrictions on air routes, especially when these substances were destined for countries such as South Korea, Japan or Australia. However, the 2021 report showed that this was not the case. The report stated that “COVID-19 and its associated mobility restrictions caused only a short-lived disruption in

18 United States National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2019). What is methamphetamine? Available at <https://nida.nih.gov/es/publicaciones/serie-de-reportes/abuso-y-adiccion-la-metanfetamina/que-es-la-metanfetamina>

19 ONUDD. (2022). *Op. cit.*, p. 15.

20 *Ibid*, p. 13.

21 ONUDD. (2020). COVID-19 and the Drug Supply Chain: from Production and Trafficking to Consumption. P. 7. Available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/covid/Covid-19_Sumministro_de_Drogas.pdf

22 ONUDD. (2020). *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

23 Sea located south of the Myanmar region, connecting to the Strait of Malacca and thus to Malaysia and Indonesia.

24 ONUDD. (2022). *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

methamphetamine supply and demand”, concluding that this “indicates a limited impact on methamphetamine availability”²⁵.

Therefore, although the restrictions on mobility and transport prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic have affected methamphetamine and drug trafficking in general in Southeast Asia, it has only been temporary thanks to the adaptability of the different methamphetamine-producing organisations. The falling price of methamphetamine, porous international borders and the ability to adapt to new circumstances have enabled trafficking in this synthetic substance to increase over the past two years.

The Golden Triangle: Myanmar, Thailand and Laos:

Myanmar as a major player: a difficult duality to resolve

As mentioned above, Myanmar is one of the components of the “Golden Triangle” route. Jeremy Douglas, UNODC’s Asia-Pacific representative, stated that “Myanmar is really the epicentre of the drug trade [...] at least in the Mekong region”²⁶. However, it is in Shan State (eastern Myanmar, bordering China, Laos and Thailand) where the focus is on the fight against drug trafficking. Shan is a federal state where instability reigns in the form of a struggle among the ethnic groups that inhabit Shan, and also with the Tatmadaw²⁷, as is the case in many other parts of the country. Media outlets such as CNN²⁸ and institutions such as UNODC²⁹ consider Shan State as one of the main sources of methamphetamine production in Southeast Asia.

Myanmar ranked 131st in the 2021 *Global Peace Index* report, while Thailand and Laos ranked 113th and 45th, respectively³⁰. Currently, with data from 2022, this index

25 ONUDD. (2021). *Op. cit.*, p. xiii.

26 Slow, O. (2017). UNODC’s Jeremy Douglas: Myanmar really is the epicentre of the drug trade. *Frontier Myanmar*. Available from <https://frontiermyanmar.net/en/unodcs-jeremy-douglas-myanmar-really-is-the-epicentre-of-the-drug-trade>

27 DRC. (2021). Myanmar: Responding to humanitarian needs in Northern Shan. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmar-responding-humanitarian-needs-northern-shan>

28 Berlinger, J. (2019). Asia’s meth trade is worth an estimated \$61 billion as region becomes a ‘playground’ for drug gangs. *CNN Asia*. Available at <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/07/18/asia/asia-methamphetamine-intl-hnk/index.html> ; Berlinger, J. (2021). Methamphetamine production soared in Asia as economy shaken by COVID-19, report says. *CNN Asia*. Available at <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2021/06/10/produccion-metanfetamina-auge-asia-economia-covid-19-informe-trax/>

29 UNODC. (2022). *Op. cit.*, pp. 5, 7, 9.

30 The *Global Peace Index*, produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace, is the largest global peace index that uses several indicators to help measure the *peacefulness* of individual states in the international community. This index measures peacefulness across 3 areas: the level of societal protection and security, domestic and international conflicts, and the degree of militarisation. Institute for Economics & Peace. (2021). *Global Peace Index 2021*. Pp. 9-10. Available at <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/GPI-2021-web-1.pdf>

ranks Myanmar in 139th position (its worst ranking since 2009) and Thailand and Laos in 103rd and 51st, respectively. According to the World Bank, of these three countries, Myanmar has the lowest values for the effectiveness of its government, as well as for the “rule of law”³¹. These data suggest that Myanmar is on a trend with little prospect of improvement in the near future, as long as the military remains in power. This is evidenced by the *Global Peace Index 2022* report when it states that “Myanmar recorded the largest deterioration in peace in the Asia-Pacific region, as the country grapples with the consequences of a military coup”³².

These numbers place Myanmar at the centre of drug production in the absence of governance and initiatives to combat trafficking in illegal substances. Moreover, the Tatmadaw is known to be corrupt and to accept bribes or payments from traffickers³³, making it just another player in the drug trafficking chain in Myanmar and, by extension, in Southeast Asia.

However, corruption is a common denominator in all three Asian countries. Thailand, Laos and Myanmar are ranked 110th, 128th and 140th (out of 180 countries) in the 2021 *Corruption Perception Index*³⁴; the question is, what makes Myanmar a central player in the fight against drug trafficking in Southeast Asia above its neighbours? An answer to this question could be sought in the permissiveness of successive Burmese governments vis-à-vis the illegal or informal economies produced within different ethnic communities. Lizzette Marrero, in her article *Feeding the Beast: The Role of Myanmar’s Illicit Economies in Continued State Instability* discusses duality in the study of Burma’s illicit economies. According to Marrero, Myanmar’s illegal economies contribute to the country’s stability and prevent Myanmar from descending into “civil war” by preventing “collisions” between different rival ethnic groups³⁵, which explains the permissiveness of successive Burmese governments, including the current Tatmadaw. However, this stabilising character is at odds with its nature as an organised crime and a danger to security and health, meaning that one could speak of a *duality in the nature of drug trafficking*, complicating the task of finding a solution to this situation.

31 See in *Transparency International*. <https://www.transparency.org/>

32 Institute for Economics & Peace. (2022). “Global Peace Index 2022. P. 16. Available at <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/GPI-2022-web.pdf>

33 Lin, K. (2022). Myanmar: The drug epidemic in Rakhine State. *IWGIA*. Available at <https://www.iwgia.org/en/news/4822-myanmar-the-drug-epidemic-in-rakhine-state.html>

34 The *Corruption Perception Index* is an index produced by Transparency International, a non-governmental organisation, which since 1995 has published annual measurements of corruption in the public sector. Transparency International. (2021). *Corruption Perceptions Index*. Available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021>

35 Marrero, L. (2018). Feeding the Beast: The Role of Myanmar’s Illicit Economies in Continued State Instability. *The International Affairs Review*. Available at: <https://www.iar-gwu.org/print-archive/3jbh18ch71kydhndufwonnmnqngroq>

Thailand as a counterpoint to Burmese permissiveness

Thailand, unlike Myanmar, has shown a positive attitude towards the fight against drug trafficking. An example of this is the *Golden Triangle Campaign 1511*, promoted by the country itself, which seeks to unite the states of the Mekong region in the fight against drug trafficking³⁶. Thailand is also party to cooperation agreements (discussed in further depth below) by sending vessels to other states to facilitate their efforts to seize and prosecute criminal drug trafficking networks³⁷.

One of the major achievements of the Thai administration has been to be one of the few countries to suppress illegal opium production³⁸; however, methamphetamine use has been on an upward trend, mainly in the form of a substance called “yaa baa”³⁹ (a mixture of methamphetamine and caffeine). From 2020 to 2021, the amount of methamphetamine seized in the country increased by 29.4%, showing a good performance in relation to drug seizure operations in the Mekong region.

One of the main features of Thailand’s drug policy is the use of the rhetoric of “victim and patient” rather than “criminal”⁴⁰, depriving the reintegration of the drug user in the punishment. An example of this is the Narcotics Rehabilitation Act passed in 2002, whose rehabilitative character is present throughout the legal text. This rhetoric, however, does not appear to be incompatible with the death penalty for “serious drug offences” in situations of organised crime and for endangering national security and health, which has led to a reduction in drug-related crimes⁴¹. In contrast, in Singapore the death penalty is imposed for the use and possession of illegal drugs, according to Amnesty International⁴².

Another step away from the measures aimed at severely punishing situations related to drug use and distribution has been the legalisation of the cultivation and

36 The Nation Thailand. (2019). Six Mekong countries join mission to fight narcotics trade. Available at: <https://www.nationthailand.com/in-focus/30378423>

37 Vietnam Plus. (2020). Southeast Asian countries promote cooperation in the fight against drugs. Available at: <https://es.vietnamplus.vn/paises-sudesteasiaticos-promueven-cooperacion-en-lucha-contra-las-drogas/117385.vnp>

38 Windle, J. (2016). Drugs and drug policy in Thailand. *Journal of drug policy analysis*. P. 2. Available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/windlethailand-final.pdf>

39 Windle, J. (2016). *Op. cit.*, p. 2.

40 *Ibid*, p. 5.

41 Lai, G. & Eaimtong, U. (2021). Thailand reforms drug laws to reduce impacts of criminal justice system. *International Drug Policy Consortium*. Available at: <https://idpc.net/blog/2021/12/thailand-reforms-drug-laws-to-reduce-impacts-of-criminal-justice-system>

42 Amnesty International. (2022). Singapore: The shameful resumption of executions after more than two years will not put an end to drug-related crime. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/es/latest/news/2022/03/singapore-new-execution-death-penalty/>

consumption of cannabis⁴³, a substance which, unlike methamphetamine, has already been subject to legalisation measures in other countries around the world, and contains medicinal properties. One of the reasons behind this legislative measure could be the need to decongest Thai prisons since a large percentage of the prison population (82% in 2021) is incarcerated for drug-related offences⁴⁴. Another reason for this liberal policy towards cannabis use could be the need to attract tourism to Thailand in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a measure compatible with others such as the withdrawal of the obligation to wear masks, the opening of bars until late hours and the non-obligation of quarantine⁴⁵. However, methamphetamine as a *hard drug* is still subject to illegalisation and prosecution in its distribution, involving the possibility of the death penalty depending on the seriousness of the case and whether or not it is included in an organised criminal network.

This focus on tourism through liberalisation measures and the prosecution and punishment of crimes related to hard drugs such as methamphetamine is a real and current feature of Thailand.

Laos, a means of transit

Like Thailand, Laos also shares a border with Shan State in Myanmar, although to a lesser extent. In addition to being mostly methamphetamine-consuming countries (Thailand to a lesser extent), Laos and Thailand share a long border along which the Mekong River flows, and it is the Mekong River that marks the border between the two countries. It is therefore not uncommon to find joint patrol operations between the authorities of Laos, Thailand, Myanmar and China⁴⁶. Laos is thus a transit point for drugs from Shan State⁴⁷ to the south, mainly to Cambodia, the methamphetamine production centre, from where they are shipped to Indonesia and Oceania. From Thailand the route extends south to Malaysia and Singapore.

43 BBC World News. (2022). The country that went from prosecuting drugs with the death penalty to perhaps the world's most liberal on marijuana. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias-61903566>

44 International Federation for Human Rights. (2022). Thailand Annual Prison Report 2022. Available at: [:https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/thailande791angweb.pdf](https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/thailande791angweb.pdf)

45 Bridge, M. (2022). No masks, legal cannabis, open bars. Is Thailand going for tourism? *Your Guide to Thailand*. Available at: <https://tuguiatailandia.com/sin-mascaras-cannabis-legal-bares-abiertos-tailandia-apostando-por-el-turismo/>

46 La Vanguardia. (2019). Thailand, China and neighbouring countries to continue joint patrol on Mekong River. Available at: <https://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20190112/454084130372/tailandia-china-y-paises-vecinos-proseguiran-patrulla-conjunta-en-rio-mekong.html>

47 ONUDD. (2021). *Op. cit.*, p. 61.

Therefore, the importance of Laos lies in its strategic position as a distribution point for goods arriving from Myanmar and the Chinese province of Yunnan, which borders Laos, to the south (Cambodia) and to the east (Vietnam), as can be seen in the following map.

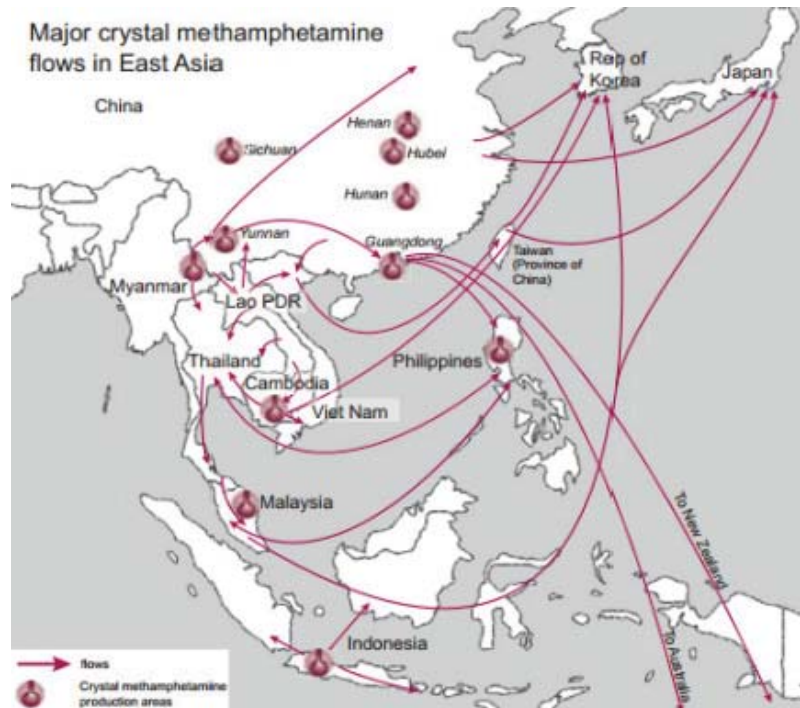


Figure 4: Crystal methamphetamine routes in South-East Asia (Source: ONUDD (2015). “Summary Submission of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement Inquiry into Crystal Methamphetamine”, p. 8).

Drug trafficking in international law: current status and a look at regional cooperation structures in Southeast Asia:

Current state of international law

Drug trafficking is not an international criminal crime (as are genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression), although there is a very strong debate in the doctrine about its inclusion among crimes against humanity⁴⁸. This fact should not seem odd, especially since its integration as one of the crimes under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) was raised in the 1980s; in fact, the debate on the constitution of the ICC was reopened thanks to a

48 Cuenca, S. (2013). Narcotráfico: Un crimen de lesa humanidad en el estatuto de Roma de la Corte Penal Internacional? *Anuario Ibero-Americano de Derecho Internacional Penal. ANIDIP*. Vol. 1, 2013, pp. 105-134; Matus Acuña, J. P. (2014). Drug Trafficking is Not a Crime Under International Criminal Law. *SSRN*. Available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3093587> o <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3093587>

request from Trinidad and Tobago based on the increase in transnational organised crime, and in particular illegal drug trafficking⁴⁹.

As it is not considered an international criminal act, the principle of universal justice is not applicable and, therefore, the acts committed by criminal networks in relation to international drug trafficking are not prosecutable by third states. When we refer to third states in the framework of the principle of universal justice, we are referring to states whose sovereign territories are located outside the place where the acts qualified or qualifiable as international criminal acts occur, since this principle is identified with “extraterritoriality as a criminal exception”⁵⁰. The main consequence of not being an international crime is that it is the states where the events are taking place that are responsible for pursuing and prosecuting the perpetrators in accordance with national laws and international instruments to which they are party.

Three international instruments form the foundation on which the International Drug Control System was consolidated during the period 1961 to 1988: (i) the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs; (ii) the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances; and (iii) the 1988 United Nations Convention on Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances⁵¹. Methamphetamine, in particular, is considered a psychotropic substance due to its effects on the nervous system, and is included in *Schedule II of the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances*⁵². The four Golden Triangle states (Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and China) are States Parties to all these instruments⁵³, and are therefore fully subject to the obligations arising from them. Here, it is interesting to note in connection with what we said previously, the reservation made by Myanmar in the 1961 Single Convention with respect to the Shan State, aimed at allowing its inhabitants to consume opium for a certain period of time and to produce and manufacture it⁵⁴.

49 UN: United Nations General Assembly. (1989). Resolution 44/39. International criminal liability of persons and entities involved in cross-border illicit drug trafficking and other transnational criminal activities: establishment of an international criminal court having jurisdiction over such offences, (A/RES/44/39). Available at: https://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/r44_resolutions_table_es.htm

50 Bonet Esteva, M. (2015). *Principle of Universal Justice: from an absolute model to a restrictive model, with regard to successive amendments to Art. 23.4 L.O. Judicial Power*. Document 123/2015. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies. Available at: https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2015/DIEEO123-2015_Principio_Justicia_Universal_Margarita-Bonet.pdf

51 Sánchez Avilés, C. (2014). *The international drug control system: formation, evolution and interaction with national policies. The case of drug policy in Spain* [PhD Thesis]. Pompeu Fabra University. Pp. 151-173. Available at: <https://www.tdx.cat/bitstream/handle/10803/283753/tcsa.pdf;jsessionid=6354EF9DA564F76F820022A8CEoDA65B?sequence=1>

52 UN. (1971). Convention on Psychotropic Substances, 1971. P. 32. Available at: https://www.incb.org/documents/Psychotropics/conventions/convention_1971_es.pdf

53 UN Treaty Collection. (n.d.). Chapter VI: Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. Available at: https://treaties.un.org/Pages/Treaties.aspx?id=6&subid=A&clang=_en

54 UN Treaty Collection. (n.d.). *Op. cit.*

The Mekong Memorandum of Understanding on Drug Control (Mekong MOU) and the ASEANAPOL

The Mekong MOU constitutes the agreement of six countries to address drug trafficking in the lower Mekong region through the creation of a cooperation structure. The process began with the proposal, made by UNODC in 1992, for a common understanding on the control of drug trafficking in the lower Mekong region, mainly between China, Myanmar, Laos and Thailand⁵⁵. These four countries would go on to sign the Memorandum in 1993. Later, in 1995, the states of Cambodia and Vietnam joined in this initiative by signing the Mekong Protocol MOU⁵⁶.

This initiative aimed to create a sub-regional structure capable of controlling drug trafficking via ministerial-level cooperation among signatory countries with UNODC assistance, and by means of annual and biannual meetings which would serve as forums for dialogue on the main strategies in the fight against drug trafficking⁵⁷.

The main criticism of the Mekong MOU could be its controversial effectiveness, based on the data studied so far in relation to the current state of methamphetamine trafficking. This criticism can also be made of the liberal perspective that promoted its creation, within an international organisation such as the UN. Following John J. Mearsheimer's conclusion, "*institutions have a minimal effect on the behaviour of states*"⁵⁸. However, this conclusion should be highly qualified since it is a generalisation that ignores other factors (cultural, political, historical), and has been reached in response to a Westernised study of the effectiveness of institutions as tools to prevent and deter states from war (in a historical situation of constant humanitarian interventions in internal conflicts: the 1990s).

The application of this conclusion to the Southeast Asian region, however, seems to be quite appropriate since the main cooperation structure created so far has focused on economic cooperation (ASEAN). Even the European Union (EU), while also predominantly a guarantor of economic cooperation and union, has other powers in the area of European security, both in border and judicial matters. However, unlike Africa, Europe and South America, the Asia Pacific region does not have a regional human rights protection system. Both factors are key to understanding the historical failure to establish security cooperation structures beyond the bilateral level. The

55 UNODC. (n.d.). Partnership, Cooperation and Action in the Greater Mekong Sub-region. The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Drug Control. P. 4. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific//Publications/2017/MOU_Brochure.pdf

56 UNODC. (n.d.). *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

57 *Ibid*, p. 7.

58 Mearsheimer, J. J. (1994). The False Promise of International Institutions. *International Security*. 19(3), p. 7. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539078>

Mekong MOU could therefore be described as the imposition of a Western model of security cooperation in a politically unstable region such as the Mekong region, one that is not ready for this kind of cooperation.

ASEAN's role as a regional organisation

ASEAN, which is made up of ten Southeast Asian states (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam), is not a military or mutual defence organisation and, unlike other regional organisations such as ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), which in situations like those in Liberia and Sierra Leone during the 1990s did intervene in the territories by sending military troops from the organisation's countries, has not taken any such measures, maintaining a clear principle of neutrality and non-intervention in its foreign policies. With regard to the principle of non-intervention, this is not to say that other organisations such as the EU have the competence to act on the territory of states in security matters, since respect for state sovereignty is also an overriding principle. However, in the European case, the creation of judicial institutions both within the union, such as the Court of Justice of the European Union, and outside it, with the European Court of Human Rights which fulfil a function of guaranteeing respect for the fundamental rights enshrined in their respective texts, is the main difference with ASEAN, which lacks similar institutions.

ASEAN initiated a multilateral cooperation project with China in 2000: the *ASEAN and China Cooperative Operations in Response to Dangerous Drugs* (ACCORD). Ralf Emmers, in his text *International Regime-Building in ASEAN: Cooperation against the Illicit Trafficking and Abuse of Drugs* 2007, reviewed this proposed integration of the International Drug Control Regime under the ASEAN umbrella. Emmers concludes that this cooperation, rather than developing multilaterally, was taking place unilaterally and bilaterally, between China and ASEAN states (exemplifying ASEAN's lack of strength)⁵⁹.

The causes of the failure of this type of cooperation can be found in internal factors such as corruption, "domestic pressure" (influence of drug lobbies on national governments), capacity constraints and intra-regional variations⁶⁰, which are some of the factors that Emmers points to as possible explanations. A multi-causal examination of this phenomenon is therefore necessary, incorporating both institutional and local levels, and especially the elements intrinsic to "informal economies" and their influence on the stability of the Mekong countries, as previously noted in the case of Myanmar.

⁵⁹ Emmers, R. (2007). *International Regime-Building in ASEAN: Cooperation against the Illicit Trafficking and Abuse of Drugs*. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. December 2007, Vol. 29, No. 3, p. 519.

⁶⁰ Emmers, R. (2007). *Op. cit.*, pp. 519-522.

ASEANAPOL and ASOD. The ASEAN Action Plans

To fill the gap of an authority capable of having operational capabilities in the fight against drug trafficking and transnational organised crime in general, it was decided to form an institution within the organisational structure of ASEAN along the lines of the well-known INTERPOL: the “ASEANAPOL” or Asian Chiefs of National Police (later, SAARC followed the same path towards the constitution of the so-called “SAARCPOL”)⁶¹.

ASEANAPOL is composed of the national police commands of the various ASEANAPOL member states: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. The functions of this organisation include i) preparing and implementing work plans for the implementation of the resolutions adopted in the annual Joint Communiqués of the ASEANAPOL Conferences; ii) facilitating and coordinating cross-border cooperation in intelligence and information exchange; iii) facilitating and coordinating joint operations and activities related to criminal investigations; and iv) preparing the annual report on its activities and submitting it to the ASEANAPOL Executive Committee⁶².

ASEANAPOL has already entered into cooperation agreements with its counterpart and leading international police organisation, INTERPOL, allowing for greater collaboration through the sharing of databases of the two organisations⁶³.



Figure 5: ASEANAPOL logo (Source: Facebook).

⁶¹ BDNNews. (2006). Police chiefs of SAARC countries decide to form SAARCPOL. Available at: <https://bdnews24.com/politics/2006/05/08/police-chiefs-of-saarc-countries-decide-to-form-saarcpol>

⁶² ASEANAPOL. (n.d.). Objectives and Functions. Available at: <http://www.aseanapol.org/about-aseanapol/objectives-and-functions>

⁶³ INTERPOL. (2007). INTERPOL and Aseanapol sign historic information-sharing agreement. Available at: <https://www.interpol.int/News-and-Events/News/2007/INTERPOL-and-Aseanapol-sign-historic-information-sharing-agreement>

The next institution created within the ASEAN organisational structure is the ASOD (ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters). The ASOD is the body responsible for overseeing ASEAN's action with regard to the fight against illicit drug trafficking, within the framework of the action plans drawn up by ASEAN. The first action plan was drawn up for the period 2009 to 2015. The second action plan covers the period from 2016 to 2025. One of the main differences with respect to the object of the two schemes is the aforementioned displacement of natural drugs by synthetic drugs such as methamphetamine⁶⁴.

The previous action plan (2009-2015) is structured in 3 Parts:

1. Part I: on the actions that should be taken to achieve sustainable and meaningful education on illicit crops.

In this part, the objective is to analyse the main sources that motivate farmers to grow licit crops, and to realign government funds in the direction of providing support to these farmers and farming communities so that they can be integrated into other economic or development plans.

Thus, this part considers socio-economic causes as one of the main factors explaining the development of illicit crop cultivation activities. However, it does not refer to the production of synthetic drugs, for which other means and facilities are required.

2. Part II: refers to actions that should be taken to achieve a sustainable and significant reduction in drug production, trafficking and drug-related crime.

Explicit references to the fight against the smuggling of precursor chemicals, which are necessary for the manufacture of synthetic substances, can already be found in this part.

3. Part III: refers to the objective of reducing the prevalence of illicit drug use, mainly through the development of prevention plans in education, public awareness and drug abuse control programmes, i.e., facilitating access to prevention, treatment and rehabilitation for those who use these substances⁶⁵.

The new action plan (2016-2025) has a somewhat more extensive structure, as it is divided into 7 sections: i) a general section; ii) preventive education; iii) law enforcement; iv) treatment and rehabilitation; v) research; vi) alternative development; and vii) extra-regional cooperation.

64 ASEAN. (2017). *The ASEAN Work Plan on securing communities against illicit drugs 2016-2025*. ASEAN Secretariat. Jakarta. Available at: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Doc-2-Publication-ASEAN-WP-on-Securing-Communities-Against-Illicit-Drugs-2016-2025.pdf>

65 ASEAN. (2009). *Draft ASEAN Work Plan on Combating Illicit Drug Production, Trafficking and Use, 2009-2015*. ASOD Workshop. Ha Noi, Vietnam. Pp. 3-8. Available at: <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Doc-1-ASEAN-WP-on-Combating-Illicit-Drug-Production-2009-2015.pdf>

The general part explicitly mentions the importance of the “Golden Triangle” and the need to homogenise national standards on drug control measures. The remaining parts are very similar to the previous action plan in terms of objectives and functions to be carried out, although the current action plan mentions issues that were not in the previous one, such as the need to continue cooperation and open new forums for dialogue, mainly with India and China⁶⁶.

Bilateral cooperation agreements

Given that the subject of this study is a transnational crime, regional cooperation structures may appear to be the ideal instrument to confront these criminal networks and enforce agreed international obligations. This cooperation may even expand to encompass “bi-regional” cooperation, an example of which can be found in the current form of cooperation on drug trafficking between Europe and Latin America, specifically between the EU and AMERIPOL (Community of American Police)⁶⁷.

Having examined the role of ASEANAPOL and its extra-regional connections with other organisations, special mention should be made of the cooperation that takes place through bilateral agreements between Southeast Asian countries. Examples include the agreements reached between Thailand and Singapore with Laos and Myanmar to send ships to help the latter fight drug trafficking across the Mekong River⁶⁸; the cooperation agreement between the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia to develop maritime and air patrols⁶⁹; and the exercise of joint drug seizure operations, such as the recent one between China and Laos⁷⁰.

Measures to improve the current situation: attacking the heart of Southeast Asia’s drug trade

Myanmar as a central objective

In light of the above, to achieve significant results in the fight against drug trafficking in Southeast Asia, it is vital to address Myanmar’s domestic issue. As can be seen, in

66 ASEAN. (2017). *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

67 The PAcCTO. (2021). Cooperation between Latin America and Europe in the fight against drug trafficking. Available at: <https://www.elpaccto.eu/noticias/cooperacion-entre-america-latina-y-europa-frente-al-narcotrafico/>

68 Vietnam Plus. (2020). *Op. cit.*

69 La Vanguardia. (2019). Philippines and Malaysia strengthen cooperation against terrorism and drug trafficking. Available at: <https://www.lavanguardia.com/politica/20190307/46901808947/filipinas-y-malasia-estrechan-la-cooperacion-contrata-terrorismo-y-narcotrafico.html>

70 SwissInfo. (2022). China and Laos seize more than a tonne of methamphetamine in a raid. Available at: https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/china-narcotr%C3%A1fico_china-y-laos-decomisan-en-una-redada-m%C3%A1s-de-una-tonelada-de-metanfetamina/47699566

the Golden Triangle the epicentre of methamphetamine production and distribution is located inside Myanmar, a state affected by internal conflict, whose government is controlled by a military junta that may in turn benefit from the revenues derived from methamphetamine trafficking⁷¹. A first package of measures should therefore be aimed at finding a solution to this internal issue.

The current leader of the Tatmadaw, General Min Aung Hlaing, declared after the coup d'état that the purpose of the Armed Forces was “*to guard the democratic system according to the 2008 constitution*”⁷². In this speech, the general declared that this was a transitory situation, a state of emergency which, when it ended, would welcome free and fair general elections. However, he made no reference in his remarks to the conditions under which the state of emergency could be declared to have ended, leaving the situation somewhat uncertain as to its future.

ASEAN and its possible role as a mediator

In relation to confronting this situation, María del Mar Hidalgo García speaks of ASEAN as a possible mediating actor, although she also admits some limitations, such as its questionable neutral character or a possible division within it⁷³. Other authors also share this central view of ASEAN as a protagonist in offering a course of action, at least in the diplomatic field⁷⁴. China, for its part, is also in favour of this option. Moreover, the regional organisation itself has already taken its own measures in this regard, including the “five-point consensus” on addressing the situation in Myanmar. Among these five points is the possibility of ASEAN acting as a mediator in the dialogue process with the Tatmadaw⁷⁵.

It should be noted that the founding text of ASEAN (the ASEAN Declaration or Bangkok Declaration of 1967) sets out a number of points that constitute the aims of the organisation. However, the only point that refers to security matters is the second one: “promote regional peace and stability through continued respect for justice and

71 Hidalgo García, M.^a del M. (2022). *Myanmar and the risk of civil war (reprint)*. Analysis Paper 66/2022. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies. P. 21. Available at: https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2022/DIEEEA66_2022_MARHID_Myanmar.pdf

72 The National News. (2021). Myanmar's military chief speaks following coup. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hbxSVGKTwmM>

73 Hidalgo García, M.^a del M. (2022). *Myanmar and the Risk of Civil War (reissue)*. *Op. cit.*, pp. 21-22.

74 Cerbián Gómez, D. (2022). *Myanmar: A Difficult Conflict to Solve*. Analysis Paper 92/2022. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies. Pp. 16-17. Available at: https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2022/DIEEEO92_2022_DAVCEB_Myanmar.pdf

75 VietnamPlus. (2022). ASEAN promotes the implementation of the five-point consensus on the situation in Myanmar. Available at: <https://es.vietnamplus.vn/asean-promueve-la-implementacion-del-consenso-de-cinco-puntos-sobre-situacion-en-myanmar/138269.vnp>

the rule of law”⁷⁶. The ASEAN Policy and Security Community was established to achieve this goal. However, if we analyse its mandate⁷⁷, we can see that its objectives are oriented towards the resolution and prevention of intra-regional conflict situations, i.e., between the states that make up ASEAN. Based on the above, it can be said that ASEAN’s move towards taking measures to address the internal situation of one of its member states is an important factor in this process, taking into account respect for the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states, especially when an internal situation has harmful cross-border effects on neighbouring states.

Action against the Burmese military junta government

Looking back, this is not the first time the Tatmadaw has been at the helm of the Burmese government; on the contrary, the trajectory of democracy in Myanmar is actually young, with the first real elections taking place since independence in 2010 (elections were held in 1990 but the Tatmadaw did not recognise the results and arrested opposition leaders). Until then, and since the 1962 Tatmadaw coup d’état, the military junta was the main leader of its government. It was not until the legitimacy of the military regime was seriously challenged⁷⁸ that the military junta was forced to give up in the name of democracy. Further steps should therefore be aimed at delegitimising the actions of the military junta and undermining its foundations. Among these bases is the flow of arms transfers, which requires action in line with the recommendations of the UN Security Council’s International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar (IFFM), through the imposition of an arms embargo on Myanmar⁷⁹. However, this possibility may be hampered by two actors in particular: Russia and China⁸⁰, both of which, according to the IFFM report, have continued to provide arms to the Tatmadaw after its coup (in contrast to other countries such as Ukraine and South Korea, which stopped their arms transfers). Serbia and India are other states that have also continued these actions⁸¹.

76 ASEAN. (1967). The ASEAN Declaration (Declaration of Bangkok). Available at: <https://agreement.asean.org/media/download/20140117154159.pdf>

77 ASEAN. (n.d.). ASEAN Political Security Community. Available at: <https://asean.org/asean-political-security-community/>

78 Moya Barba, G.(2022). The Rohingya Crisis: the invisible genocide. *Journal Historia Autónoma*. 21 (2022). P. 131. e-ISSN: 2254-8726.

79 Human Rights Council. (2022). Progress made and remaining challenges with regard to the recommendations of the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar. Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General (A/HRC/51/41). P. 5.

80 Russia and China stand out for their relevance as permanent members of the UN Security Council and thus their inherent veto power in that body.

81 Human Rights Council. (2022). Progress made and remaining challenges with regard to the recommendations of the independent international fact-finding mission on Myanmar. *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

Furthermore, the aforementioned report emphasises the economic capacity provided to the Tatmadaw, derived from entities that allow the entry and exit of foreign currencies and companies that maintain their activities on Burmese territory by engaging in trade and investment (in addition to what has been said, with the income derived from drug trafficking in Southeast Asia). Measures in these areas are therefore necessary to undermine the military junta's economic base.

However, the Tatmadaw's base not only rests on its military power and the economic capacity to perpetuate this power, but there is also an important social base that helps it to sustain and govern itself. This basis is closely linked to what could be called the "Rohingya issue"⁸² and the junta's relationship with Buddhist monks and part of the Buddhist population in Myanmar. Since its inception, the Tatmadaw has advocated polarisation, in general, between Buddhists and people belonging to other ethnic and religious minorities and, in particular, between Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims⁸³. This is how Burmese activist and academic Maung Zarni tells the story: "*The military systematically engaged in spreading Islamophobia (...) they want to get rid of the Rohingya and discriminate and persecute others*"⁸⁴.

Therefore, the first package of measures to address the drug trafficking situation in Southeast Asia, surprising as it may seem, does not so much advocate measures related to the fight against drug trafficking at the regional or international level, but measures related to attacking the epicentre of drug crime in the Golden Triangle: Myanmar. To this end, and through the collaboration of regional (ASEAN) and international (UN) institutions, the military, economic and social bases on which the military junta government operates should be the main targets (China's geopolitical and economic interests in Myanmar should also be considered in this respect, as it is a state through which it has access to the Bay of Bengal and has numerous economic links). Once the necessary steps have been taken to restore stability in Myanmar and, ultimately, prevent its transformation into a failed state, work can begin on the necessary actions to tackle drug trafficking in Southeast Asia.

Conclusions

Methamphetamine trafficking in Southeast Asia has expanded and continues to expand without a central authority to prosecute drug traffickers, but rather with

82 Expression used by the academic Maung Zarni. Source: Alam, S. *et al.* (2020). Academic: 'The Rohingya issue in Myanmar goes beyond the Muslim versus Buddhist paradigm'. Agencia Anadolu. Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/es/an%C3%A1lisis/acad%C3%A9mico-cuesti%C3%B3n-rohiny%C3%A1-en-myanmar-va-m%C3%A1s-all%C3%A1-del-paradigma-de-musulmanes-contra-budistas-/1892231>

83 The Rohingyas are an ethnic minority who practise Islam and live mainly in northern Rakhine State in western Myanmar, bordering Bangladesh and the Bay of Bengal.

84 Alam, S. *et al.* (2020). Academic: Rohingya issue in Myanmar goes beyond the Muslim versus Buddhist paradigm. *Op. cit.*

individual states conducting their own drug seizure operations which, through regional cooperation, manage to tackle this cross-border threat.

For the time being, the scope of methamphetamine trafficking is regional, not extending beyond the Asia-Pacific area. However, a major concern centres on a possible expansion of the route across the Myanmar-India border into West Asia, where two major drug routes could collide: the Golden Crescent route (Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran) with the Golden Triangle route, which poses a potential threat to European security because the Golden Triangle route does extend into Europe.

The “Golden Triangle” region of Thailand, Laos and Myanmar (and to a lesser extent China), which also corresponds to the lower Mekong region, is seen as the main trafficking route for this type of synthetic drug in Southeast Asia.

The attempt at regional cooperation through the Mekong MOU could be described as a failure in terms of achieving its objective: curbing illicit drug trafficking in the Mekong region. Myanmar is seen as the central state on the Golden Triangle route in terms of methamphetamine production; in particular, the focus is on Shan State as the main producer of methamphetamine. The necessary measures must therefore be taken to ensure the stability of the Burmese state, with the economic, military and social foundations on which the Tatmadaw government is currently based as its fundamental objectives. These measures would be the prelude to future actions in relation to the fight against drug trafficking.

Last, the absence of a regional authority capable of implementing measures aimed at engaging national governments’ actions on drug trafficking makes this situation even more difficult to resolve. To this end, as has been seen with cooperation relations with China, cooperation agreements are more likely to be reached with the Southeast Asian states as such than with ASEAN as the regional organisation into which they are integrated. This is why cooperation between the various police organisations created under the umbrella of different regional organisations (ASEANOPOL under the umbrella of ASEAN and SAARC POL under the auspices of SAARC) is growing in importance. And although this cooperation is not a long-term solution, but rather just a palliative method to curb illicit drug trafficking, it could help curb the expansion of drug routes into other territories, further compromising the difficult solution of drug trafficking in Southeast Asia.

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