

The economic impact of asymmetric warfare through illicit drug trafficking in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Purpose — *This research aims to analyze the economic impact of asymmetric warfare through illicit drug trafficking in Indonesia.*

Method — *This research uses a qualitative method with data collection techniques using interviews and literature studies. Researchers conduct interviews with officials related to the National Narcotics Board with 10 people and officials from the Defense Potential Directorate of the Indonesian Ministry of Defense with 2 people.*

Result — *Illicit drug trafficking in Indonesia has an impact on the national resilience of the Indonesian nation. The impact covers all aspects of astagatra, which consists of trigatra aspects, namely demographic, geographical, and natural resources aspects, and pancagatra aspects, which consist of ideological, political, economic, socio-cultural, and defense-security aspects. In economics, research has shown that the economic loss due to drugs amounts to 84.7 trillion rupiahs due to illicit drug trafficking, where 77.42 trillion rupiahs is a personal loss and 7.27 trillion rupiahs is a social cost. Moreover, drug addicts will find it difficult to get a job, given that the impact of rejection from the community and the work environment reaches 92%. Cooperation between agencies and community participation is necessary to address it. This is because Indonesia's defense system is total people's defense and security system (Sishankamrata), which requires the participation of all components of the nation.*

Contribution — *This research add to the knowledge about the impact of asymmetric warfare through illicit drug trafficking, specifically the economic impact. In addition, this research is expected to be a source of input for the government in developing strategic steps to counter illicit drug trafficking which is asymmetric warfare.*

Keywords: *illicit drug trafficking, asymmetric warfare, defense system*



INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of the world due to the flow of globalization not only increases the ease of cross-border communication but also provides opportunities for the rapid emergence of cross-border or transnational crimes. Drug trafficking is generally transnational and is of global concern as it creates a threat to international security. According to [Anggraini \(2016\)](#), the drug problem can be divided into three interrelated parts, namely the problem of illegal drug production, illicit drug trafficking, and drug abuse. Illegal production includes the cultivation of plants that are raw materials for the production of dangerous drugs such as the coca plant as the raw material for cocaine, opium flowers as the raw material for heroin, and cannabis or marijuana that is processed into hashish and marijuana; and the processing of these raw materials so that they are ready to be traded and consumed. Illicit trafficking is all post-harvest or post-processing activities until they reach the hands of users, including transportation activities, smuggling, and drug trafficking. Meanwhile, abuse is the final link in the drug problem chain, which is the use of drugs by consumers in a manner that is not following health regulations.

The Southeast Asian region also faces the problem of illicit drug trafficking and also has the largest drug trafficking area in Asia, the Golden Triangle. In 2015, the amount of crystal methamphetamine seized in Southeast Asian and Eastern Asian countries reached 34.7 tons, and then in 2017, there was an increase to 39.4 tons ([Fathurrohman, 2020a](#)). In 2018, methamphetamine was the main drug problem in this region, flooding the markets in Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Thailand. The latest estimates show that East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania are the largest consumers of ATS in the world with a total of 9.5 million methamphetamine users and 3.9 million ecstasy users ([Fathurrohman & Bichler, 2021](#)). Indonesia, as one of the Southeast Asian countries, is not immune from drug problems, and there has been an increase in both the disclosure of drug cases and the number of drug abusers in Indonesia. The following is data on the disclosure of drug cases conducted by the National Narcotics Board:

Table 1. Data on drug case disclosures in Indonesia during 2018-2022

No	Data	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
1	Cases	1.042	867	806	760	768
2	Suspects	1.556	1.341	1.247	1.109	1.209
3	Networks	-	98	88	85	49
4	Rystal meth evidence	3,49 tons	1,80 tons	1,12 tons	3,313 tons	1,902 tons
5	Marijuana leaves evidence	7,54 tons	3,22 tons	2,36 tons	115,1 tons	153,86 tons
6	Ecstasy evidence	130.180 pills	614.945 pills	340.357 pills	191.575 pills	262.789 pills

Sources: Badan Narkotika Nasional (2019, 2020, 2021), Humas BNN (2022)

The prevalence rate of drug addicts or victims of drug abuse also increased, in 2019 the prevalence rate was 1.80% ([Puslitdatin Badan Narkotika Nasional, 2020](#)), while in 2021 the prevalence rate of drug addicts or victims of drug abuse increased by 0.15% to 1.95% or around 3,662,646 Indonesian people became drug addicts or victims of drug abuse ([Pusat Penelitian Data dan Informasi Badan Narkotika Nasional, 2022](#)). This is extremely dangerous, as drugs can be used as asymmetric weapons. Like in Venezuela, they use drugs as an asymmetric weapon against the United States ([Grantham & Arocha, 2022](#)). In Mexico, illicit drug trafficking is considered asymmetric warfare ([Etter & Lehmuth, 2013](#)). Additionally, some countries in Latin America such as Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Peru, and Bolivia consider illicit drug trafficking as a fourth-generation war or asymmetric warfare ([Vallejos, 2011](#)).

Asymmetric warfare is a non-conventional conflict, defined as a conflict, other than traditional warfare, that covertly takes place, with low intensity, and is carried out by one of the parties, such as drug cartels ([Bunker in Dwicahyono et al., 2021](#)). Asymmetric warfare has an impact that is no less than conventional warfare, and its impact even exceeds conventional warfare ([Pranoto & Hendrajit, 2016](#)). That is why a drug expert from the United States Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, Steven Casteel, said that drugs are massive destroying weapons that can be used to fight and destroy a country's population ([Wibowo, 2020](#)). If compared to terrorism, the impact of illicit drug trafficking is more destructive in the long term for the survival of society than terrorist activities. If terrorism can kill hundreds of people in one action, drugs can kill millions of people and its impact lasts a long time in the long term ([Count De Marenches in Reaves, 2003](#)).

Drugs have become a global threat to health and development ([Singer, 2008](#)), for example, In Colombia, drug control efforts cost a budget of 1.3 billion US dollars per year or about 1.2% of Colombia's gross domestic product ([Mejia & Restrepo,](#)

2016). It is very concerning, that if there were no drug problems, that budget could be used for other programs such as education, poverty alleviation, etc. What about Indonesia itself? Based on that, this research wants to analyze the economic impact of asymmetric warfare through illicit drug trafficking in Indonesia. The purpose is to provide an overview for policymakers and the general public regarding the impact of the illegal drug trade in Indonesia, which is an asymmetrical war, particularly in terms of the economy. Thus, it is expected that there will be strategic steps taken to address the issue.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method. Qualitative research methods are based on postpositivist philosophy and are used to examine natural object conditions. The researcher is the key instrument, data collection techniques are done in a triangulation manner, data analysis is inductive or qualitative, and the research focuses on understanding the meaning and constructing phenomena instead of making generalizations (Sugiyono, 2018). The research design used in this study is descriptive analysis. Descriptive research design aims to explore or clarify existing symptoms, phenomena, or social realities. It seeks to describe variables related to the problem and unit being studied and does not question the relationship between existing variables. Descriptive research does not draw generalizations about the causes of symptoms, phenomena, or social realities that exist (Samsu, 2017).

Data collection technique

The data collection methods utilized in this study are through conducting interviews and reviewing documents. As described by Arikunto (cited in Samsu, 2017), an interview involves a conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee to gather information. The interview will continue until enough data is gathered. The purpose of conducting interviews is to directly obtain information from the participants in the field. The goal is to assess what the participants do and do not know about the information or data being sought after. In this research, the researcher interviewed 10 officials from the National Narcotics Board and 2 officials from the Defense Potential Directorate General of the Indonesian Ministry of Defense.

On the other hand, document review involves searching for information in various forms, such as notes, transcripts, books, newspapers, magazines, reports, inscriptions, minutes of meetings, logs, and agendas. The documents used by the researcher include previous research, reports released by BNN, and books

relevant to the research. The researcher also uses these documents as a triangulation of the results obtained from the interviews.

Data analysis technique

According to [Miles, Huberman & Saldana \(2014\)](#), in data analysis activities there are several steps such as: 1) data collection which is the analysis of research data carried out from the time the research data collection took place until the data collection was completed; 2) data condensation that is a simplification carried out through selection, focusing, and validating raw data into meaningful information, making it easier to conclude; 3) data display which is done by forming brief descriptions, charts, and linking between categories. The presentation of data is usually done in the form of narrative text, and 4) drawing a conclusion or verification that is the final stage in data analysis which is carried out by looking at the results of data condensation and still referring to the formulation of the problem and the goals to be achieved. The data that has been compiled will be compared with one another to conclude an answer to the existing problems.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Asymmetric warfare

Asymmetrical warfare can be described as a type of conflict in which a non-state actor utilizes unconventional methods and strategies against a state's weaknesses to attain a disproportionate outcome, thus undermining the state's ability to reach its intended objectives ([Lele, 2014](#)). The National Research Council classifies asymmetrical warfare as a form of conflict that emerged from an uncommon way of thinking and is not bound by the standard rules of warfare, encompassing a wide spectrum of conflict that encompasses *astagatra* elements - a mixture of *trigatra* elements such as geography, demography, and natural resources and *pancagatra* elements like ideology, politics, economy, socio-culture, and defense and security ([Pranoto & Hendrajit, 2016](#)). Asymmetrical wars involve at least two participants, with the defining feature being unequal forces. Asymmetrical warfare is a war between parties with significant differences in military power, tactics, or strategies. These wars often involve unconventional tactics where the weaker party employs strategies to compensate for its shortcomings in quantity and quality ([Arismunandar, 2013](#); [Tanjung et al., 2021](#)). These strategies do not necessarily have to be military.

Asymmetric warfare refers to a type of conflict that is not based on traditional warfare practices and involves a disparity in military power between two opposing sides. This form of warfare encompasses various aspects, including countering asymmetric threats, conducting asymmetric operations, understanding cultural differences, and evaluating the costs associated with asymmetric warfare. According to [Akbar \(2022\)](#), asymmetric warfare is a combination of traditional warfare and information warfare, and its goal is to achieve victory over the adversary. [Buffaloe \(2006\)](#) added that asymmetric warfare encompasses political, economic, socio-cultural, and military dimensions. Unlike symmetrical warfare, asymmetrical warfare emphasizes guerrilla tactics, subversion, insurgency, and infiltrations, rather than direct combat, to erode and overwhelm the enemy to secure victory. The intensity of the conflict is one of the defining factors of asymmetrical warfare ([Buffaloe, 2006](#)).

Asymmetrical warfare refers to a situation where one side takes advantage of its strengths or its opponent's weaknesses. According to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, it is the attempt to counteract an opponent's strengths and exploit their weaknesses by using methods significantly different from the opponent's normal mode of operations ([Arango, 2008](#)). Another perspective of asymmetric warfare, as stated by Bunker ([DwicaHyono et al., 2021](#)), that it is a form of unconventional warfare that is initiated by state institutions and is mostly conducted covertly at low intensity by parties such as guerrilla groups, drug cartels, or special forces divisions. This type of warfare aims to indirectly influence power and exploit the opponent's weaknesses through technology and public unrest. Examples of asymmetrical warfare include terrorism, drugs, weapons of mass destruction, transnational crime, and cyberwar, and it can occur on a global, regional, or national scale. At the national level, there can be foreign infiltration and national vulnerability. In contrast, at the regional level, it can involve regional disputes, international migration, criminal organizations, and drug cartels, and be triggered by transnational business groups. Global-level examples of asymmetrical warfare include terrorism, piracy, insurgency, and countries that violate international norms ([Filomeno et al., 2018](#)).

According to [Pranoto and Hendrajit \(2016\)](#), the difference between conventional warfare that openly employs military force and asymmetrical warfare that tends to be non-military (and non-violent) is that they are similar in "pattern" but different in "nature and actions". Conventional warfare follows a standard pattern, which consists of three stages: "bombardment," with the use of fighter planes or long-range artillery troops; "entry of cavalry" in the form of tanks or armored vehicles; and "occupation by infantry". In contrast, the "bombardment"

stage in asymmetrical warfare takes the form of issues spread by related parties and groups. At the same time, the "entry of cavalry" is referred to as TEMA or AGENDA. The final stage in the military warfare pattern is the "entry of infantry," while in asymmetrical warfare it is "controlling the economic system and natural resources in the target country". The pattern may look similar in conventional and non-military wars, but the actions are different. If the stages of military warfare are "bombardment" - "entry of cavalry" - "occupation by infantry," then the pattern of non-military warfare is "issues" - "themes" - "schemes".

Illicit drug trafficking as asymmetric warfare

The concept of asymmetrical warfare originated from situations where a conventional military force faced irregular and unarmed adversaries, such as guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and rebellion. Today, asymmetrical warfare is considered a significant security issue, including international terrorism and organized crimes like drug trafficking ([Guchua, 2018](#)). The term is often used to describe actions taken by non-state actors against states. Such warfare is viewed as a growing threat, much like revolutionary and nuclear warfare dominated the strategic landscape in the latter part of the 20th century. Asymmetry encompasses various tactics like guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and irregular warfare that stem from conflicts over limited resources, ethnic and religious differences, and transnational crime (including its connection to terrorism and insurgency) ([Lele, 2014](#)). Drug trafficking, for example, is a transnational crime that finances acts of terrorism and rebellion ([United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2017](#)). In Indonesia, the link between narcotics and terrorism was evident when Fadly Sadama, a leader of a terrorist group associated with the 2001-2002 Bali Bombing attacks, was involved in the drug trade and used the profits to buy weapons and finance robberies, which in turn supported the activities of the East and Central Indonesian Mujahidin Councils ([Akmalina et al., 2019](#)).

According to Robert J Bunker ([Lele, 2014](#)), asymmetric warfare, also known as unconventional warfare, is primarily a covert form of conflict carried out with low intensity, often by drug cartels. Although Indonesia does not have large drug cartels like those in Mexico and Colombia, there may be hidden or unnamed drug cartels in Indonesia, such as drug dealer groups ([Abimanyu, 2019](#)). This is evidenced by the drug dealer war in Sumatra revealed by the Riau Regional Police, where a conflict occurred between the Medan drug dealer group and the Dumai drug dealer group. The Dumai group eventually emerged victorious but was later arrested by the police with evidence of 210 million in cash from the sale of methamphetamine, 3 kg of the drugs, and seven firearms ([Fathurrohman, 2020b](#)). Another example is the case of Rico Partikasih, a major drug dealer in

Jakarta, who was arrested by police but also resulted in casualties among the police and informants and the dealer himself was shot dead ([Abimanyu, 2017](#)), demonstrating that drug dealers, especially large ones, often have firearms and accomplices to resist arrest.

Illicit drug trafficking in Indonesia can be categorized as an asymmetric war between state actors against non-state actors or vice versa. The actors, especially big drug lords, arm themselves with firearms to fight against law enforcement officers. It has also been found that illicit drug trafficking in Indonesia has connections with terrorism, especially to fund their actions ([Tatara et al., 2022a](#)). Asymmetric warfare through illicit drug trafficking targets various aspects of national and state life that are vulnerable ([Tatara et al., 2022b](#)).

The economic impact of asymmetric warfare through the illicit drug trafficking in Indonesia

The relationship between various aspects of national and state life in Indonesia is known as *astagatra*. *Astagatra* is a fundamental concept of national resilience that emphasizes the relationship between different aspects of human and cultural life, utilizing natural resources and capabilities. As a national concept, *astagatra* regulates and manages the well-being and security of *trigatra* (geography, natural resources, and population capabilities) and *pancagatra* (ideology, politics, economy, social culture, and defense and security) ([Reksohutomo cited in Wiswayana & Pinatih, 2020](#)). Research has shown that drug trafficking in Indonesia negatively affects all aspects of *astagatra* in the national and cultural life. Concerning *trigatra*, the impact of illegal drug trafficking in Indonesia involves demographic, geographical, and natural resource aspects, while concerning *pancagatra*, the impact of illicit drug trafficking includes ideological, political, economic, social-cultural, defense, and security aspects. In this study, out of the eight aspects encompassed in *astagatra*, the researcher will only focus on discussing the economic aspect.

According to data from the Central Statistics Agency in 2020, Indonesia's population reached 270.20 million, with a productive age population of 70.72% ([Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021](#)). Meanwhile, based on data from the National Narcotics Agency (BNN), the prevalence of drug addicts or victims is 1.95%, or around 3.6 million people in Indonesia ([Pusat Penelitian Data dan Informasi Badan Narkotika Nasional, 2022](#)). With such a large number of drug abusers, it will impact the economic aspect of national life.

In economics, research has shown that the economic loss due to drugs amounts to 84.7 trillion due to illicit drug trafficking. This is consistent with data from the

BNN and Puslitkes UI which revealed that the economic loss due to drugs amounted to 84.7 trillion as a result of illegal drug circulation, where 77.42 trillion is a personal loss and 7.27 trillion is social cost ([Pusat Penelitian Data dan Informasi Badan Narkotika Nasional, 2017](#)). Moreover, drug addicts will find it difficult to get a job, given that the impact of rejection from the community and the work environment reaches 92% ([Kadarmanta & Effriyanti, 2022](#)). However, Indonesia will benefit from a demographic bonus where the productive age of the Indonesian population is higher than other ages, which will impact social and security aspects. The high number of unemployment among drug users will increase the crime rate as addicts will do anything to obtain drugs, even breaking the law. Furthermore, this can impact the defense aspect, where they will be easily provoked by certain parties who aim to destroy Indonesia and fight the government, so their goal of controlling the economy and natural resources will be achieved ([Filomeno et al., 2018](#)). Given the impact of asymmetric warfare through illicit drug trafficking, such as a vicious cycle that interconnects one aspect to another, cooperation between agencies and community participation is necessary to address it. This is because the state's defense system is the total people's defense and security system (*Sishankamrata*), which requires the participation of all components of the nation ([Tatara & Timur, 2023](#)).

Additionally, in line with that, the Finance Minister of the Republic of Indonesia stated that illicit drug trafficking disrupts the nation's economy. The impact of drugs decreases the purchasing power of the people and also has negative effects on the productivity and health of society, especially the younger generation. The youth, who should be the backbone of the economy, are instead destroyed by drugs, turning them from a potential workforce and profit for Indonesia in obtaining demographic bonuses, to a burden on the country's economy ([Ravel & Patnistik, 2018](#)).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research, it can be concluded that asymmetric warfare through illicit drug trafficking in Indonesia impacts the national resilience of the Indonesian nation. The impact covers all aspects of *astagatra*, which consists of *trigatra* aspects, namely demographic, geographical, and natural resources aspects, and *pancagatra* aspects, which consist of ideological, political, economic, social-cultural, and defense-security aspects. In economics, research has shown that the economic loss due to drugs amounts to 84.7 trillion due to illicit drug trafficking, where 77.42 trillion is a personal loss and 7.27 trillion is a social cost. Moreover, drug addicts will find it difficult to get a job, given that the impact of rejection from the community and the work environment reaches 92%. Given

the impact of asymmetric warfare through illicit drug trafficking, such as a vicious cycle that interconnects one aspect to another, cooperation between agencies and community participation is necessary to address it. This is because the state's defense system is the total people's defense and security system (*Sishankamrata*), which requires the participation of all components of the nation. In addition, this research is expected to be a source of input for the government in developing strategic steps to counter illicit drug trafficking which is asymmetric warfare. For future researchers, it is hoped that they can research related to the government's strategy in countering illicit drug trafficking in Indonesia which is asymmetric warfare.

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