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Drug Control, Human Rights and 'Parallel Universes'

1.1 Background and Context

1.1.1 Quincy Wright and the 'Three Stages' of Drug Control

Writing in the American Journal of International Law in 1924 on 'the opium question', Professor Quincy Wright described what he termed the 'three stages' of international drug control contemporary to that era. The 'first stage' Wright described as beginning in 1729, continuing up until the early 1900s. This period might today be characterised as the pre-multilateral era of drug control, during which time a handful of States adopted what were essentially national or bilateral measures on drugs. In 1729, Chinese Emperor Yongzheng issued the first edict prohibiting the smoking of opium.¹ It is also from this year that the earliest records exist of a European opium trade, in this case conducted by the Portuguese.² The first stage of drug control was characterised by the monopoly trade in opium by the British East India Company from 1773,³ which led to the important role of opium within international affairs in the eighteenth century.⁴ Opium smoking was a tolerated activity in many British colonies and territories in Asia at that time, despite the 'official' disapproval of the British government, and the sale of opium via these State monopolies was an important source of government revenue.⁵ This period saw the increase in domestic opium production in China, and

Quincy Wright, 'The Opium Question' (1924) 18/2 American Journal of International Law 281. See also James Windle, 'How the East Influenced Drug Prohibition' (2013) 35/5 The International History Review 1185.

² Kenneth W. Makowski, 'Narcotics Regulation: A Study in Irresolution' (1960–1961) 34 Temple Law Quarterly 310, 311.

³ Alfred McCoy, *The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade, Afghanistan, Southeast Asia, Central America, Colombia* (3rd ed, Lawrence Hill Books 2003) 5.

⁴ William M. Hepburn, 'International Legislation on Social Questions' (1931–1932) 9 New York University Law Review 310, 321.

⁵ John Collins, 'Regulations and Prohibitions: Anglo-American Relations and International Drug Control, 1939–1964' (PhD thesis, London School of Economics London, 2015) 32.

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attempts by China to stop British opium imports into the country, leading to the first and second Opium Wars fought between the countries in the mid-1800s, as the British attempted to maintain their markets.⁶ The first of these wars led to the cession of Hong Kong to England in 1842,⁷ an early illustration of how drug control was to shape global politics in the years to come. This 'first stage' also included the negotiation of numerous treaties and trade agreements intended to suppress or restrict the opium trade, particularly among and between China, Great Britain, France and the United States.⁸

Wright's 'second stage' covers what was essentially the first phase of multilateral efforts in drug control, when control measures 'became a matter of international law, but without a specific international supervisory machinery'.⁹ Beginning with the International Opium Commission in Shanghai in 1909, and the subsequent resolutions emerging from that meeting, and continuing into 1912, with the convening of the second International Opium Conference at The Hague. The International Opium Convention that emerged from the Hague conference codified the resolutions adopted in 1909 into the first truly international treaty on drug control. Over the ensuing years, efforts were made to encourage other States to ratify the treaty and to participate in the newly created international regime it defined.¹⁰

A significant boost to those efforts came via the Treaty of Versailles that ended the first World War. The British Government realised well before the war ended that 'the peace treaties . . . might furnish a convenient vehicle by which most of the nations of the world could be brought into the antiopium movement'.¹¹ It was seen as a particular opportunity to bring the defeated States of Germany, Austria, Hungary and Turkey into the regime, important producing and manufacturing countries which had not ratified the Opium Convention, and whose reluctance was seen to be providing a rationale for other States to similarly refuse. According to Taylor, 'It was felt that if all the belligerents were brought within the purview of the Convention, the neutral states would eventually be forced

⁶ Frank Dakota, Lars Laamann and Zhou Xun, Narcotic Culture: A History of Drugs in China (University of Chicago Press 2004) Chapter 3.

⁷ Makowski (n 2) 311. ⁸ Wright, 'The Opium Question' (n 1) 281–285.

 ⁹ Herbert L. May, 'Narcotic Drug Control' (1951–1952) 29 International Conciliation 491, 497.

¹⁰ Wright, 'The Opium Question' (n 1) 281–285.

¹¹ Arnold H. Taylor, American Diplomacy and the Narcotics Traffic, 1900–1939: A Study in International Humanitarian Reform (Duke University Press 1969) 141.

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to follow suit.^{'12} As a result, based upon the British and US proposals, Article 295 was inserted into the Treaty of Versailles during the Paris Peace Conference.¹³ It committed the High Contracting Parties who were not already Parties to the 1912 Convention to ratify the treaty within a year. Furthermore, Article 295 specified that in the case of those Powers that were not yet State Parties to the Opium Convention, the ratification of the Treaty would itself 'be deemed in all respects equivalent to the ratification of the Convention and to the signature of the Special Protocol... for bringing the said Convention into force'.¹⁴ Similar clauses were also inserted into other peace treaties at the conclusion of the war.¹⁵

Wright's 'third stage' begins with the foundation of the League of Nations in 1920, and is characterised by an increased commitment to international cooperation in drug control, and the creation of a 'permanent international control machinery'.¹⁶ This is reflected in the adoption of Article 23(c) of the Covenant of the League of Nations, which 'intrust[s] the League with general supervision over the execution of agreements with regard to traffic in... opium and other dangerous drugs'.¹⁷ This third stage sees increased and expanded multilateral efforts to control opium and other drugs, including the creation of new resolutions, a growing number of States agreeing to come into the regime and, in the decade after Wright's article was published, the adoption of new treaties under the supervision of the League that expanded the scope of international legal obligations in this area.¹⁸

Using the evolutionary stages posited by Wright in 1924, this book examines what it calls the 'fourth stage' of international drug control, namely the system established by the international community after 1945 under the United Nations. At the level of international law, the UN period is marked by the drafting and ratification of three new conventions that incorporate and expand upon the previous League of Nations instruments.¹⁹ It includes the creation of new and invigorated supervisory

¹² Ibid 142. ¹³ Ibid 142–143. ¹⁴ Peace Treaty of Versailles 1918, art 295.

¹⁵ Adolf Lande, 'The Adjustment of the International Opium Administration to an Eventual Dissolution of the League of Nations' (1945) 45 Columbia Law Review 392, 396, Taylor (n 11) 144.

¹⁶ May (n 9) 497.

¹⁷ Covenant of the League of Nations (adopted 28 April 1919) (Covenant) art 23(c).

¹⁸ Wright, 'The Opium Question' (n 1) 285.

¹⁹ International Opium Convention (adopted 19 February 1925) 81 LNTS 319 (1925 Convention); Convention for Limiting the Manufacture and Regulating the Distribution of

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bodies, and increased State participation in the regime to the point where the treaties today enjoy near universal ratification. However, this fourth stage of drug control differs in several ways from the League of Nations era that preceded it. In addition to the developments described above, the fourth stage of international drug control is marked by the increased use of penal laws to suppress drugs,²⁰ resulting in what the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime describes as the negative 'unintended consequences' of the regime.²¹

Despite the robust nature of the modern international drug control system, and the near universal ratification of the core instruments, the demand for and consumption of the drugs prohibited under the treaties remains high.²² According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the negative unintended consequences of this fourth stage regime are many and include the creation of huge criminal markets for drugs, controlled by cartels that often use violence and the corruption of State officials to maintain their vast profits, destabilising weak States; untold billions of dollars spent each year in largely ineffective drug interdiction efforts, at the expense of public investment in health, education and social services; exploding prison populations in many parts of the world, often driven by the prosecution of drug-related offences; and millions dead from, and many millions more infected with, HIV as a result of sharing of syringes for injecting drug use.²³ Another of the unintended consequences of the fourth stage of drug control is the negative impact of the regime on human rights. Addressing this 'unintended consequence' forms the basis of this book.

1.1.2 Human Rights in Drug Control's 'Fourth Stage'

One need only scratch the surface of domestic and international efforts to control illicit drugs during the United Nations era to see the potential for

Narcotic Drugs (adopted 13 July 1931) 139 LNTS 303 (1931 Convention); Convention of 1936 for the Suppression of the Illicit Traffic in Dangerous Drugs (adopted 26 June 1936) 198 LNTS 301 (1936 Convention).

²⁰ Neil Boister, 'The Interrelationship between the Development of Domestic and International Drug Control Law' (1995) 7 African Journal of International and Comparative Law 906, 913 (Interrelationship).

²¹ UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs, 'Making Drug Control "Fit for Purpose": Building on the UNGASS Decade: Report by the Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime as a contribution to the review of the twentieth special session of the General Assembly' (7 March 2008) UN Doc No E/CN.7/2008/CRP.17 (Fit for Purpose).

²² See, for example, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 'World Drug Report 2015' (2015) United Nations, New York.

²³ UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs, 'Fit for Purpose' (n 21) 10–12.

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human rights concern. Indeed, drug control and enforcement activities are prime areas for the abuse of human rights, not least because, as noted by Barrett and Nowak, the very indicators of success of drug control efforts - number of criminal offences prescribed; number of people arrested and successfully prosecuted; number of people in detention; number of traffickers punished (in some countries by execution); number of people in drug treatment (whether voluntarily or involuntarily); number of hectares of crops destroyed; number of successful military operations against insurgents or criminal gangs - are also indicators of human rights risk, if not actual evidence of human rights violations.²⁴ As a result, the negative human rights consequences occurring during the fourth stage of drug control are mammoth, spanning all regions of the world, and include the execution of up to 1,000 people annually for drug offences;²⁵ the arbitrary detention of up to half a million people worldwide under the guise of 'drug treatment';²⁶ the denial of due process rights and rights to consent to treatment in the context of drug cases;²⁷ and the denial of the right to health to millions of people who inject drugs by legally prohibiting access to effective HIV prevention measures.²⁸

The negative unintended consequences on human rights also highlight another unique aspect of this fourth stage that the international law on drug control during the United Nations era has developed alongside of, and in parallel with, the modern system of international human rights law, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Despite the contemporaneous development of these two international

- ²⁴ Damon Barrett and Manfred Nowak, 'The United Nations and Drug Policy: Towards a Human Rights-Based Approach' in A Constantinides and N. Zaikai (eds), *The Diversity* of International Law: Essays in Honour of Professor Calliope K. Kpufa (Martinus Nijhoff 2009) 468.
- ²⁵ See Patrick Gallahue and Rick Lines, 'The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview' (International Harm Reduction Association 2010), Patrick Gallahue, 'The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: Global Overview 2011' (International Harm Reduction Association 2011).
- ²⁶ See, for example, Richard Elliott, Rick Lines and Roxanne Schleifer, 'Treatment or torture? Applying international human rights standards to drug detention centers' (Open Society Foundations 2011) 3.
- ²⁷ See, for example, Juhi Gupta, 'Interpretation of Reverse Onus Clauses' (2012) 5/1 NUJS Law Review 49, Drug Policy Alliance, 'Drug Courts are Not the Answer: Towards a Health Centered Approach to Drug Use' (Drug Policy Alliance 2011), Joanne Csete, 'Costs and Benefits of Drug-Related Health Services' in J. Collins (ed) *Ending the Drug Wars: Report of the LSE Expert Group on the Economics of Drug Policy* (LSE Ideas 2014) 75–76.
- ²⁸ See, for example, UN General Assembly, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health' (6 August 2010) UN Doc No A/65/255, paras 50–58 (Special Rapporteur Health 2010).

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legal regimes, in practice there has been little cross fertilisation between the two. The United Nations drug control system has rarely considered the human rights impacts of the regime, and the human rights system has rarely considered drug control efforts within its mandate. In practice, this gap means that human rights violations in the name of drug control largely occur in the absence of human rights scrutiny, and in some cases are even justified by States on the basis that the abusive policies or practices are supported under the UN drug control treaties. The current status quo prompted the former Special Rapporteur on the right to the highest attainable standard of health, Paul Hunt, to conclude that '[i]t is imperative that the international drug control system . . . and the complex international human rights system that has evolved since 1948, cease to behave as though they exist in parallel universes'.²⁹

Within the United Nations system, nowhere is the disconnect between the 'parallel universes' of drug control and human rights more apparent than on the 26th of June each year. On 7 December 1987, the UN General Assembly declared June 26th as the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.³⁰ This date was chosen as it coincided with the closing of the International Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, which met earlier that year to agree on the final text of the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.³¹ This third UN drug treaty, which was adopted in 1988, obligates States Parties to implement strict penal sanctions within their domestic law to punish drug offences. However, 26 June 1987 was also the date that the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment entered into force.³² Ten years later, in December 1997, the General Assembly commemorated this achievement by designating the 26th of June as the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, 'with a view to the total eradication of torture and the effective functioning of the Convention³³

²⁹ Paul Hunt, 'Human Rights, Health and Harm Reduction: States' Amnesia and Parallel Universes' (International Harm Reduction Association 2008) 9.

³⁰ UN General Assembly, 'International Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking' (7 December 1987) UN Doc No A/RES/42/112, para 5.

³¹ UN Convention against the Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (20 December 1988) 1582 UNTS 95 (1988 Convention).

³² Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (10 December 1984) 1465 UNTS 85 (Torture Convention).

³³ UN General Assembly, 'UN International Day in Support of Victims of Torture' (18 February 1998) UN Doc No A/RES/52/149.

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The ensuing years have illustrated how uncomfortably these two United Nations commemorative dates sit together, as some States choose to 'celebrate' the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking by staging the execution of drug traffickers, most visibly in China where the executions are often public and en masse.³⁴ In fact, in the decade following the entry into force of the 1988 drug convention, the number of States legislating to impose capital punishment for drug offences increased significantly,³⁵ this during a period when scholars were documenting an overall downward trend in the use of the death penalty worldwide.³⁶ There is a case to be made that the increase in States prescribing capital punishment for drug offences came as the direct result of the ratification of the 1988 Convention, which created international obligations for States to impose punitive domestic laws and penalties for drug offences. That the above executions are explicitly carried out to mark the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, despite the fact that the UN human rights system has concluded that the death penalty for drug offences constitutes a violation of international human rights law,³⁷ illustrates 'the contradictions faced by the United Nations as it seeks to protect and expand human rights while also acting as the international community's guarantor of conventions to control licit and illicit drugs'.³⁸

Given that June 26th marks the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, this disconnect between human rights and drug control is also illustrated by the increasing international documentation of the infliction of torture, or other forms of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, in the name of 'drug treatment'.³⁹ In March 2012, a group of twelve United Nations agencies – including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the World Health Organization, the UN Office on

- ³⁵ See, Rick Lines, 'The Death Penalty for Drug Offences: A Violation of International Human Rights Law' (International Harm Reduction Association 2007) 7, Rick Lines, 'A "most serious crime"? International Human Rights Law and the Death Penalty for Drug Offences' (18th International Conference on the Reduction of Drug-Related Harm, Warsaw, 15 May 2007).
- ³⁶ William A. Schabas, *The Abolition of the Death Penalty in International Law* (3rd ed, Cambridge University Press 2002) 19, Roger Hood and Carolyn Hoyle, *The Death Penalty: A Worldwide Perspective* (4th ed, Oxford University Press 2008) 13–18.
- ³⁷ See generally, Lines, 'A "Most Serious Crime"?' (n 34).
- ³⁸ Emma Bonino, 'Crimes without Victims: Appropriate Policy Responses to Drug Use' in Protecting the Human Rights of Injection Drug Users: The Impact of HIV and AIDS (Open Society Institute 2005) 17.
- ³⁹ See generally, Elliott, Lines and Schleifer (n 26).

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³⁴ Rick Lines, 'A "Most Serious Crime"? The Death Penalty for Drug Offences and International Human Rights Law' (2010) 21 Amicus Journal 21.

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Drugs and Crime and UNICEF – released a joint statement calling for the closure of all compulsory drug detention and rehabilitation centres, where many such abuses have been documented.⁴⁰ The UN Special Rapporteur on torture has also raised specific concern about 'a number of areas where torture and ill-treatment occur as a direct or indirect result of current approaches to drug control',⁴¹ including the use of the death penalty. In his 2009 report, Special Rapporteur Manfred Nowak noted with concern that 'the international drug control system has evolved practically detached from the United Nations human rights machinery'.⁴² In his 2013 report, the subsequent Special Rapporteur, Juan Mendez, again highlighted violations linked to drug control law and policy.⁴³ Clearly the gap in law and practice that currently exists between drug control and human rights is one that needs to be bridged.

The disengagement evident at the UN level between human rights and drug control is also reflected in the literature. Writing in 1996, Professor Norbert Gilmore of McGill University noted that 'little has been written about drug use *and* human rights. Human rights are rarely mentioned expressly in drug literature and drug use is rarely mentioned in human rights literature'.⁴⁴ Twenty years later, the literature examining drug control issues through the lens of international human rights law has grown, but the total body of peer-reviewed commentary and analysis in the area would barely rank the issue as a footnote in the broader human rights lexicon. The relative dearth of legal scholarship in the area of human rights and drugs stands in sharp contrast to the many human rights issues

⁴⁰ International Labour Organization; Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; United Nations Development Programme; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation; United Nations Population Fund; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; United Nations Children's Fund; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women; World Food Programme; World Health Organization; and Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, 'Joint Statement: Compulsory drug detention and rehabilitation centres' (March 2012).

⁴¹ UN Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Manfred Nowak' (14 January 2009) UN Doc No A/HRC/10/44, para 17 (Nowak Report).

⁴² Ibid para 51.

⁴³ UN Human Rights Council, 'Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Juan E. Mendez' (1 February 2013) UN Doc No A/HRC/22/53. (Mendez Report).

⁴⁴ Norbert Gilmore, 'Drug Use and Human Rights: Privacy, Vulnerability, Disability, and Human Rights Infringements' (1996) 12 Journal of Contemporary Health Law and Policy 355, 356.

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engaged by drug control, and the litany of documented human rights abuses resulting from drug enforcement practices.

While some of the more recent literature seeks to close this gap, other literature seeks to reinforce it. Takahashi argues there is no link between the international drug control regime and capital punishment because most countries do not execute people for drug offences,⁴⁵ and makes the case that the death penalty for drug offences is in fact not a drug control issue at all, but one related to broader rule of law concerns. In an interesting example of the Hunt's concept of 'parallel universes' in action, Takahashi states 'the death penalty [for drugs] issue is not so much of a drug control issue as much as it is an issue of human rights,⁴⁶ and that while accepting that executions for drug offences are clearly violations of international human rights law, 'it is not relevant whether [these executions] were done enforcing drug control laws or during a campaign to cut down on traffic violations'.⁴⁷ The suggestion that the legal context underpinning and justifying executions is not relevant to, or should be shielded from, human rights scrutiny is unusual. In fact, a 2001 report by the UN Secretary-General recorded a 50 per cent increase in the number of countries prescribing the death penalty for drugs into domestic law between 1985 and 2000,48 the exact period during which 1988 drug treaty was being drafted, adopted and ratified at State level. This suggests that, at minimum, the link between the international drug control regime and the use of the death penalty is a reasonable area of human rights inquiry to explore. However, Takahashi argues that human rights leaders who have spoken out on drug control issues, such as several UN High Commissioners for Human Rights, have been 'fooled' or 'tricked' into doing so.⁴⁹ In effect, attempting to dismiss or ridicule the very notion

⁴⁶ Saul Takahashi, 'Drug Control, Human Rights, and the Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health: By No Means Straightforward Issues' (2009) 31 Human Rights Quarterly 748, 761.

⁴⁵ Saul Takahashi, 'Drug Control and Human Rights: Frequently Asked Questions' (World Federation Against Drugs 2013) 8.

⁴⁷ Saul Takahashi, 'Introduction: The Perils of Sectionalism' in S. Takahashi (ed) Human Rights, Human Security, and State Security: The Intersection, vol. 1 (Praeger, 2014) xx.

⁴⁸ UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, 'Capital punishment and implementation of the safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty: Report of the Secretary-General' (29 March 2001) UN Doc No E/CN.15/2001/10, para. 90.

⁴⁹ Ibid xx-xxi. Although Takahashi mentions only Louise Arbour in his critique, both former High Commissioner, Navanethem Pillay, and current High Commissioner, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, have also spoken out on human rights abuses driven by drug control.

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of a broader systemic impact of the international drug control on human rights, and the work of those scholars and bodies that highlight these concerns.

However, this perspective is not reflective of the broader literature, nor the evolving practice of UN mechanisms, on the question of the human rights impacts of drug control. For example, in April 2016 more than sixty Member States used the occasion of the UN General Assembly Special Session on the world drug problem to specifically voice their opposition to the death penalty for drug offences.⁵⁰ This would suggest these States considered a discussion of human rights issues such as capital punishment completely appropriate for highest level United Nations meeting on drug control.

1.2 Scope and Objectives

1.2.1 Bridging the 'Parallel Universes' of Drug Control and Human Rights

International legal instruments on drug control date back more than one hundred years.⁵¹ Since the adoption of the International Opium Convention in 1912, eight other treaties on drugs have been agreed under the auspices of the League of Nations and later the United Nations, and drug control has been the subject of more than one hundred resolutions of the UN General Assembly.⁵² The international law of drug control therefore predates by several decades the modern system of international human rights law that has emerged since 1948, and the numerous United Nations and regional human rights treaties that have been ratified subsequently. The lessons of the fourth stage of drug control, and the impacts of these 'parallel universes' on human rights as described above, demand a new paradigm, one that closes the gaps in law and practice, and prevents human rights violations occurring due to drug control and enforcement activities.

Despite their differing histories, drug control and human rights treaties today exist as part of a larger common body of public international law. As

⁵⁰ The author is grateful to the International Drug Policy Consortium for sharing its contemporaneous notes from the General Assembly Special Session, 19–21 April 2016.

⁵¹ International Opium Convention (signed 23 January 1912) 1922 LNTS 189 (1912 Convention).

⁵² UN General Assembly, 'Resolutions' www.un.org/documents/resga.htm accessed 15 May 2014.