

Understanding the sources of “Captagon” fuelling political instability in West Asia

1. There is widespread media coverage of the abuse of tablets sold as “Captagon” and their production as a source of revenue in armed conflicts in the Middle East. There is no other synthetic drug seized as regularly in such quantities in the West Asia region. Amphetamine, a synthetic stimulant, is typically the main active ingredient in “Captagon” tablets.
2. At the same time, there is a striking lack of information about the sources of the amphetamine. While laboratories clandestinely compressing amphetamine powder and other ingredients into “Captagon” tablets have occasionally been reported, there have been few reports in the Middle East of illicit laboratories synthesizing amphetamine or reports of seizures of the chemicals needed for such syntheses.
3. Only recently, in the context of a targeted international activity under the INCB-led Project Prism, was there some light shed on the types and sources of chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of “Captagon” tablets: authorities in Lebanon have seized and forensically identified significant amounts of a specific non-scheduled “designer” precursor of amphetamine; the first such identification outside Europe.
4. While these findings are to be welcomed in that they define the target, they do not give reason to be complacent. In fact, more international focus needs to be put on the chemicals that are needed to illicitly manufacture drugs like “Captagon”.
5. Countries in the Middle East and other affected regions may need to more carefully scrutinize potential modus operandi of the criminal networks to determine how traffickers are obtaining and moving chemicals to the sites of illicit manufacture. International donors and organizations that engage in technical cooperation programmes all need to work together to build the capacities and the operational knowledge to prevent chemicals from being diverted into illicit drug manufacture.
6. INCB is ready to be part of concrete actions and joint efforts to put an end to the damaging impact of drugs generally and in conflict situations in particular.

INCB is the independent, quasi-judicial body charged with promoting and monitoring Government compliance with the three international drug control conventions: the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances, and the 1988 Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

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