

ALTSEAN BURMA

ALTERNATIVE ASEAN NETWORK ON BURMA
campaigns, advocacy & capacity-building for human rights & democracy

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ATS: A NEED FOR SPEED

- There are almost twice as many users of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) in the world than of opiates.
- The majority of ATS production and trafficking in the world occurs in Southeast Asia. Burma is a primary source of ATS to the world market.
- The ATS trade has enabled the SPDC to reduce opium production in response to international pressure and give it an alternative source of revenue that is less politicized than heroin.
- ATS production is faster, more profitable and easier to conceal than heroin.
- Regional governments need to take seriously the threats to regional, state and human security posed by ATS. Its production in Burma has sparked an explosion in production, trafficking and use throughout East and Southeast Asia.
- Injected and tablet forms of ATS are directly linked to the spread of HIV/AIDS to Burma's neighboring countries.
- The SPDC plays a pivotal role in the production and trafficking of ATS and has provided a safe haven for international drug lords.
- Every country neighboring Burma is impacted by ATS production:
 - **CAMBODIA:** 100,000 methamphetamine pills enter the country daily.
 - **CHINA:** 670,000 people using drugs produced in Burma. There was 435% increase in drug seizures in the first 3 months of 2006 compared to 2005, half of it was synthetic drugs like ATS.
 - **THAILAND:** 900 million ATS tablets arrive from Burma each year.
 - **INDIA:** Drug syndicates in Burma are flooding northeast India with ATS.
 - **LAOS:** 1,870,305 ATS tablets were seized in Laos in nine months.
 - **MALAYSIA:** 36kg of methamphetamines were seized in nine months.
 - **AUSTRALIA:** Half of all its methamphetamines originate in Burma.
 - **SINGAPORE:** 56% of all drug arrests involve ATS.
 - **JAPAN:** 80% of all drug arrests involve ATS.

ASIA AT THE EPICENTER

- The total global ATS production in 2004 was 480 metric tons (mt); 353mt were amphetamines and 126mt were ecstasy.¹
- Twenty six million people (0.6% of the global population) used amphetamines, methamphetamines, or related substances in 2003.² By comparison there are only 16 million opiate users worldwide.
- ATS use is rising faster in Asia than in any other region of the world. It is home to 62% of the world's amphetamine and methamphetamine users with the predominance being in East and Southeast Asia.³
- In 2003, global seizures of ATS rose by 13%. Thailand was the leading country and seized 20% of the world total. China was a close second with 18% of the world total. Burma seized less than one percent of the world total.⁴
- In 2004, 58% of global methamphetamine seizures came from East and Southeast Asia.
- Between 2000 and 2004, seizures of ATS by Burma's State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) fell by 69% despite evidence that the ATS trade in Burma was still flourishing.⁵

NOTHING NEW, JUST WORSE

Much of the focus on Asia's drug problem has centered on opium. Afghanistan is the world's largest producer with Burma at number two. Recent studies indicate a downward trend of opium production in Burma. However, any benefits associated with the alleged decrease in opium production have been overshadowed by a tremendous upturn in production and trafficking of ATS.⁶

WHY THE SHIFT TO ATS?

ATS production is a vastly more profitable enterprise for drug traffickers than heroin. It can be produced in crystal, tablet or pill form, making it much more transportable. Production facilities are much easier to hide because they are smaller and easier to set up and break down than heroin labs, often being located in remote jungle or wilderness areas where they can go undetected by police. To create ATS requires specific precursor chemicals. Producers can make arrangements with legal companies to procure these precursors.⁷ A skilled ATS producer can make about 4.5 kg of ATS in a 24-hour period.⁸

Heroin production, by contrast, requires a three-month growing period for the poppy plants followed by a complex sequence of chemical processes.⁹ As an SPDC official stated, "It is very easy to produce ATS. All you have to do is get chemicals, a few people. The equipment is here in the market, the method is on the Internet, you just download it and with high school chemistry you can do it."¹⁰ Moreover, ATS production is cheaper than heroin production. Drug syndicates can cut farmers out of the equation and thereby cut costs and increase profits. The only major expense that remains is purchasing the precursor chemicals, but that is negligible compared to chemicals required for heroin production. Finally, global demand for

¹ UNODC, World Drug Report 2006, UN Doc E.06.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

² UNODC, World Drug Report 2005, UN Doc E.05.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

³ UNODC, World Drug Report 2006, UN Doc E.06.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

⁴ UNODC, World Drug Report 2005, UN Doc E.05.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

⁵ UNODC, World Drug Report 2006, UN Doc E.06.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

⁶ UNODC, World Drug Report 2006, UN Doc E.06.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

⁷ Reuters (20 Jun 03) UN sees rapid rise in amphetamine use worldwide

⁸ US Office of National Drug Control Policy (Nov 03) Methamphetamine Fact Sheet

⁹ US Central Intelligence Agency (26 Apr 05) From flowers to heroin

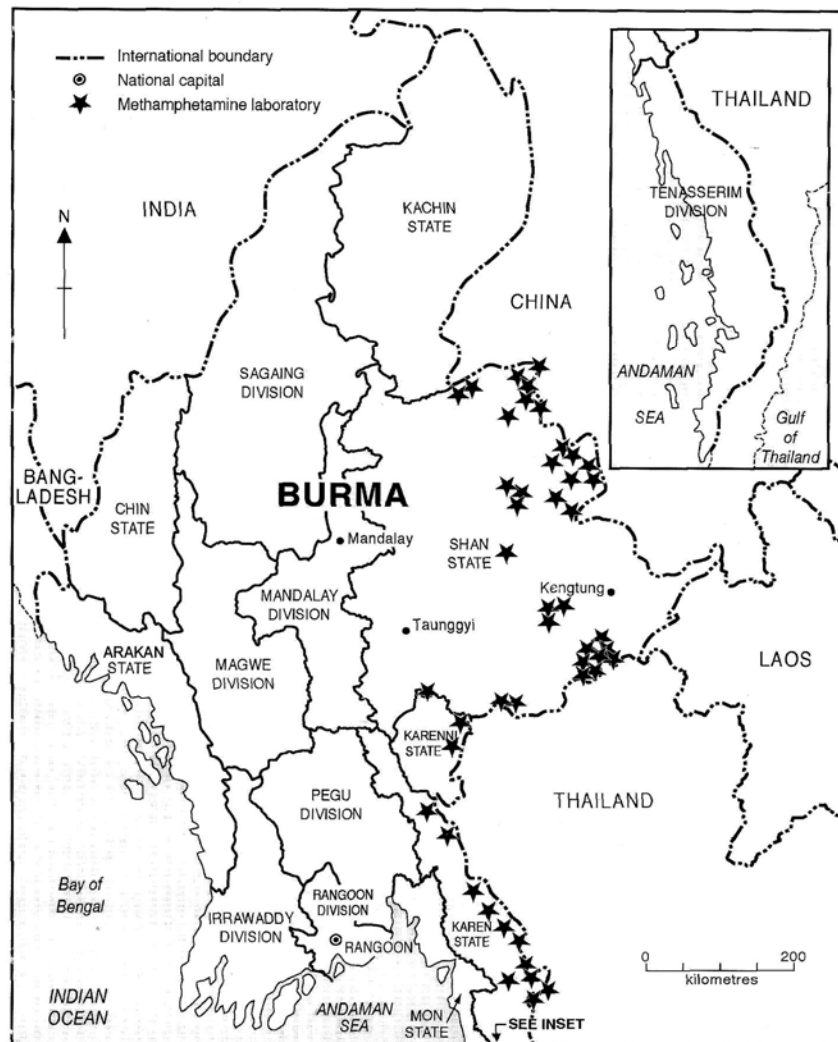
¹⁰ AFP (27 Jun 05) Myanmar slashes opium production, but fights methamphetamines alone

ATS is driving its production as is evident by the numerous seizures in countries not just in Asia, but also around the world.

ATS PRODUCTION IN BURMA

In Burma, most production of ATS occurs in the remote areas of land along the Burma/China and Burma/Thailand borders.¹¹ A large portion is confined to Shan State, where it can be quickly moved across the border to Thailand and China.¹² Many ATS labs are located in areas that are controlled by ethnic armies such as the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and the ethnic Chinese Kokang. Each of these armies shares a ceasefire agreement with the SPDC under which it is tacitly permitted to conduct its drug trade. Reports indicate that more and more ATS is being produced in labs that also serve as heroin refineries.¹³ Evidence from ATS seizures show that drug producers in Burma are creating ATS in a variety of forms such as tablets, crystal methamphetamine, and an injected form.

METHAMPHETAMINE LABS IN BURMA 2002-2003¹⁴



¹¹ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

¹² Transnational Institute (May 06) Drug Policy Briefing No. 17: HIV/AIDS and drug use in Burma/Myanmar

¹³ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

¹⁴ Altsean-Burma (Nov 04) A Failing Grade

A SERIOUS PUBLIC HEALTH THREAT

The adverse effects of chronic ATS use are hardly contained to the individual user. Unlike with other drugs, the impact of ATS is not confined to the margins of society, but bleeds through it at every layer. Chronic ATS use can lead to violent behavior, impaired judgment and high-risk sexual behavior. In one study of ATS users, 53% of males and 44% of females reported engaging in violent acts while under the influence.¹⁵

Methamphetamines produce a longer lasting “high” than opiates, lasting between 6 and 24 hours.¹⁶ The high a user gets from using heroin only lasts about three or four hours.¹⁷ As a result, users spend less time seeking out drugs and more time at work, school or in public settings, often while still under the influence, creating a greater likelihood that the violent tendencies brought on by the drug might manifest into violent behavior directed at others.¹⁸ In a nationwide survey of US law enforcement agencies in 2003, 31.6% reported methamphetamines as the drug most responsible for violent crime in their area. In regions where methamphetamines were more prevalent that number was as high as 73.3%.¹⁹

ATS use also takes a toll on public health care systems. More than 10,000 methamphetamine psychotic patients sought treatment in Thailand during 2002 and in many hospitals 30-50% of the patients admitted were for treatment of methamphetamine use.²⁰ In 2006, drug officials in Thailand project that the costs of rehabilitative services for 20,000 drug addicts will be 100 million baht (US \$2.5 million).²¹

The monetary costs of combating methamphetamine use include cleaning up lab sites, arresting and imprisoning producers, users, and traffickers, and domestic violence shelters and foster care services for women and children from homes shattered ATS. This all comes on top of the loss of productivity that users contribute to the workforce. The production of ATS involves hazardous chemicals that release toxic fumes causing health problems and even death if inhaled, and are also extremely volatile. In many cases methamphetamine labs go undetected until a fire or explosion occurs. On average there are 2.7kg of waste chemicals for every 45kg of ATS produced.²² These chemicals may pollute groundwater, remain present in buildings long after their use as a production facility, and contaminate soil, rendering it useless and uninhabitable. In the US, police spend on average US \$5,000 but as much as \$150,000 to clean up a single methamphetamine lab.²³

WHO IS USING ATS?

ATS has traditionally been used for weight loss, athletic performance enhancement, and to stay awake as is seen in truck drivers, migrant workers and construction workers. More recently it has become a fashionable accessory of the “rave culture” with increased popularity throughout Asia’s urban hubs. The most common profile for an ATS user is young urban-dwellers.²⁴ Students use ATS during busy times like final exams in order to increase their amount of work output.²⁵ In 1999 Thailand’s Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB)

¹⁵ Journal of Drug Issues, (Winter 06) Methamphetamine use and violence

¹⁶ Frontline: The Meth Epidemic (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/meth/faqs/>)

¹⁷ Basic Facts about Drugs: Heroin (<http://www.acde.org/common/Heroin.htm>)

¹⁸ Journal of Drug Issues (Winter 06) Methamphetamine use and violence

¹⁹ National Drug Intelligence Center (Apr 04) National Drug Threat Assessment 2004

²⁰ Lancet (31 May 03) Asia grapples with spreading amphetamine abuse

²¹ Irrawaddy (19 May 06) New drug restrictions focus on migrants

²² What are the community costs of methamphetamine in the Flathead Valley? (<http://www.stopmeth.com/costs.htm>)

²³ Branch County Meth Task Force (<http://www.bhsj.org/meth/faq.htm>)

²⁴ Journal of Drug Issues (Winter 06) Methamphetamine use and violence

²⁵ Harvard Asia Pacific Review (Fall 05) The yaa baa phenomenon in mainland Southeast Asia

estimated that 12.4% of students used ATS, a 1.4% increase over the previous year.²⁶ In 2005, it was estimated that a third of Thailand's regular drug users were below the age of 16.²⁷

Burma certainly has its fair share of ATS users. In 2003 the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported at least 15,000 regular ATS users in Burma. NGOs and community leaders working in Burma have reported seeing an increase in the use of synthetic drugs. They specifically mention youth in urban centers as well as workers in ethnic areas.²⁸ Use amongst migrant workers from Burma in neighboring countries is difficult to estimate but anecdotal evidence suggests it is very high.

THE CONNECTION TO HIV/AIDS

ATS use impairs judgment, making users more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as fighting and unsafe sexual practices.²⁹

Recent reports indicate that law enforcement officials in Thailand have found an injected form of methamphetamine.³⁰ ATS use through injection poses grave consequences for a region that is already hard-hit with the transmission of HIV/AIDS by intravenous drug use.

In Burma, 26-30% of officially reported HIV cases are linked to intravenous drug use, one of the worst rates in the world.³¹ In 2003, intravenous drug users in Rangoon and Mandalay were tested for HIV and between 50 and 85% tested positive for the virus.³² Infection rates remain highest in Burma's northern and eastern ethnic regions where opium, heroin, and ATS are most readily available.

The SPDC has done little to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS in Burma. The junta's tight restrictions on international NGOs that were recently codified in February 2006 drove out of the country several of its largest aid organizations such as the Global Fund and Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) France. One of the biggest points of dispute was over the SPDC's insistence that workers visiting prisoners be accompanied by a government official. The International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), which conducts prison visits in Burma, insisted the restriction would jeopardize the confidentiality and accuracy of its work and so the SPDC suspended prison visits altogether. However, HIV/AIDS is significant problem in Burma's prisons. A large number of prisoners contract the virus through medical and non-medical injecting. The junta seems indifferent to the problem. In the mid-1990s the SPDC even banned all reading materials about HIV/AIDS from all of Burma's prisons.³³ The conditions in prisons today are hard to estimate considering the barriers to information put up by the junta.

TRAFFICKING ROUTES IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

In East and Southeast Asia there are primarily two types of drug trafficking taking place: trafficking of drugs that have already passed through the stages of production and trafficking of precursors for the creation of drugs. Drug trafficking includes the trade of heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and ATS. Trafficking of precursors includes chemicals such as ephedrine and

²⁶ Lancet (31 May 03) Asia grapples with spreading amphetamine abuse

²⁷ Taipei Times (11 Oct 05) Asian states run out of patience with Myanmar

²⁸ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

²⁹ Journal of Drug Issues (Winter 06) Methamphetamine use and violence

³⁰ Transnational Institute (May 06) Drug Policy Briefing No. 17: HIV/AIDS and drug use in Burma/Myanmar

³¹ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

³² WHO (Jun 05) Summary country profile for HIV/AIDS treatment scale-up: Myanmar (http://www.who.int/3by5/support/june2005_mmr.pdf)

³³ TNI Policy Briefing (17 May 06) HIV/AIDS and drug use in Burma/Myanmar

pseudoephedrine.³⁴ The UNODC reports that the trafficking of drugs usually takes place within a region and interregional trafficking is almost exclusively of precursors.³⁵

ATS seizures

Globally, 547 ATS labs were dismantled in 1990. This number grew in 2004 to 18,532.³⁶ About 90% of all methamphetamine seizures occur in East and Southeast Asia.³⁷ According to the UNODC, when asked for the origin of most methamphetamines taken during drug seizures, respondents most often named China, followed closely by Burma and the Philippines.³⁸

Despite concerted efforts to stem the flow of ATS in Southeast Asia, drug busts have turned up far fewer amounts of ATS than are predicted to be produced and trafficked every day. A true reduction in the production of ATS would be followed by an increase in market price, but this has not happened despite varying seizure rates.³⁹ Many of the ATS seizures in Asia take place in countries sharing a border with Burma and in some cases Burma has been named as the country of origin for the drugs.

Burma: The Center of it all

In Burma, much of the heroin and ATS produced is trafficked overland or is shipped along the Mekong River. ATS produced in Burma has been documented flowing to China, Thailand, India, Laos, and Bangladesh. This means that every country bordering Burma is impacted by ATS production in Burma. Recent heroin seizures in 2004 and 2005 have produced evidence that drug traffickers are increasingly using the Rangoon international airport to further their enterprise to countries that traditional routes could not reach directly.⁴⁰

Burma does not have its own chemical industry. It relies entirely on imports of precursor chemicals from neighbors such as China and India to feed its production of ATS.⁴¹

In 2006, the center of Burma's drug enterprise relocated from Tachilek, which sits just over the Thai border from Mae Sai, to Mandalay, Burma's second largest city. The move comes after increased pressure by the Chinese in the Golden Triangle that forced junta officials to start cracking down in the eastern Shan State.⁴²

Although many ATS-producing factories near the Golden Triangle region in eastern Shan State closed down due to increased operational difficulties during Thailand's 2003 'War on Drugs,' the move appears to have been just temporary. Sources indicate that the factories have returned to producing ATS under the protection of the UWSA.⁴³

Aside from trafficking and producing ATS, Burma is also a major consumer, especially the SPDC Army. According to David Mathieson, a narcotics expert from Australian National University, the soldiers carry methamphetamines with them to be taken prior to mounting brutal offensives against ethnic armies and innocents. This comes to light as

³⁴ USDEA (Sept 03) Methamphetamine: The current threat in East Asia and the Pacific Rim

³⁵ UNODC, World Drug Report 2005, UN Doc E.05.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

³⁶ UNODC, World Drug Report 2006, UN Doc E.06.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

³⁷ United Nations (04) Report of the International Narcotics Control Board

³⁸ UNODC, World Drug Report 2006, UN Doc E.06.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

³⁹ UNODC, World Drug Report 2006, UN Doc E.06.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

⁴⁰ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

⁴¹ AP (20 Oct 05) China, Southeast Asia neighbors say opium production down, use of synthetic drugs up

⁴² SHAN (31 Mar 06) Biz hub moves to Mandalay

⁴³ SHAN (2 Aug 05) Drug factories withdraw from the triangle

methamphetamines have been continuously found among the belongings of dead SPDC soldiers.⁴⁴

In 2005, the SPDC reported having seized 3.65 million ATS tablets.⁴⁵ Official SPDC statistics report that in the first eleven months of 2005, they seized over 1.6 million methamphetamine tablets along with 1,000kg of raw opium, 776kg of heroin and 119kg of marijuana. One seizure by the SPDC in May 2005 took 102kg of crystal amphetamines. The syndicate responsible had previously smuggled over 800kg of ATS to China, Malaysia, the Philippines and the US.⁴⁶ In July 2005, the SPDC seized 102.5kg of ATS on its way to Hong Kong, Malaysia and South Korea.⁴⁷ Officials continued to make arrests in 2006. In January, 13 million amphetamine tablets were taken in one seizure in Burma. The drugs reportedly belonged to a unit of the UWSA.⁴⁸ In June, 400,000 methamphetamine pills and 30 barrels of liquid chemicals were seized in Nakawngmu near Chiang Mai, Thailand.⁴⁹ Also in June, SPDC officials arrested three men transporting more than 600 amphetamine tablets at the Three Pagodas Pass on the Thai/Burma border.⁵⁰

ATS Seizures in Burma⁵¹

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
ATS pills (number of pills)	16,026,688	28,887,514	26,759,772	33,103,548	9,399,794	4,002,684	8,379,311
ATS crystal (kg)	No figure	No figure	No figure	518	415	102	0.16

Precursor Chemical Seizures in Burma⁵²

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Ephedrine (kg)	3,819	6,485	2,670	3,922	1,724	376	183
Acetic Anhydride (l)	424	1,620	2,429	12,318	2,953	2,562	26
Chemical Liquid (l)	4,968	57,019	86,756	174,191	26,440	40,628	17,971

Thailand-Burma Border

Methamphetamines remain the most frequently used drug in Thailand.⁵³ Every year Thailand receives up to 900 million amphetamine pills from Burma.⁵⁴ Today about 79% of Thailand's drugs come through its northern border with Burma and Laos.⁵⁵ Trafficking of methamphetamines from Burma to Thailand declined following the 2003 'War on Drugs' in Thailand when over 2,000 people were killed and policing efforts on the Thai-Burma border were intensified. Trafficking into Thailand increased again in 2005 in response to a growing demand among Thai youth, and as part of a new trend to utilize Thailand as a center for transporting drugs throughout the region.⁵⁶ Some of the drugs arriving into Europe have been

⁴⁴ The Daily Telegraph (06 Mar 06) New evidence backs claims of genocide in Burma

⁴⁵ AFP (20 Feb 06) Amphetamine seizures increase in Myanmar

⁴⁶ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

⁴⁷ AFP (01 Jul 05) China, Myanmar bust international drug trafficking gang

⁴⁸ AFP (21 Mar 06) Myanmar claims progress in narcotics crackdown

⁴⁹ SHAN (13 Jun 06) From boom town to ghost town

⁵⁰ IMNA (12 Jun 06) Amphetamine smugglers arrested for the first time on Thai-Burma border by Burmese police

⁵¹ UNODC (Dec 05) Myanmar Country Profile

(http://www.unodc.org/pdf/myanmar/myanmar_country_profile_2005.pdf)

⁵² UNODC (Dec 05) Myanmar Country Profile

(http://www.unodc.org/pdf/myanmar/myanmar_country_profile_2005.pdf)

⁵³ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

⁵⁴ Taipei Times (11 Oct 05) Asian states run out of patience with Myanmar

⁵⁵ Irrawaddy (19 May 06) New Drug Restrictions Focus on Migrants

⁵⁶ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

traced back to Thailand with Burma as the country of origin.⁵⁷ Thailand is also a source of precursors flowing into Burma for use in the manufacture of ATS.⁵⁸

In 2002, the Thai Royal Army reported having seized 120 million ATS pills. The drugs were linked to the UWSA in northeastern Burma. More recently in 2005, Thailand seized a grand total of 13.4 million methamphetamine pills and 44kg of the ATS precursor ketamine.⁵⁹ In one seizure, Thai police netted 10,000 ATS tablets along with 610kg of heroin from a boat off the coast of the Trat province in March 2005. In June they seized 148kg of ATS and 86kg of heroin en route to Malaysia.⁶⁰

Burma's western border with India

An arrangement of convenience has developed between traffickers in Burma and India. Precursor chemicals manufactured in India are trafficked into Burma where they are used to create ATS and then smuggled back into India's northeast states. By working with indigenous tribal groups inside of India, trafficking organizations in Burma move large quantities of drugs with little trouble.⁶¹ The Indian states hit hardest by this arrangement continue to be Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland. This pattern has made Burma northeast India's primary source of illicit drugs.⁶² While the northeast has experienced the greatest surge of drugs from Burma, this route has also emerged as an entry point to traffic drugs to other states of India.⁶³ In 2004, the United Nations' report of the International Narcotics Control Board found that almost all of the precursor ephedrine seized in India was destined for Burma.⁶⁴

China to the north

China is the biggest producer of numerous precursor chemicals used in the manufacture of ATS. Similar to the arrangement drug traffickers from Burma have with persons in India, ATS production in the Golden Triangle indicates that precursors from China are flowing into Burma where production bases along the border convert them into ATS.⁶⁵ The drug is then trafficked back inside China or on to new destinations such as Thailand or Laos. A report by China's National Narcotics Control Commission said that, "the amount of precursor chemicals smuggled into the Golden Triangle area is startling."⁶⁶ When trafficking to Thailand declined in 2003, much of that business was rerouted to China where it remains a large problem.⁶⁷ In March 2005, the Bangkok Post reported that there are 1.14 million drug addicts in China with half of them being methamphetamine users.⁶⁸ In 2004, China reported it had 670,000 addicts who use drugs produced in Burma.⁶⁹ Most popular destinations for ATS in China are urban centers where it is used in the nightclub and rave culture.⁷⁰

China seized 3,190kg of crystallized methamphetamines in 2002. The next year that number rose by 83% to 5,830kg. Most ATS coming from Burma is in pill form and not crystallized. However, in 2003 one lab producing crystallized methamphetamines was destroyed in

⁵⁷ UNODC, World Drug Report 2005, UN Doc E.05.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

⁵⁸ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

⁵⁹ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

⁶⁰ The Nation (25 Jun 05) Burma's drug-free deadline is a delusion

⁶¹ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

⁶² Mizzima (30 May 06) Burma the main source of drugs for India's northeast

⁶³ Mizzima (16 Sep 05) Drugs and arms trafficking boom in India's Northeast 'Drugs originating from Burma'

⁶⁴ UN (2004) Report of the International Narcotics Control Board [E.05.XI.3]

⁶⁵ Thai Press Reports (31 Jan 06) Thailand Myanmar (Burma) makes empty promises on controlling drug trade

⁶⁶ Nation (31 Oct 05) Meth in their madness?

⁶⁷ UNODC, World Drug Report 2005, UN Doc E.05.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

⁶⁸ SHAN (18 May 05) China losing patience

⁶⁹ Mizzima (03 Mar 04) Opium production decreases but amphetamines increase in Burma

⁷⁰ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

Burma.⁷¹ In May 2005, Chinese officials seized 102kg of ATS in Yunnan Province, an area that shares its southern border with Burma. In November, police in Yunnan seized 110kg of methamphetamines.⁷² In the first three months of 2006, Chinese officials recorded a 435% increase in the number of drug seizures from 2005. About half of the hauls were synthetic drugs such as ATS.⁷³

Laos and Cambodia

Laos and Cambodia have recently emerged as favorite destinations for ATS produced in Burma. Along with other countries in the region, these two are experiencing upsurges in the consumption of methamphetamines. The UNODC estimates that as many as 100,000 methamphetamine tablets enter Cambodia on a daily basis. The majority of them come through Stung Treng along the northern border with Laos. From Cambodia many of the drugs are either consumed domestically or trafficked through the porous border to Thailand or Vietnam.⁷⁴

ATS entering Laos is, for the most part, due to the arrival of new drug syndicates in Burma. These syndicates have come under fire by the UWSA, the predominant drug producing and trafficking organization in Burma. Rather than risk armed conflict with the UWSA, these groups have relocated their bases of operation to Laos where they produce ATS for shipment to Thailand. Authorities have identified as many as 30 ATS labs on the Laos side of the Thai-Laotian border. For organizations whose production bases remain inside Burma, one of the most beaten trafficking paths is over the Mekong River to Muang Mom in Bo Keow district of Laos. The final destination is Vientiane where the drugs can be stored before moving to their next destination.⁷⁵ In many cases that destination is Thailand, either directly or first through Cambodia.

In the first half of 2004, Laos seized 3,020,000 methamphetamine tablets. In 2005, Laotian officials seized 1,870,305 tablets in a nine month period. In 2005, Cambodia seized 293,245 methamphetamine pills. In one seizure in May 2005, Cambodian police arrested two traffickers attempting to smuggle 100,000 ATS pills from Cambodia into Vietnam. In December, police in Banteay Meanchey Province of Cambodia arrested four men attempting to traffic 46,000 methamphetamine pills.⁷⁶

South Korea and Japan

In Japan, methamphetamines are the most frequently used drug. Despite this fact, there is no domestic manufacturing base for amphetamines in Japan. This means Japan's ATS users are completely reliant on imports. However, Japan is a chief producer of 60 different types of precursor chemicals. Eighty percent of all drug-related arrests in Japan involve the use of amphetamines. Estimates place the amount of ATS trafficked into Japan annually between ten and twenty metric tons.⁷⁷ The Government of Japan attributes the majority of ATS entering the country to China, Hong Kong or North Korea, all of which have trafficking links to Burma.⁷⁸

⁷¹ UN (04) Report of the International Narcotics Control Board [E.05.XI.3]

⁷² Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

⁷³ AP (09 May 06) China busts cocaine ring – with US help

⁷⁴ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

⁷⁵ Bangkok Post (06 Nov 05) As new players move in to fill the vacuum, multinational drug suppression efforts are stepping up

⁷⁶ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

⁷⁷ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

⁷⁸ UNODC, World Drug Report 2005, UN Doc E.05.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

In South Korea, 67% of methamphetamines arrive from China.⁷⁹ ATS also originates from Thailand, the Philippines and North Korea. Precursor chemicals transit in South Korea as well, in preparation for transshipment to South America and the Middle East.⁸⁰

North Korea's role

Information gained from seizures indicates that there is also a drug connection between Burma and North Korea. In 2003, Australia stopped a North Korean freighter smuggling 50kg of heroin labeled with the Double UO Globe-brand No-4, the most famous brand coming out of the Golden Triangle region. This heroin was later traced to facilities operating in northern Burma.⁸¹ In this case the cargo was heroin. However it can be presumed that if North Korea is taking part in the transport of heroin, it is involved in the transport of ATS since both drugs are being produced by the same organizations.

Elsewhere

ATS maintains a presence throughout East and Southeast Asia. In Malaysia, 36kg of methamphetamines were seized between January and September 2005. The country's proximity to the Golden Triangle exposes it to a great deal of ATS trafficking. Drugs are brought in to feed the domestic market and to be sent on to destinations like Singapore and Australia. For Australia this is highly problematic as it is dealing with one of the highest rates of methamphetamine abuse in the world.⁸² Half of all methamphetamine shipments to Australia originate in Burma.⁸³ In April 2004, over 400,000 pseudoephedrine tablets, a precursor of ATS, were seized in Australia. The shipment had arrived from Malaysia.⁸⁴ In Singapore the numbers have been high too-in 2004 methamphetamines, ketamine, and ecstasy accounted for 56% of all drug arrests. In Vietnam, which shares borders with Laos, China, and Cambodia, ATS is widely abused. Taiwanese officials attribute their own heroin and amphetamine imports to traffickers in China, North Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, and Burma. Between January and November 2005, Taiwanese authorities seized 480.17kg of methamphetamines, 2,406.56kg of semi-processed amphetamines and 6,182.20kg of precursor chemicals.⁸⁵

ATS PRODUCERS IN BURMA

United Wa State Army (UWSA)

Under a 1989 ceasefire agreement with the junta, the 20,000-strong UWSA emerged as one of the largest producers and traffickers of heroin in the world.⁸⁶ As of June 2005, the UWSA declared a total ban on poppy cultivation and the production and trafficking of opium. While the UWSA has taken these outward steps to stem its involvement in the opium trade, it has gotten more involved with ATS.⁸⁷ In 2002, an estimated 700 million ATS pills entered Thailand from the northern Thai/Burma border as a result of trafficking by the UWSA.⁸⁸

⁷⁹ UNODC, World Drug Report 2005, UN Doc E.05.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

⁸⁰ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

⁸¹ Nation (25 Jun 05) Burma's drug-free deadline is a delusion

⁸² Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

⁸³ Reportage (Sep 03) Canberra blind to Burmese government drug trade (<http://www.reportage.uts.edu.au/stories/2003/international/burmaspeed.html>)

⁸⁴ UN (2004) Report of the International Narcotics Control Board [E.05.XI.3]

⁸⁵ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

⁸⁶ Nation (20 Jul 05) UWSA prepared to assert independence more aggressively

⁸⁷ Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 06) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2006

⁸⁸ Bangkok Post (24 Nov 2002) Army awaits influx of 1bn pills

According to United States DEA records, in recent years more than 12,000 methamphetamine tablets labeled with the UWSA logo have been seized at mail services around the US.⁸⁹ In 2005, the UWSA reportedly planned to flood Thailand with 20 million amphetamines by enticing rival Shan State Army (SSA) soldiers with a share in the profits if they would assist with the transport.⁹⁰ UWSA Commander Bao Youxiang allegedly plays a key role in the coordination of drug trafficking by the Wa. His second in command, Li Ziru, has experience with the heroin trade that can be traced back to the 1980s.⁹¹

Surachai “Bang Ron” Ngernthongu

“Bang Ron”, the reputed “amphetamine king” of Burma, is a wanted fugitive in Thailand and since 1998 he has been hiding out in Burma. He has been accused of being the single biggest drug dealer to Thai youth and his escape to Burma was credited to his extensive network of traffickers, armed rebel groups and even Thai police.⁹² Despite repeated requests by the Thai government for “Bang Ron’s” extradition, the SPDC continues to harbor him and allows him to engage in the drug trade.⁹³

Maha Ja

Maha Ja got his start as a commander in notorious drug lord Khun Sa’s Mong Tai Army. After the surrender of Khun Sa, Maha Ja reportedly took over his drug business in Homong, just over the border from Mae Hong Son, Thailand.⁹⁴ In February 2005, Thai police charged Maha Ja, who is currently the leader of the Shan State Army South (SSA-S),⁹⁵ with providing methamphetamines to Thai dealers.⁹⁶

Wei Hsu Kang (aka Wei Hseuh-kang, Prasit Chivinnitipanya, Somboon Kadumporn⁹⁷)

Kang is the leader of UWSA South’s 171 Brigade, estimated to be 800 men strong. In 1993, he was sentenced to death in absentia by a Thai court for drug smuggling.⁹⁸ In January 2005, along with seven other members of the UWSA, Kang was indicted by a grand jury in the US state of New York on charges of drug trafficking. In April 2005, his brigade was involved in an attack on SSA headquarters in Loi Taileng in retaliation for SSA attacks on his drug factories. Today, he continues to wage armed conflict against the SSA, as well as traffic heroin and ATS.⁹⁹

The SPDC’s role

Through its numerous ceasefire agreements the SPDC has allowed ethnic armies such as the UWSA and the National Democracy Alliance Army (NDAA) to freely engage in narcotics production and trafficking. Because of their pro-SPDC agendas, these armies have been considered by many to be simply proxy armies for the regime.¹⁰⁰ During the 1994 campaign against Khun Sa and the Mong Tai Army, the SPDC enlisted the assistance of the UWSA.

⁸⁹ US Dept. of Justice Press Release (24 Jan 05) Eight high-ranking leaders of Southeast Asia’s largest narcotics trafficking organization indicted by a federal grand jury in Brooklyn, New York

⁹⁰ SHAN (01 Jun 05) Speed: Wa’s Trojan horse for Shans – King Cobra

⁹¹ TIME Asia (16 Dec 02) Burma’s drug kings

⁹² Bangkok Post (01 Feb 99) Burma must end its drug deals

⁹³ Bangkok Post (09 Feb 99) Rangoon Makes A Curious Choice to Host Drug Talks

⁹⁴ Nation (02 Feb 05) Warrants issued for warlords

⁹⁵ DVB (24 Jun 04) Burma junta pressurizing ceasefire groups

⁹⁶ Nation (06 Feb 05) Wa army leader insists he’s no drug trafficker

⁹⁷ US Dept. of Justice Press Release (24 Jan 05) Eight high-ranking leaders of Southeast Asia’s largest narcotics trafficking organization indicted by a federal grand jury in Brooklyn, New York

⁹⁸ Bangkok Post (27 Mar 05) Temperature rising in Shan State

⁹⁹ Asia Times (09 Jun 06) The real ‘long war’ is in Myanmar

¹⁰⁰ Irrawaddy (24 May 06) Burmese Drugs still hurting Northeastern India

After Khun Sa's surrender the UWSA was granted vast tracts of land along the Thai/Burma border, situated perfectly for conducting its illicit heroin and methamphetamines trade.¹⁰¹

Evidence exists that the SPDC has continued to use the UWSA as a proxy army in its war against the dwindling Shan State Army (SSA), even promising to grant land to the UWSA that is taken in battle from the SSA.¹⁰² The SPDC's willingness to look the other way on UWSA methamphetamine dealings may in fact be influenced by the UWSA's progress. A member of the UWSA even claimed that in 2005 UWSA soldiers asked for permission to continue manufacturing and trafficking drugs in exchange for more attacks on the SSA.¹⁰³

The SPDC has to date not prosecuted or extradited any of Burma's biggest drug lords and no SPDC military official over the rank of colonel has ever been prosecuted for drug offenses.¹⁰⁴ In fact, many former drug lords such as Lo Hsing-han and Pao Yu Hsiang now lead cushy lives as top businessmen in Burma. Through laundering of drug profits, they appease the junta by funding its mining industry, overseeing much of its agricultural sector, operating its chief national banks, and running Yangon Airlines.¹⁰⁵ Moreover the SPDC officials regularly accept bribes from organizations such as the UWSA as payment for safe transport of their drugs inside of Burma,¹⁰⁶ making the SPDC complicit in the continued production and trafficking of ATS. Along the Thai/Burma border, the SPDC army provides security and investment for over 50 ATS labs. The 221st Light Infantry Battalion often occupies tracts of land known to contain both heroin and ATS labs.¹⁰⁷

BURMA'S DRUG ERADICATION DOES NOT INCLUDE ATS

The SPDC's 15-Year Plan

Beginning in 1999, the SPDC initiated its 15-year Narcotics Eradication, intended to finish one year before the ASEAN-wide deadline of 2014. The Burmese plan is divided into three phases of five years each and targets 52 townships.¹⁰⁸ While the SPDC has declared several townships drug-free, the evidence says otherwise.

While the SPDC plan targets opium growing, it does not take any steps toward eradicating ATS production, which is much harder to detect because of its confinement to clandestine labs rather than in open fields. In the period between 2000 and 2003, only 12 ATS labs were destroyed in Burma with a peak in 2001 at five.¹⁰⁹ In 2003, only one ATS lab was destroyed.¹¹⁰ This number is especially abysmal considering that a report by the Shan Herald Agency for News in 2003 reported 18 labs in the Shan State town of Mongton alone.¹¹¹ Recently only one ATS lab was shut down in 2004.¹¹² By comparison, in just one year between 2002 and 2003 Cambodia closed 7 ATS labs, Indonesia closed 6 and China closed 13.¹¹³ In 2005, Burma destroyed 3 labs.¹¹⁴

¹⁰¹ Asia Times (10 Jun 06) The real 'long war' is in Myanmar - Michael Black and Roland Fields

¹⁰² HRW (26 May 05) Burma army and proxies attack Shan civilians

¹⁰³ Bangkok Post (13 Apr 05) Drug situation along frontier highly volatile

¹⁰⁴ U.S. Council on Foreign Relations Independent Task Force (Jun 03) Myanmar: A Time For Change

¹⁰⁵ Bangkok Post (31 January 05) Today's Burma funded by drugs

¹⁰⁶ The Nation (31 Oct 05) Meth in their madness?

¹⁰⁷ Reportage (Sep 03) Canberra blind to Burmese government drug trade

¹⁰⁸ Altsean Burma (Nov 04) A Failing Grade: Burma's Drugs Eradication Efforts

¹⁰⁹ UNODC (Dec 05) Myanmar Country Profile

(http://www.unodc.org/pdf/myanmar/myanmar_country_profile_2005.pdf)

¹¹⁰ UNODC, World Drug Report 2005, UN Doc E.05.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

¹¹¹ Shan Herald Agency for News (2 Aug 05) Drug factories withdraw from the triangle

¹¹² Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (Mar 05) International Narcotics Control Strategy Report 2004

¹¹³ UNODC, World Drug Report 2005, UN Doc E.05.XI.10 (http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html)

¹¹⁴ UNODC (Dec 05) Myanmar Country Profile

(http://www.unodc.org/pdf/myanmar/myanmar_country_profile_2005.pdf)

Laboratories Dismantled in Burma¹¹⁵

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
ATS	2	5	4	1	1	3
Opiate Group	3	16	9	7	2	No figure

Drug Rehabilitation in Burma

The SPDC's method of rehabilitation includes the criminalization of drug addicts. In 1993, the SPDC passed the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Law requiring all addicts in Burma to register with government medical facilities in order to undergo treatment and rehabilitation. However, failure to register or failing to successfully complete rehabilitation resulted in a 3 to 5 year prison sentence.¹¹⁶ Between 1988 and 2004, 22,315 drug addicts were arrested for failing to register. In prison, drug users are very likely to contract HIV/AIDS or to pass it to someone else if they are already infected. In the first five years of the SPDC's 15-year plan, only 3,952 drug addicts came forward to register in Burma.¹¹⁷

Throughout Burma there are 26 Drug Treatment Centers (DTC), 40 small treatment centers and 2 rehabilitation centers. Many of Burma's drug treatment facilities were constructed during the mid-1990s at a time when drug addicts were treated like criminals, making conditions similar to that in prisons. As a result many drug addicts are reluctant to seek treatment. Furthermore, treatment centers were built and equipped to deal with more docile opiate users than the often-violent ATS user. Of users who complete treatment, the reported relapse rate after only one month is 60-70%.¹¹⁸

NOT JUST A DOMESTIC ISSUE

The threat of ATS to regional security cannot be underestimated. Its use is more prevalent than that of opiates, and its symptoms much more destructive on society. The SPDC is failing to safeguard the people of Burma and the surrounding region from the scourge of ATS. More incriminatingly, the SPDC is delaying justice to international drug cartels, abiding widespread use of ATS in its military and providing a base of operations to traffickers along each of its borders. The SPDC has allowed ATS production and trafficking to skyrocket in Southeast Asia and this threat highlights one more example of the regime's inability to govern Burma.

¹¹⁵ UNODC (Dec 05) Myanmar Country Profile
(http://www.unodc.org/pdf/myanmar/myanmar_country_profile_2005.pdf)

¹¹⁶ TNI Policy Briefing (17 May 06) HIV/AIDS and drug use in Burma/Myanmar

¹¹⁷ UNODC (Dec 05) Myanmar Country Profile
(http://www.unodc.org/pdf/myanmar/myanmar_country_profile_2005.pdf)

¹¹⁸ UNODC (Dec 05) Myanmar Country Profile
http://www.unodc.org/pdf/myanmar/myanmar_country_profile_2005.pdf