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Q9

Explain how narco-terrorism has emerged as a serious threat across the country. Suggest suitable measures to counter narco-terrorism.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · GS III · 10 marks · Border Security and Organised Crime
Security challenges and their management in border areas - linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

Core demand of the question

- Explain how narco-terrorism has become a serious pan-India threat
- Suggest measures that join policing with rights and demand reduction
- Do not treat every addict as a terrorist

Revision summary

Narco-terrorism is drug profit and drug routes used to fund terror and organised violence.

India is exposed on the Pakistan-Afghanistan side and the Myanmar-Northeast side, now including drone drops and synthetic drugs.

Punjab, J&K and the Northeast are the hardest-hit belts; highways and parcels move the inland trade.

- **Measures:** border and drone defence, **NCB-ED-NIA** money trails, precursor control, de-addiction, and UNODC-style cooperation.

Rights-compliant seizures and a clear line between addict and financier keep the strategy legitimate.

Introduction

Narco-terrorism is the use of **drug money and drug logistics** to fund terror, insurgency and organised violence - and the use of terror routes to move narcotics. India sits between the **Golden Crescent** and the **Golden Triangle**. That geography, plus a young domestic market, has made the threat **national**, not a Punjab-only headline.

Body

How the threat emerged

Heroin and other opiates enter from **Afghanistan-Pakistan** across the **Punjab, Rajasthan and Jammu** belts; some of that money has long been linked to **Pakistan-based terror**. In the **Northeast**, the **Golden Triangle** feeds **methamphetamine, heroin and precursor** traffic, overlapping insurgent taxation. **J&K** and **Punjab** have seen the mix of addiction, hawala and militant finance. **Coastal and air-cargo** routes, and later **drones** dropping consignments over the Punjab border, reduced the need for a walking mule. Inland, cartels use **National Highway** and railway parcels. Some **Left-Wing Extremism** zones have been accused of taxing poppy or ganja. The new seriousness is **synthetic drugs** (meth, MDMA) made from **diverted precursors**, which do not need an Afghan field. Terror and gang groups like the

cash because it is **dense, portable and repeatable**. The public cost is a **lost youth cohort**, corrupted local police, and a finance stream that survives even when a terror module is shot.

- **Peg:** **Golden Crescent** to Punjab-J&K, **Golden Triangle** to the Northeast, **drones** on the western border: three maps, one business.
- **Peg:** NDPS is the criminal law; the terror link is investigated when the same network funds a module or a hawala chain.

Measures

Border and coastal sealing with better **drone detect-and-defeat**, not only a fence, is the first layer. **NCB, State ATS, ED and NIA** must share a **financial intelligence** picture so a seizure is not an orphan event. **Precursor control** under NDPS and customs has to bite chemical firms. **FATF-style** anti-money-laundering, already a India commitment, should follow drug cash into real estate and betting. **De-addiction and harm reduction are security policy: a treated user is not a captive market. Fast NDPS courts and witness protection matter more than a louder ordinance. Rights are not optional: planted seizures** destroy the case and the village. International work with **Iran, Afghanistan's neighbours, Myanmar and the UNODC** has to match the map. A measure that only fills jails, and does not cut **demand or hawala**, will leave the terrorist's accountant in business.

- **Peg:** I4C-style cyber cells matter because retail now sits on encrypted chat, not only on a highway dhaba.
- **Peg:** Distinguish the addict, the petty peddler and the terror-financier, or the law loses the public.

Flow diagram

Golden Crescent -> Indian routes
Golden Triangle -> Indian routes
Drones hawala synthetics -> Indian routes
Indian routes -> Terror and cartel cash
Border AML treatment -> Terror and cartel cash

Conclusion

Narco-terrorism joins **Golden Crescent** and Triangle supply to Indian terror and gang finance, now including **drones** and synthetics. Counter it with borders, money trails, precursor control and treatment. A rights-blind seizure war will not starve the terrorist.

Facts & figures

Golden Crescent

Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan opium belt; the main western heroin threat to India.

Golden Triangle

Myanmar-Laos-Thailand belt; a source of heroin and methamphetamine toward the Northeast.

NDPS Act

Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, the core Indian drug offence and precursor law.

NCB

Narcotics Control Bureau, the Union's nodal drug-enforcement body, working with State police and customs.

Drones

Cross-border unmanned drops into Punjab have been repeatedly reported as a new trafficking method.

FATF

Anti-money-laundering standards India is assessed against; drug proceeds are a predicate offence in that system.

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