

CIVIL - MILITARY FUSION CENTRE

Counter-Narcotics in Afghanistan

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Illicit Drugs & Afghanistan

Eray Basar¹

Abstract

Despite the continuous counter-narcotics efforts of the international community and the Afghan government throughout the past decade, *Agence France-Presse* wrote in April 2012 that Afghanistan continues to be a [major contributor to the global drug supply](#). Approximately 90% of the world's opium, most of which is processed into heroin, originates in Afghan fields. While potential opium production in Afghanistan peaked in 2007, poppy cultivation has recently risen. For instance, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) marked a [61% increase](#) in the potential opium production between 2010 and 2011. A separate UNODC report from 2010 states that drugs and bribes are equivalent to approximately [a quarter of Afghanistan's gross domestic product \(GDP\)](#).

Dynamics & Motivations. Price fluctuations influence [market dynamics](#), according to the UNODC. For instance, the [rise in poppy cultivation](#) between 2005 and 2009 translated into an increase in supply, which in turn helped to bring about the gradual [decrease in the price of opium](#). Similarly, a decline in the amount of opium poppies produced in 2009-2010 contributed to rising poppy values and greater cultivation in 2011. Other factors are also reportedly at play. For instance, a World Bank report on "[Drugs and Development in Afghanistan](#)" says that poppies are attractive to some farmers because "there is working capital financing available at all stages, as well as credit and other inputs for producers." The same report notes that many poorer households are obligated to grow poppies by landowners and creditors to enable them to pay off debts. The *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* further indicates that many Afghan farmers are in fact compelled to grow this crop by insurgent elements through [threats and intimidation](#).

Who Benefits? Numerous people benefit from [the poppy cultivation business](#) and from related narcotics processing and trafficking, according to the World Bank. However, the benefits are far from evenly distributed among groups involved in the trade. The World Bank notes that farmers with limited amounts of land, most of whom are involved in sharecropping, benefit the least while farmers with capital resources and significant landholdings receive greater income. Small-scale opium traders also benefit, though their income is eclipsed by that accruing to wholesalers and refiners who arrange transport and processing of raw materials into opium and heroin. The Chr. Michelsen Institute notes that the proceeds of poppy cultivation and narcotics trafficking particularly benefit a [small group of warlords](#).

The Taliban and other insurgent groups also reportedly receive income from poppy cultivation, hashish cultivation and narcotics trafficking. The World Bank's report on "[Drugs and Development in Afghanistan](#)" says that insecurity in parts of Afghanistan during the course of the past 11 years has facilitated poppy

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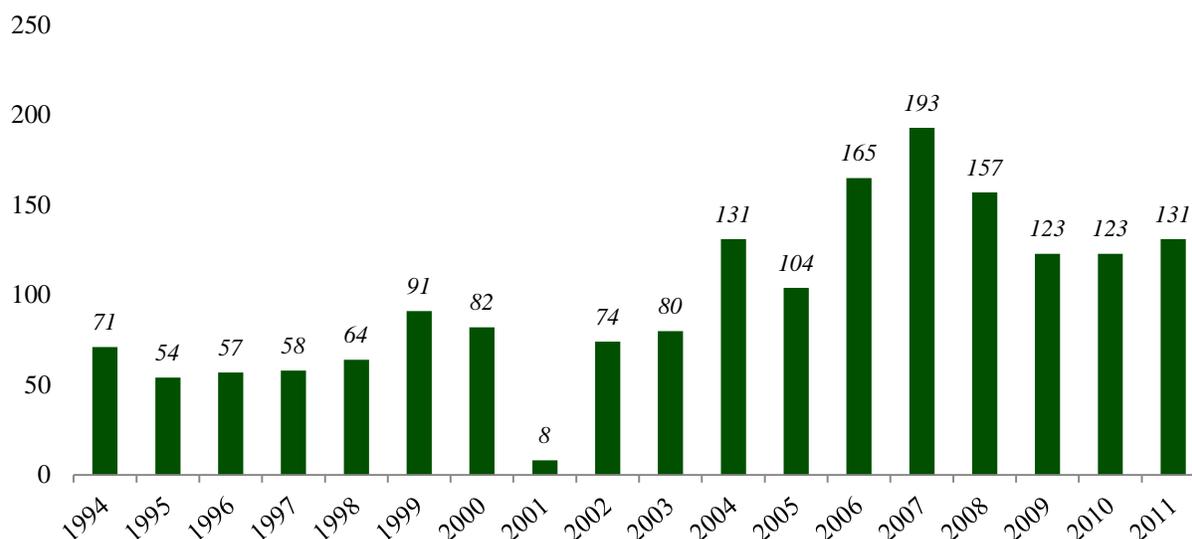
cultivation and that opium has provided a “ready source of cash” which has financed the purchase of weapons and other items necessary to sustain the insurgency. Furthermore, UNODC’s report on “[The Global Afghan Opium Trade](#)” says the Taliban receives approximately 10% of the value of opiates being transported by traffickers. Given that the total value of the heroin trafficked to Iran and Pakistan was estimated to be approximately USD 700 million in 2009, UNODC says approximately USD 70 million may have been paid to the Taliban as tax on transport alone. Poppies and narcotics reportedly also contribute to the insurgency’s financing in other ways.

[Beyond Poppies & Opium](#). In addition to the opium “industry”, Afghanistan has also become the [biggest producer of hashish](#), a drug produced from the cannabis crop’s resin. According to *Time Magazine*, Afghan farmers earned [approximately USD 94 million](#) from the sales of 1,500-3,500 tonnes of hashish.”

Introduction

Poppy cultivation and drug trafficking persist in Afghanistan despite the continuous counter-narcotics efforts of the international community and the Afghan government throughout the past decade. As pointed out in a May 2012 article from *Reuters*, the country continues to be a [major contributor to the global drug supply](#). Approximately 90% of the world’s opium, most of which is processed into heroin, originates in Afghan poppy fields. The production of opium and related drugs has been growing since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. A 2010 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) states that the amount of money involved in drugs and bribes are equivalent to approximately [a quarter of Afghanistan’s licit gross domestic product \(GDP\)](#). As specified in a report from the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) in Norway, the proceeds of poppy cultivation and narcotics trafficking primarily benefit a [small group of warlords](#); CMI further finds that the drug trade directly feeds into another major challenge for Afghanistan – corruption. (See the *CFC volume on “[Corruption and Anti-Corruption Issues in Afghanistan](#)”* for a further discussion of this issue.) Since 2002 there has been an increase in poppy cultivation (i.e, the land area sown with poppies) and in the amount of opium produced each year through 2007 (see *Figures 1 and 2*). The [decrease in the opium cultivation](#) and production after 2007 is attributed to some successful counter-narcotics efforts in parts of the country as well as the severe drought and crop failure caused by unfavourable weather conditions. According to a UNODC report entitled “[Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011](#)”, 95% of the total production takes place in nine western and southern provinces.

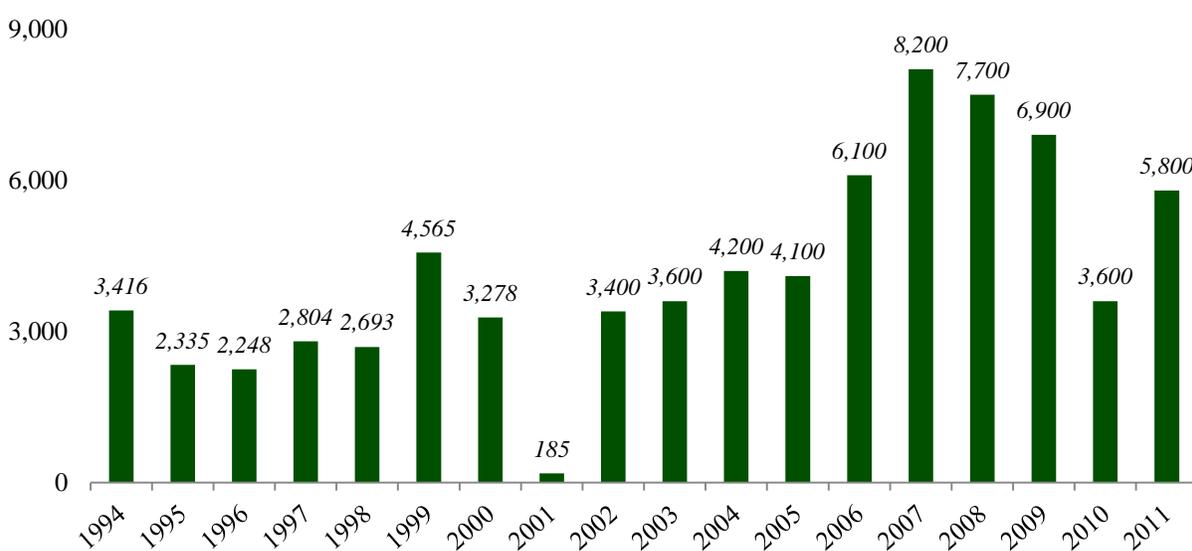
Figure 1. Land Area Cultivated with Poppies in Afghanistan (Thousands of Hectares), 1994-2011



Source: *UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011.*

The past several years witnessed a downward trend with regards potential opium production until 2011 (see Figure 2). There was a 61% increase in the potential opium production between 2010 and 2011 as a result of a sharp increase in per-hectare (ha) opium yields. Yields reflect the amount of opium produced per hectare of land and are affected by factors such as climate, crop disease, precipitation and so on. For instance, 2009 was a high-yield year, with 56.1 kg/ha, though opium production did not spike given that less land was planted with poppies. However, 2010 saw a sharp decline in yields to only 29.2 kg/ha because of a crop disease. In 2011, yields increased to 44.5 kg/ha, which led to an apparent spike in production despite the modest increase in land area sown with opium poppies.

Figure 2. Potential Opium Production in Afghanistan (Metric Tonnes), 1994-2011

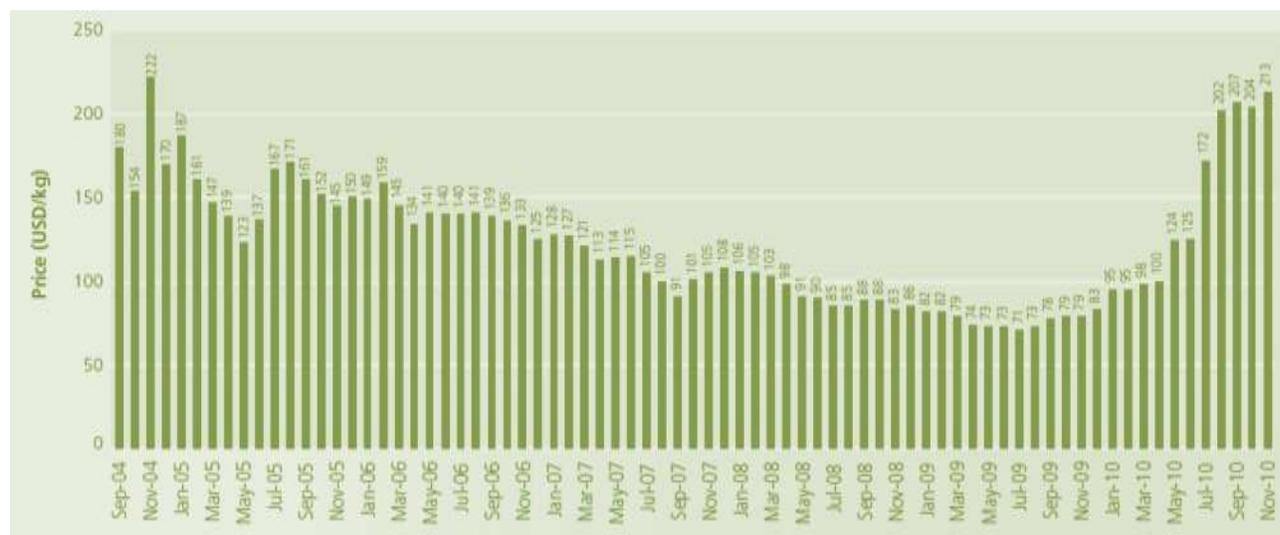


Source: *UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011.*

The year 2001 is an outlier in Figures 1 and 2 given that the figures dropped significantly. This rapid reduction was a consequence of a very effective ban on opium and eradication process by the Taliban regime. According to an article in *The New York Times*, the Taliban managed to effectively eliminate the poppy crop in one season despite the fact that Afghanistan was then supplying almost three quarters of the world’s opium and most of the heroin entering Europe. However, the ban and the eradication had very costly consequences for Afghan farmers. According to an article by the Cato Institute’s Ted Galen Carpenter, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell announced a USD 43 million grant to Afghanistan in addition to the aid that the US was already providing to agencies assisting Afghan refugees on 17 May 2001. The grant aimed to help the farmers and reward Kabul for its counter-narcotics efforts. Nevertheless, Carpenter claims that the Taliban’s apparent crackdown on poppy cultivation was part of a ploy; authorities in the neighbouring Tajikistan indicated that the amount of opium crossing the border was actually increasing. The article suggests that the Taliban’s anti-poppy stance was part of an effort to raise the value of the opium stockpiled by the group. In addition, a 2011 report by UNODC, entitled “The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment”, states that there was no shortage of opium on world markets in 2001, thus lending support to claims that opium had been stockpiled by the Taliban and that the group had never moved to decimate the poppy trade. The ban was lifted, and farmers planted their fields with poppies again in 2001 once the Taliban regime was no longer in power, reports *The Guardian*.

Seventeen provinces in Afghanistan are categorised as being “poppy-free” by UNODC’s “Afghanistan Opium Survey: 2011”. UNODC defines a province as poppy-free when it is home to less than 100 ha of poppies. The number of poppy-free provinces had previously reached a peak in 2010, when 20 provinces received this designation. The central region² of Afghanistan has become entirely poppy-free with the exception of Kabul province. Similarly, the north-eastern region, which had been totally poppy-free in 2010, lost this status due to increased cultivation in Baghlan and Faryab, both of which started to cultivate poppies on slightly more than 100 ha in 2011.

Figure 3. Dry Opium Prices in Afghanistan, 2004–2010



Source: UNODC, *The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment 2011*.

² Regions as designated by UNODC for analytical purposes. Central region includes the following provinces: Kabul, Khost, Logar, Pakitya, Panjshir, Parwan, Wardak, Ghazni, Paktika.

Price levels are also an important element to understand the [market dynamics](#), as the trends in the production and the amounts produced correlate with the price of poppies and opium. For instance, the [rise in poppy cultivation](#) between 2005 and 2009 translated into [an increase in supply](#), which in turn helped to bring about the gradual [decrease in the prices of opium](#) observed in the Figure 3 (*preceding page*). That is, the high prices in the initial years motivated Afghan farmers to plant more poppies, thus increasing the supply of opium in the market and driving down prices.³

Incentives & Motivations for Cultivation

A World Bank report entitled “[Drugs and Development in Afghanistan](#)” identifies various factors affecting poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, including the exit of other suppliers from the market and the growing demand for the product. The exit of suppliers such as Iran, Pakistan and Turkey from poppy production created a gap which Afghanistan could and did fill. In addition, demand for heroin has been increasing not only in Afghanistan and within neighbouring countries but also in Europe and elsewhere. Furthermore, increased insecurity in parts of Afghanistan during the course of the past 11 years has exacerbated the situation, according to the World Bank. The report also states that opium has provided a “ready source of cash” which has financed the purchase of weapons and other items necessary to sustain the insurgency. Relatedly, violence in Afghanistan prior to and since 2001 – combined with regular and frequently severe droughts – has reduced the supply of irrigation water and impelled many farmers to seek out poppies rather than more water-intensive, licit crops. Finally, it is argued that “[m]arket organization is excellent, well adapted to the characteristics of the product and to the nature and intensity of risks. Markets extend from the farm gate to the frontier and beyond, and there is working capital financing available at all stages, as well as credit and other inputs for producers.”

At the farmer level, according to the World Bank, poppies are perceived as a [non-perishable and durable commodity](#) which commands a high price and which has a guaranteed market. In addition, drug traffickers provide credits and other inputs which render poppy cultivation appealing to many Afghan farmers. The most significant and obvious reason for the Afghan [farmers to produce poppy crop](#) is its higher profitability according to the UNODC’s 2003 report, “[The Opium Economy in Afghanistan](#)”. The report states that farmers are responsive to the price signals; that is, any decline in the opium prices caused the reduction of area under cultivation, and thus, lowered the opium production. Conversely, the increases in the opium price caused the farmers to plant more.

The “[Afghanistan Opium Risk Assessment](#)” published by UNODC in April 2012 reflects farmers’ explanations for why they choose to plant opium poppies over alternative, licit crops. According to the UNODC report, 71% of the farmers produce opium due to its high sale price. About 13% of them indicated that poverty was the main reason. To a lesser extent, the high level of income per hectare (5%) and the high demand for opium (2%) were cited.⁴ Conversely, 45% of respondents who have opted not to grow poppies cited the government prohibition as the primary factor influencing their decision. Similarly, 18% of non-poppy-growers indicated Islamic opposition to drugs as their main reason for steering clear of poppies. A further 17% mentioned that elders and *shuras* (councils) had discouraged or banned farmers from cultivating poppies. Another 17% presented the insufficient irrigation water sources as the reason for not cultivating.

³ Refer to [this link](#) for a general explanation of supply and demand dynamics.

⁴ In this instance, respondents were only permitted to cite the one “main reason” why they had planted poppies.

Lastly, concerns regarding eradication and insufficient yields were among the reasons given, with 11% and 6% of the respondents, respectively.⁵

The World Bank's report on "[Drugs and Development in Afghanistan](#)" cites other factors which influence Afghan farmers' decision to grow poppies. A selection of these are briefly summarised below.

- Poppy cultivation is part of a risk management approach adopted by some farmers. While some farmers, particularly those with high debts and small pieces of land, may cultivate poppy due to an absence of viable alternatives, many others cultivate poppies as part of a diversified strategy which allows them cash from poppies as well as food security from licit crops.
- Poppy cultivation provides cash, which is needed by the majority of households which purchase most of their basic need, including food, from markets.
- The high risk associated with poppy cultivation – given that it is illicit and vulnerable to disease or climatic conditions – pushes landowners to sharecrop their land for poppy cultivation, thus spreading the risk among many farmers.
- Poorer farmers often become obliged to cultivate poppy crop, due to high debts or sharecropping requirements.

As these examples demonstrate, several factors lead – or impel – Afghan farmers to grow opium poppies. In addition, numerous sources such as the *Institute for War and Peace Reporting* indicate that many Afghan farmers are in fact compelled to grow this crop by insurgent elements through [threats and intimidation](#).

Beneficiaries of the Poppy Trade

Numerous people benefit from [the poppy cultivation business](#) and from related narcotics processing and trafficking, according to the World Bank. However, the benefits are far from evenly distributed among groups and categories of individuals involved in the trade, a small number of which are noted below.

- Farmers with capital resources and significant landholdings are among the major beneficiaries of the drug market. They cultivate poppy on their own land, usually as a part of mixed crop strategy, and often let some of their land to be used for sharecropping; they then receive a portion of the poppies cultivated by the sharecroppers working the land.
- In contrast, poorer farmers cultivate small amounts of poppy. If they are sharecropping, they are often required by the landlord to cultivate poppy crop. These farmers cannot benefit from the drug industry income very much even with the high opium prices because of the high-interest debts and unfavourable sharecropping arrangements.
- Rural wage labourers work to harvest the poppy crop, which is a very labour-intensive process. As many as half a million people move seasonally for wage labour, following the poppy harvest in different areas.
- Small opium traders buy and sell small amounts of raw opium at farm gate and opium bazaars.

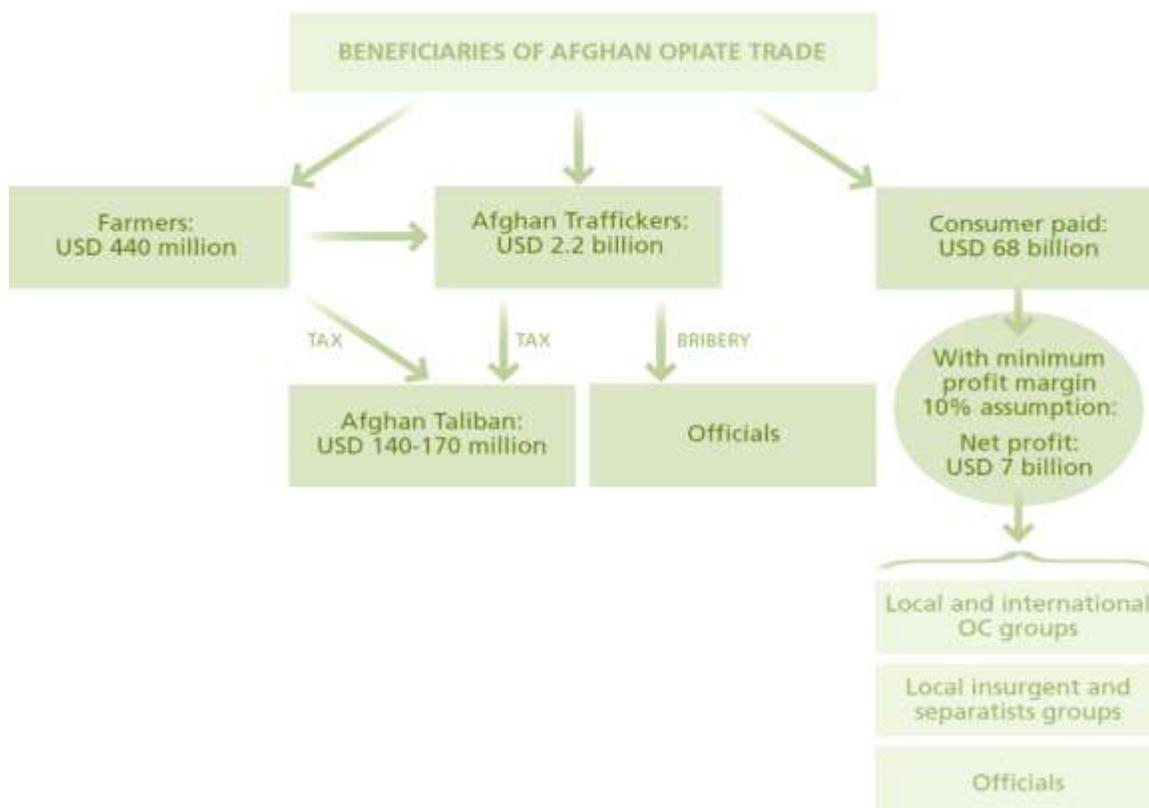
⁵ Respondents were permitted to provide more than one explanation when explaining why they did not cultivate poppies. Hence, the total of these responses exceeds 100%.

- Wholesalers and refiners arrange for processing of the raw materials, often moving poppies from Afghanistan to neighbouring countries in the process.

Although the Taliban's role is not very clear in the drug trafficking, it is indicated that they have a major involvement, according to UNODC's report on "[The Global Afghan Opium Trade](#)". That report says the Taliban is being paid approximately 10% of the value of opiates being transported by traffickers. The Taliban's 10% tax is either paid in cash or in forms of items such as food, weapons, vehicles and so on. Given that the total value of the heroin trafficked to Iran and Pakistan was approximately USD 700 million in 2009, approximately USD 70 million may have been paid to the Taliban as tax or for protection. In addition, in 2009, the Taliban reportedly received approximately USD 600-1,200 per month from heroin laboratory owners, which accumulates to approximately USD 2-7 million per year given that there are an estimated 300 to 500 laboratories across Afghanistan.

UNODC further reports that almost 95% of the opium produced in Afghanistan is produced in those provinces in which the Taliban has been highly active. In 2009, the farm-gate income of opium trade was around USD 438 million, of which USD 22-44 million was allegedly paid to the Taliban and other anti-government elements in the form of taxes and protection fees. In total, the Taliban was estimated to receive USD 155 million from the opiate production and trafficking market. However, the UNODC report also indicates that the Taliban may have received far more than this estimated amount, given that the total value of the opiates trade was USD 2.2 billion in 2009.

Figure 4. Overview of the Beneficiaries of Afghan Opiate Trafficking, 2009

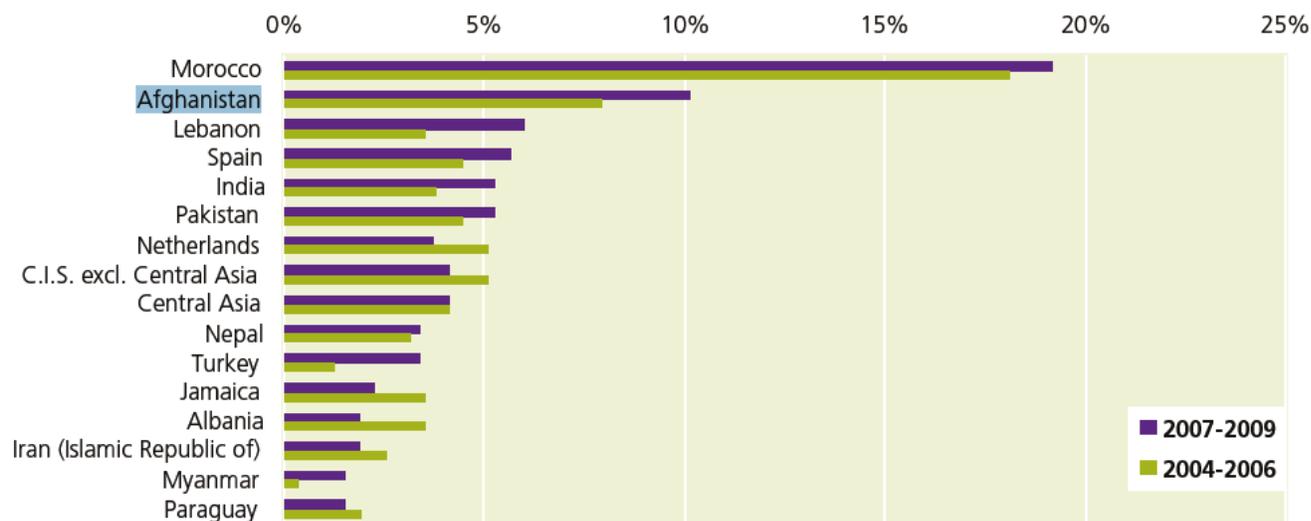


Source: UNODC, [The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment 2011](#).

Cannabis Cultivation and the Hashish Production

In addition to the opium “industry”, Afghanistan has also become the [biggest producer of hashish](#), a drug produced from the cannabis crop’s resin. According to an article in the *Time Magazine*, Afghan farmers earned [approximately USD 94 million](#) from the sales of 1,500-3,500 tonnes of hashish. The area under cannabis cultivation in Afghanistan in 2010 was estimated to be between [9,000 ha to 29,000 ha](#). Due to uncertainties about these estimates, a mid-point estimation was not possible, according to the UNODC’s [Cannabis Survey 2010](#). This survey was held in 22 provinces defined as the “cannabis risk area” where cannabis cultivation had been reported or observed in the previous surveys.

Figure 5. Main Source⁶ Countries of Cannabis Resin Reported to UNODC, Percentage of Total



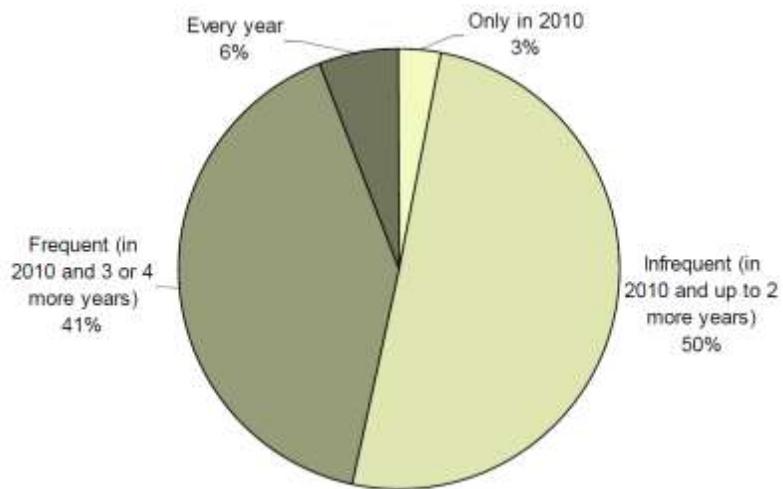
Source: *UNODC, World Drug Report 2011.*

Note: Source countries in this chart are calculated as a percentage of countries reporting seizures of cannabis originating in each country. Accordingly, approximately 10% of countries reporting cannabis seizures in the period from 2007 to 2009 specified that some of that cannabis originated in Afghanistan. The figures do not reflect each country’s contribution to the global cannabis supply.

Unlike those growing opium poppies, cannabis farmers have [not been continuously planting](#) the crop; only 6% of the farmers reported as cannabis producers surveyed by the UNODC have been producing it every year between 2005 and 2010. The southern region of Afghanistan was reportedly producing the greatest amounts of cannabis. The data show that frequent producers – who produced three or four years in addition to 2010 – accounted for 45% in this region compared to the 24% in the other regions.

⁶ Source countries might not always mean the country where it was produced and might also indicate the latest known transit country.

Figure 6. Cannabis Cultivation Frequency, 2005–2010⁷



Source: UNODC, Cannabis Survey 2010.

⁷ These figures only include farmers who were growing cannabis in 2010.

Opium Poppies & the Afghan Economy

Steven A. Zyck⁸

Abstract

Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan has a significant economic impact. Data from the [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#) (UNODC) and the World Bank shows that the value of Afghan opium equalled nearly half of the country's [gross domestic product](#) (GDP) in 2004. Subsequent economic growth diluted the significance of poppies, though opium comprised 15% of Afghanistan's GDP in 2011 and remains economically important. This chapter addresses both the economic costs of poppies and the links between poppies and Afghanistan's licit economy.

Economic Costs of Poppy Cultivation. Research from the UNODC, the World Bank and other organisations indicates that poppies have significant costs for the licit economy. A selection of these are briefly summarised below.

- UNODC suggests that poppy cultivation and the drug trade have undermined economic growth in Afghanistan by contributing to [insecurity and corruption](#). A [US Senate report](#) states that “the flow of illicit drug profits ...[is] bankrolling the Taliban and fueling the corruption that undermines the Afghan Government.”
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) finds that the high wages paid to those tending the poppy crop drive up the [cost of wage labour](#) and “negatively affects the competitiveness” of Afghan manufacturing and other industries.
- Poppies also lead Afghans farmers to “take out loans to cultivate large amounts of opium poppy, creating a vicious cycle of debt that cannot be broken by shifting back to licit crops”, says a [2007 US government study](#). One NGO found some farmers are never able to pay off the loans and in essence become [indentured labourers](#).

Links between Afghanistan's Licit Economy and Opium Poppies. While poppies are commonly viewed as an economic obstacle, researchers have also noted that they are significant to the Afghan economy for the reasons summarised below.

- One expert, David Mansfield, finds that opium poppies are a major cash crop and [source of capital](#) which some farmers use to finance licit enterprises or the cultivation of “alternative crops” such as wheat, fruits and vegetables.
- Poppies are “[the main cash crop](#)” in Afghanistan, and “opium-related income contributes primarily to higher consumption”, according to a UNODC publication. Mansfield also finds that, in [Helmand](#), local business owners indicate that [demand at local markets](#) is particularly driven by poppy farmers.

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- The [wage labour associated with poppy cultivation](#) would not be generated by other widely-grown crops, particularly wheat, according to a past UNODC report. That report found that 85% of all person-days of labour hired in [Nangarhar](#) province in 2006, to provide one example, were dedicated to poppy cultivation.
- Lastly, Mansfield's research finds indicates that the profits generated by poppies enable consistent [investment in the land](#), including weeding, crop rotation and the installation of irrigation tubewells, and thus prevent soil degradation.

This chapter further discusses the economic effects, as identified by experts, of various counter-narcotics approaches. It cites research which suggests that [eradication](#) may lead to expanded poppy cultivation while entrenching poverty among poor households. In addition, other approaches, such as interdiction and alternative livelihoods, are outlined, and their economic implications are summarised.

With the World Bank and others indicating that Afghanistan will face an [economic slowdown](#) as international security and development assistance declines in the years leading up to and after 2014, experts cite a need to address Afghanistan's poppy challenge in a way that does not undermine future potential for licit economic growth..

Introduction

Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan and the transnational drug trade it enables are often viewed primarily with regard to security, insurgency and corruption. A report from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) indicates that, since 2001, “the poppy trade has played a [critical destabilizing role](#), both in corrupting the Afghan government and police and in bankrolling the resurgence of the Taliban”. Such perceptions are common, according to a US *Public Broadcasting Service* article, and have given rise to a series of strategies, particularly eradication, focused upon [ridding Afghanistan of poppies](#). However, as noted later in this chapter, every approach to counter-narcotics has a significant economic impact given that – regardless of its illegality – poppies and drugs are major components of the Afghan economy. Each of these economic impacts has further [implications for security, governance and politics](#), according to a report from New York University's Center on International Cooperation. That is, ridding an area of poppies quickly may deny insurgents a portion of their funding but may also result in spiralling poverty rates, increased unemployment and underemployment and a more attractive recruitment environment for insurgent elements. Understanding poppy cultivation and narcotics trafficking as an economic issue also helps to broaden their relationship to stabilisation efforts.

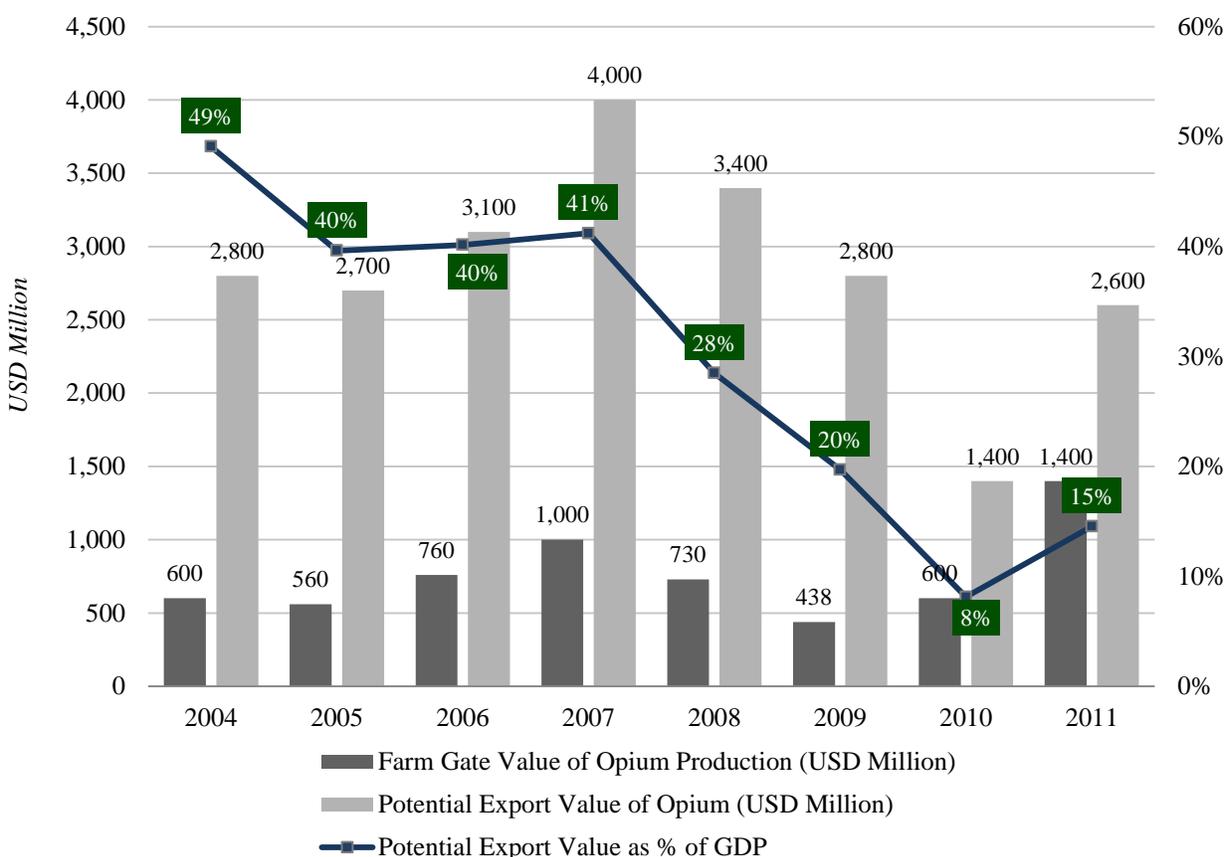
This chapter reviews the role that poppy cultivation and narcotics trafficking play within the Afghan economy. It addresses the total value of the drug trade and the general division of related income among farmers, landowners, dealers, traffickers and others. It then turns to the manner in which poppies both undermine and contribute to licit forms of economic growth. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the economic implications of various counter-narcotics strategies which have been proposed and pursued. This chapter relies entirely on open-source information and attempts to reflect the findings of organisations specialising in poppy cultivation, narcotics trafficking, criminality and economic growth in Afghanistan.

Key Figures & Information

As demonstrated in Figure 1, opium production is a significant economic force in Afghanistan. Data from the [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#) (UNODC) and the World Bank shows that the value of Afghan opium equalled nearly half of the country's [gross domestic product](#) (GDP) in 2004. Subsequent economic

growth diluted the significance of poppies, with opium comprising 15% of Afghanistan’s GDP in 2011. As Figure 1 reflects, poppies become proportionally less important to the Afghan economy in recent years. However, this trend primarily reflects fluctuations in the value of poppies and, more significantly, the increase in Afghanistan’s licit GDP, which grew from a modest USD 2.46 billion in 2001 to USD 5.7 billion in 2004 and UD 17.90 billion in 2011. Despite the fact that 38% more opium was produced in Afghanistan in 2011 than in 2004, according Chapter 1, the proportional economic significance of the poppy crop was far smaller.

Figure 1. Opium Production as a Percentage of Licit GDP in Afghanistan, 2004–2011



Source: Value of opium production is extracted from the UNODC, [Afghanistan Opium Surveys for 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2011](#); data regarding GDP is from the World Bank, [World Development Indicators](#), 2012.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the increase in poppy cultivation in 2011 was driven by increased yields of opium per hectare of land cultivated with poppies. Per hectare yields, which are heavily affected by climate, water supply and crop disease or infestation, are among several factors influencing the economic value of opium production in Afghanistan. In addition, the recent, current and projected supply of opium also plays a role. According to UNDOC, the price of opium quadrupled from 2009 to 2011 because of the effect of crop disease.

Price signals and other economic dynamics are important in impelling Afghan farmers to begin or continue growing poppies, according to UNODC’s most recent “[Afghanistan Opium Survey](#)”. When asked to explain the main reason which led them to cultivate poppies over alternative, licit crops, 93% cited economic factors. In total, 59% credited the high price of opium at the time (as noted above); 13% said they grew poppies to

improve their living conditions, and another 13% indicated that poverty drove them to cultivate the crop. Lastly, 8% indicate that poppies enabled them to gain significant income from relatively little land.

Understanding Households' Poppy Income

Afghanistan's Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, says the average Afghan household has access to only one hectare of land, which is significant to the economics of poppy cultivation. Christopher M. Blanchard with the US Congressional Research Service (CRS) remarks that those farmers with greater access to land often receive far greater profits from poppy cultivation than small land-holders. The difference in incomes was only partly related to the amount of land available to each. David Mansfield, one of the leading experts on poppies in Afghanistan, provides greater detail regarding this issue in a chapter on "Responding to the Challenge of Diversity in Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan". He describes the case of a typical, poor sharecropper. This individual sharecrops a hypothetical one-third hectare of land in 2005, when UNODC indicates that a hectare of poppies was worth approximately USD 5,400. The farmer would thus hypothetically received USD 1,800 from his crop. However, the sharecropper is obliged to provide two-thirds of his crop to the landowner as rent. Given that the sharecropper is from a very poor household, he was obliged to sell his remaining third of a hectare of poppies in advance at a reduced rate – about 50% of the market value – in order to get sorely needed cash for food and other basic needs. Hence, his household receives approximately USD 300 in income. This amount of money does not go far in poppy-growing areas, which tend to have among the largest households in Afghanistan. Hence, the farmer and his family would likely be left either with no savings or in debt. Mansfield contrasts this example with that of a relatively better-off landowner, who receives two-thirds of the poppies grown on his land by sharecroppers and who has sufficient money to delay selling his share of the crop until the market price is at its highest point. This hypothetical landowner would have, in 2005 terms, received up to USD 7,200 per hectare. Further and larger profits would eventually accrue to opium dealers, processors and traffickers.

Economic Costs of Poppy Cultivation

Research from the UNODC, the World Bank and other organisations (*discussed below*) indicates that poppies have significant costs for the licit economy. These include evident factors such as contributing to insecurity and corruption, both of which discourage investment, as well as more subtle second- and third-order effects related to the value of wage labour, currency stability and indebtedness.

Undermining the Investment Climate

A 2006 report on "Macroeconomic Impact of the Drug Economy and Counter-Narcotics Efforts" suggests that poppy cultivation and the drug trade have primarily undermined economic growth in Afghanistan by contributing to insecurity and corruption. A US Senate report arrives at a similar conclusion, stating that "the flow of illicit drug profits ...[is] bankrolling the Taliban and fueling the corruption that undermines the Afghan Government. Tens of millions of drug dollars are helping the Taliban and other insurgent groups buy arms, build deadlier roadside bombs and pay fighters." The US Senate publication says that corrupt officials and insurgents are linked through the drug trade, and the World Bank suggests that armed groups, corrupt officials, poor security and the "opium economy" are part of what it terms a "vicious circle" (*see Figure 2*). In short, this circle (or cycle) involves poppy profits accruing to armed groups, including warlords as well as insurgents, who then use the money to prevent the government and international community from disrupting their illicit enterprise by launching attacks and bribing officials.

Figure 2. The Vicious Circle of Afghanistan's Drug Industry



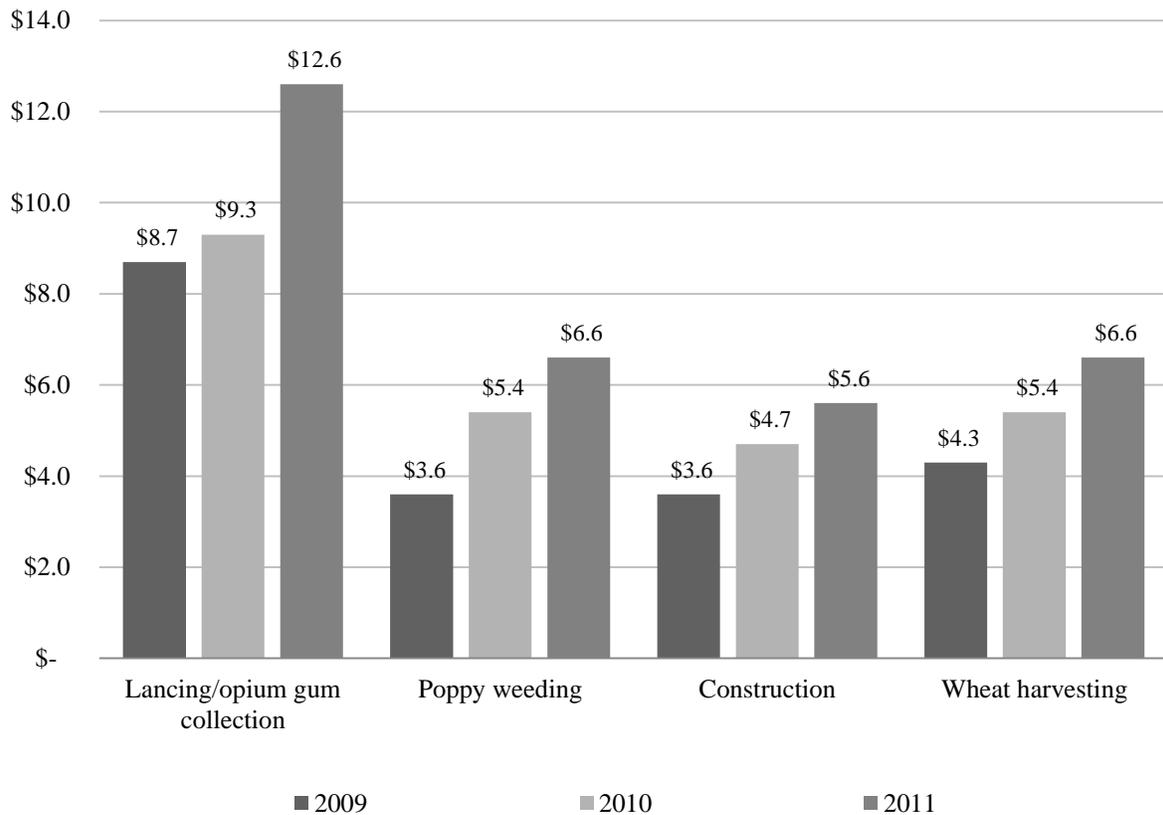
Source: William A. Byrd, “[Responding to Afghanistan’s Opium Economy Challenge](#)”, World Bank, 2008.

In a situation marked by insecurity and corruption, investment in the licit economy declines. The linkage between corruption and investment was recently highlighted in a [January 2012 CFC report](#), which found that corruption discouraged investment in a number of ways, including by rendering it difficult for potential investors to estimate “informal” expenses (e.g., bribes) and difficult to secure enforceable property rights. Accordingly, by feeding into Afghanistan’s corruption challenge, poppy cultivation and narcotics trafficking reduce the likelihood that investors will be willing to become involved in Afghanistan.

Driving Up Labour Costs

Poppies are a highly labour-intensive crop, according to UNODC’s 2009 “[Afghanistan Opium Survey](#)”. For example, to increase yields, poppy fields are typically weeded three times per year, and the harvesting of the opium gum involves a process known as “lancing”. Lancing is “the act of incising opium capsules during harvest using a sharp instrument, causing the opium latex to ooze out of the capsule”. A study from the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the World Bank indicated that Afghanistan’s 2006-2007 growing season could have generated [70 million person-days of labour](#), approximately one-third of which would have gone to wage labourers. While many of these person-days are provided by farmers and their families, the work involved in the harvest often requires the hiring of others. Hence, the price paid to labourers in poppy-growing areas is a major influence upon the price of wage labour.

Figure 3. Daily Wage Labour Costs in Afghanistan, 2009-2011



UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Surveys for 2009 and 2011*.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the value of poppies and opium means that those helping to tend and harvest the crop receive a premium for their services and this drives up the cost of wage labour across a province or the entire region (since many wage labourers travel from area to area, following the poppy harvest). For instance, an individual lancing poppies to extract the opium gum in 2011 could receive up to USD 12.6 per day, an amount which is nearly twice that available for all other forms of labour, according to UNODC (see Figure 3). An IMF report states that “the drug economy negatively affects the competitiveness of other domestically produced goods through high wage rates and a higher real exchange rate”. In short, private enterprises are required to pay higher rates for wage labour in poppy-growing areas, undermining the viability of manufacturing and other forms of licit growth. A chapter in a joint UNODC-World Bank volume arrives at the same conclusion, noting that the poppy industry raises the costs of labour in all sectors in poppy-growing areas and that this dynamic discourages economic diversification. With UNODC reporting a 35% increase in the value of lancing labour between 2010 and 2011, it seems possible that this imbalance may persist into the future.

Increased “Dollarization” of the Economy

In a piece written for the World Bank and UNODC, Edouard Martin and Steven Symansky write that a heavy economic reliance on poppies may have contributed to the “dollarization” of the economy. “Dollarization” generally refers, according to the IMF, to a country’s adoption of a foreign currency, most commonly the US

dollar, as its official or primary currency of exchange. Martin and Symansky note that the drug trade in Afghanistan and the region primarily uses US dollars as well as Pakistani rupee and Iranian rial for transactions and that, as a result, the position of the afghani as the country's primary currency is weakened. *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported that the Afghan government had been auctioning off [USD 2.4 billion per year](#) to stabilise the country's currency (albeit primarily as a result of the export of hard cash from the country). In addition, an [August 2011 CFC report](#) concluded that the use of foreign currencies, particularly the Pakistani rupee, was causing depreciation of the afghani and even inflation in parts of the country.

Debt Cycles

Poppy cultivation also has negative implications for the economic well-being of individual farmers, particularly poorer farmers who are obliged to take on debts year after year. A [2007 US government study](#) found that "some farmers take out loans to cultivate large amounts of opium poppy, creating a vicious cycle of debt that cannot be broken by shifting back to licit crops". That is, a farmer takes out a loan in one year to grow poppies. If the poppy yield is not sufficient, that same farmer may be unable to fully pay off the loan. He may thus be forced to grow poppies the next year in order to attempt to pay off the loan. Since loans are often given on disadvantageous terms, according to the French NGO *Urgence Réhabilitation Développement (URD)*, some farmers may ultimately never be able to pay off the loans and in essence become [indentured labourers](#).

Opium & Afghanistan's Licit Economy: Interdependencies

While opium poppy cultivation is most commonly viewed as corrosive with regard to security, governance and development in Afghanistan, researchers have also noted that it is closely inter-connected to licit economic activities. As discussed below, these connections revolve around the following: (i) access to capital, (ii) consumer spending, (iii) wage labour opportunities, (iv) access to land and credit and (v) investments in soil quality and irrigation.

Access to Capital

Mansfield, in an October 2011 study of [poppies and counter-narcotics efforts](#) in [Helmand](#) and [Nangarhar](#) provinces for the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), highlights the role that poppies play in providing capital for licit economic activities. He writes:

"Ironically, for those looking to invest in other, licit income streams, further counternarcotics efforts will likely be seen as a threat, since individuals often use the proceeds from the sale of their opium as capital for investment. For example, one respondent reported that he intended to use the money he earned from the sale of his opium to purchase an ice cream store. Were this opium to be seized, as many respondents increasingly fear, these farmers would be bereft of both on-farm and nonfarm income."

Mansfield's research identifies opium poppies as a key cash crop and source of capital which some growers may use to feed into licit enterprises. Echoing this point, a report on "Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy" for CRS suggests that reduced poppy cultivation makes lenders [less likely to provide loans](#) given that most loans in poppy-growing areas were tied to an anticipated poppy harvest.

Consumer Spending

While the majority of profits from the narcotics industry do not accrue to the agricultural households in rural communities, experts note that the loss of poppy-related income does impact consumer spending. The piece by

Martin and Symansky points out that poppies are “[the main cash crop](#)” in Afghanistan and that “farmers spend most of their income, and that opium-related income contributes primarily to higher consumption, in particular of non-subsistence goods”. Martin and Symansky note that poppy-related income primarily finances consumer spending on basic needs such as food, fuel, and healthcare but that Afghans with sufficient poppy income also purchase non-essential items such as cars, televisions, generators and other goods that contribute to the local economy. While such purchases may not, in nation-wide terms, be a major economic force, poppy-related consumer spending is primarily concentrated in those areas which are highly economically dependent on opium.

For instance, [Mansfield’s 2011 report](#) says that in Helmand, the province which produces the greatest amount of opium:

“[S]hopkeepers in Lashkar Gah and Gereshk report that the primary customers for meat and vegetables are the farmers that continue to cultivate opium. Those trading in cloth, vegetables, wheat flour and other food products in Gereshk are selling much of it at a premium to fellow traders in the bazaars of northern Helmand where opium poppy cultivation persists. There is thus a risk that a significant reduction in opium in these areas may also result in a contraction in the legal economy and the benefits it offers.”

The IMF, in a 2005 report on Afghanistan, found that poppy cultivation and the drug trade “adds to the [demand for domestic products](#) and improves the balance of payments. It impacts the nondrug economy primarily through the income it generates”. The IMF goes on to note that, in 2004, Afghan farmers were believed to have received approximately 25% of the USD 2.8 billion generated by the drug trade and that they spend much of this money on domestic markets. Hence, consumer spending would be undermined in poppy-growing areas, in particular, if poppies were suddenly unavailable in Afghanistan. The following section reviews the economic implications of varied counter-narcotics strategies.

Wage Labour Opportunities

As discussed in the preceding section, poppies are not only an important source of income for the farmers but also for those individuals who are temporarily hired to help harvest the crop. If one considers that approximately [23-24 million person-days of wage labour](#) may have been dedicated to harvesting Afghanistan’s poppy crop in 2006-2007, according to the aforementioned DFID-World Bank study, this likely generated tens if not hundreds of millions of US dollars in income for rural households. To put the situation into perspective, Mansfield found that [85% of all person-days](#) of labour hired in Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan were dedicated to poppy cultivation rather than to other activities.⁹ Such person-days of wage labour would be unable if poppies ceased to be cultivated. While licit agriculture also generates wage labour, other widely cultivated crops do not require as many days of labour given that most elements of cultivation can be managed by farmers’ own families.

Access to Land and Credit

For many Afghan households which lack access to agricultural land, poppy cultivation is the only way they are able to gain access to land and the credit needed to purchase agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertiliser. A study by Christopher War, David Mansfield, Peter Oldham and William Byrd found that, without poppies, landowners would not be inclined to make their [land available to sharecroppers](#). Few other crops offer the

⁹ See chapter 3 of the linked publication.

same income and the same labour-intensive cultivation process as poppies. A landowner unable to grow poppies would find it more financially appealing to cultivate his own land with wheat, fruits or vegetables and to keep the entirety of the profit for himself rather than allowing sharecroppers to receive a third of the income. Hence, the study found that the difference for the poorest of landless farmers was not between poppies and licit crops but between poppy cultivation and even deeper poverty. Stating this point clearly, [Mansfield writes](#): “Were the land-wealthy to cultivate other crops (typically with much lower labour requirements) instead of opium poppy, the land would no longer be available to sharecroppers or for lease but would be farmed using family labour of the landowner or relatively few wage labour inputs.” He concludes that, without poppy-contingent forms of credit, poorer households may have insufficient money for basic needs.

Investment in Soil Quality and Irrigation

Mansfield’s extensive research on poppies further finds that the crop enables consistent [investment in the land](#) and thus prevents soil degradation. The income derived from poppy cultivation is sufficient to enable farmers to pay for quality fertilisers and regular weeding of the soil. Other crops with lower profit margins are generally weeded once per year, while poppies are weeded three times in most cases. Furthermore, income from poppies also enables the introduction of techniques designed to prevent soil erosion and maximise the effectiveness of irrigation water. For instance, in [Badakhshan](#) province, Mansfield found that farmers in certain poppy-growing areas introduced “bunding” given that they had access to sufficient resources. Bunding involves the adding of soil embankments to slow the water flowing across fields in order to prevent soil erosion and capture more irrigation water. In addition, Mansfield spoke with farmers in multiple provinces who had, due to poppy-related income, been able to add tube wells with which to irrigate their land. He writes: “Those who used tubewells [...] were unanimous in their view that few other crops [besides poppies] could provide the access to credit require for installation or rent of a tubewell”. Lastly, Mansfield found that the profits enabled by poppies allowed landowners to farm their land less intensely, allowing it to remain fallow every two to three years, thus preventing the soil from being degraded. Less profitable crops may be cultivated year-round every year.

The Economics of Counter-Narcotics Strategies

This section briefly addresses the various economic implications of commonly-proposed counter-narcotics strategies. These include the following: (i) eradication, (ii) interdiction and (iii) alternative livelihoods.

Eradication

Eradication, according to Byrd’s report on “[Responding to Afghanistan’s Opium Economy Challenge](#)”, includes the actual destruction of poppies as well as threats to do so. Such interventions aim to increase the uncertainty and “opportunity costs” associated with poppy cultivation, thus making it too risky for farmers to plant. However, Byrd finds that the effects of eradication are short-lived and that, unless eradication or credible threats of eradication persist, farmers tend to return to planting poppies. In addition, his research shows that poppies are “footloose” across both space and time and that “impressive reductions in opium poppy cultivation [are] being offset by increases in other areas and/or in subsequent years”. In addition, both Byrd and Mansfield highlight the negative effects that eradication efforts may have upon poor households in rural areas. Mansfield finds that households adopt a number of [coping strategies](#) to adapt to the loss of income from poppy production and poppy-related wage labour in areas of widespread eradication. For instance, in Helmand in 2011, he learnt that families were reducing the quantity and quality of food they consumed, postponed seeking necessary medical care, withdrew children from school and ceased paying off loans or marriage-related

payments. In addition, some households were reportedly forced to sell their “long-term productive assets”, which rendered them less capable of earning a licit source of income in the future. For a case study of the implications of one eradication-focused effort, which also included elements related to alternative livelihoods/crops, see Box 1 on the “Food Zone Programme” in Helmand.

Box 1. The Helmand Food Zone Programme

The Food Zone Programme (FZP) is [an Afghan-led initiative](#) developed and launched by Governor Gulab Mangal of Helmand province in early 2008, shortly after he took office, according to Jeffrey Dressler of the Institute for the Study of War. The initiative aimed to reduce the cultivation of opium poppies, a practice which – combined with narcotics trafficking – was seen as undermining provincial governance and security. Available open-source information concerning the FZP portrays the programme activities in somewhat differing terms. Nearly all reports, however, note that the programme included the following [three components](#): (i) distributing heavily subsidised wheat seeds and fertilisers to Afghan farmers who agreed to cease growing poppies; (ii) mandating that farmers sign a pledge not to grow poppies in exchange for the subsidised seeds and fertilisers; and (iii) undertaking targeted eradication against some farmers in the area who continue to cultivate opium poppies.

An unpublished (but widely cited) study by Cranfield University in the United Kingdom noted that the programme led to a [year-on-year reduction in poppy cultivation of 37%](#) in targeted areas in Helmand between 2008 and 2009, according to UNODC. Outside of the target areas, poppy cultivation increased by 8% during that same period. However, other research questioned the effectiveness of approaches such as the FZP. For instance, the French NGO URD suggested that the FZP caused [poppy cultivation to increase](#) in neighbouring areas, thereby increasing the geographical scope of the problem. Mansfield writes that farmers whose poppies were eradicated “have been compelled to [reduce the amount of land they cultivate with wheat and other crops](#)” given that they had less access to capital and loans, which are both heavily rooted in the poppy trade, with which to purchase needed inputs such as seeds and fertiliser. Mansfield further noted that an [influx of foreign and Afghan troops](#) into Helmand in and after 2009 also likely bears partial credit for the reduction in cultivation in that province.

Interdiction

Byrd notes that interdiction is another common counter-narcotics approach. According to a US Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, “interdiction programs aim to [decrease narcotics trafficking and processing](#) by conducting interdiction operations, which include, among other things, raiding drug laboratories; destroying storage sites; arresting drug traffickers; conducting roadblock operations; seizing chemicals and drugs; and conducting undercover drug purchases”. While interdiction by the Afghan National Security Forces is addressed in Chapter 4, Byrd notes that, economically speaking, it sidesteps some of the economic [challenges posed by eradication](#). Interdiction commonly targets those trafficking in opium, narcotics, precursor chemicals and cash rather than poor rural farmers and wage labourers, thus penalising those in the drug trafficking system who receive the lion’s share of the profits. Yet Byrd also finds that interdiction in Afghanistan has been highly subject to corruption given that politically-connected and bribe-paying traffickers are generally able to circumvent interdiction or may use Afghan government interdiction efforts to target their competitors in the drug trade. Citing research by Adam Pain¹⁰, Byrd writes: “Cases have been reported of drug traders being arrested but then released in return for a payment, and of their drug shipments being confiscated,

¹⁰ See Adam Pain, “[Opium Trading Systems in Helmand and Ghor Provinces](#)”, in *Afghanistan’s Drug Industry*, 2006.

not for destruction but for onward sale by corrupt local authorities, including the possibility of returning part of the shipment to the trader concerned for an additional payment.” Accordingly, interdiction efforts, when affected by corruption, may contribute to the consolidation of the drug trade among a few leading traffickers and may entrench the sorts of corruption that, as previously noted, discourage investment into the country.

Alternative Crops/Livelihoods

Alternative livelihoods are defined as “replacing economic dependence on illicit narcotics with alternative legal activities”, according to a [presentation by DFID personnel](#). That same presentation notes that alternative livelihoods may revolve around any or a combination of the following: agriculture, non-farm employment, social safety nets (e.g., public works jobs) and remittances from migrant workers (i.e., Afghans who travel abroad for work and sent money back home). Within Afghanistan, Byrd notes that the earliest and most simple forms of alternative livelihoods have involved the [distribution of free or subsidised inputs](#) such as seeds and fertilisers, as in the aforementioned FZP. He writes that such interventions were often too short-term in nature and simply impelled poppy cultivation to temporarily shift to areas where such inputs were not distributed by the international community and Afghan government. Byrd finds that such activities also fail to tackle the wide array of factors, beyond credit to purchase seeds and fertiliser, that drive poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. A [major 2008 World Bank study](#) went further and concluded that subsidies are not only unsustainable but that they may actually promote narcotics cultivation. The study found that the narcotics networks could out-bid international or government stakeholders attempting to subsidise wheat and that subsidies for licit agriculture in essence drove up the market price of opium and led to new financial incentives for farmers to grow it. The study further noted that subsidizing wheat or other licit crops – though wheat is by far the most common – over a large area would lead to excess supply and drive down prices both in subsidised and non-subsidised areas. Hence, subsidizing wheat would cause wheat prices to decline and make farmers more inclined to cultivate opium poppies.

As previously noted, alternative livelihoods interventions are being promoted by a wide range of international and Afghan stakeholders. For instance, the previously discussed [DFID-World Bank study](#) ultimately recommended a comprehensive approach to alternative livelihoods in rural areas which combined six categories of intervention: (i) integrating rural development and governance; (ii) expanding the amount of agricultural land under irrigation; (iii) improving the financial returns on livestock and animal husbandry; (iv) promoting rural, non-farm enterprises; (v) increasing local procurement by relevant development stakeholders; and (vi) developing integrated production and market promotion strategies for key crops. In addition, the authors of that report suggest a strategy which involves the integration of several Afghan government National Priority Programmes, such as the National Solidarity Programme and the National Rural Access Programme and the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan, into counter-narcotics and alternative livelihood strategies.

Conclusion: Poppies & Transition-Related Spending Cuts

The World Bank increasingly suggests that Afghanistan will face an [economic slowdown](#) as international security and development assistance declines in the years leading up to and after 2014, the end of major international forces’ presence. GDP growth rates could decline from their recently high levels – averaging around 9% for much of the past decade – to approximately 5-6% per year under somewhat positive scenarios that assume progress in the mining sector, a gradual draw-down in foreign assistance and relatively consistent levels of governance and insecurity. If these assumptions prove faulty, the World Bank suggests that Afghanistan’s economy could cease growing and in fact contract by up to 2% per year.

Given the economic importance of poppies in Afghanistan's economy and the fragility of Afghanistan's economic position as international assistance declines, future changes in this sector could have magnified impacts in the coming years. Such an issue is also significant in light of research from the World Bank and UNODC which shows that many of the areas most likely to be hit by decreasing international spending are also those areas, namely Kandahar and Helmand provinces, which cultivate a significant proportion of the country's opium poppies.

Irrigation, Profits & Alternative Crops

Rainer Gonzalez Palau¹¹

Abstract

This chapter addresses the role of irrigation water, market prices and profitability in Afghan farmers' crop selection, particularly in their decision to grow opium poppies as opposed to alternative crops such as cereals, fruits and vegetables. Research and experts cited in this chapter suggest that [access to sufficient irrigation water](#) is crucial in enabling farmers to take up alternative crops. Moreover, improvements in infrastructure, water management, farming practices and other areas are needed to ensure water is used efficiently so that it is available for licit crops. Irrigation is especially important in enabling the cultivation of high-value crops which may prove more profitable than opium poppies given that they require greater amounts of water.

Irrigation. According to a UN database, the [total irrigated area in Afghanistan](#) amounts to 3.2 million hectares (ha). The Afghanistan Research Evaluation Unit (AREU) states that the country has enough water to cover the current and future uses, but that transporting water from water-rich areas to water-scarce areas poses a challenge for infrastructure and institutions. Understanding Afghanistan's irrigation network, including the natural, technical and social elements, is key to assessing the prospects of alternative crops. Gaining such an awareness is particularly challenging given that almost 90% of irrigation in Afghanistan is done through more than 28,000 informal systems (e.g., *karez*, springs, wells and rivers). After describing Afghanistan's current irrigation infrastructure and management systems, this chapter reviews experts' recommendations for maximising the efficiency of the country's multitude of irrigation networks. It shows that some increases in water availability may be attained by constructing or rehabilitating irrigation systems but that [improving the efficiency](#) and effectiveness of water use is particularly crucial. Most water loss is related to the low efficiency of the irrigation systems and the mismanagement of water distribution. The UK Department for International Development, for instance, found that efficiency of both formal and informal systems [ranges from 20-40%](#).

Profitability. Contrary to the claim that poppy cultivation is more profitable than alternative livelihoods, this chapter cites research showing that there are alternatives which could yield [higher returns than opium poppies](#). In order to make these alternatives feasible for implementation, farmers will have to have access to agricultural inputs as well as irrigation water. The water requirements for these alternative crops are much greater than for poppies, thus making it extremely important that water resources are used in the most effective and efficient manner. For instance, almonds need between 1,326 and 2,125 mm of water and could yield a profit of USD 16,068 per ha. Wheat needs less, between 338 and 1,013 mm, but yields only USD 320 per ha.

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Beyond Water and Profits. Experts have found that, while Afghanistan suffers from patches of water scarcity, the country overall has sufficient irrigation water supplies to meet its needs. The challenge is to establish appropriate institutions and adequate physical infrastructure to distribute and manage that water in the most efficient way possible. In addition, AREU identified a [combinations of additional factors](#) which feed into farmers' decisions to grow opium poppies versus alternative crops, including the position of key elites vis-à-vis poppy cultivation, food security and social equality. The AREU study found that that “the absence of opium cultivation was more than a matter of water”. Water availability generally is a necessary but insufficient condition to enable Afghan farmers switch to high-value alternative crops.

Introduction

Afghanistan accounts for 63% of global opium poppy cultivation, according to the 2011 “[World Drug Report](#)”. Stated differently, more than six out of every ten hectares (ha) of land planted with poppies anywhere in the world are in Afghanistan. Hence, those factors which lead farmers in Afghanistan to sow their land with poppies – as opposed to a licit alternative crop – are crucial. For instance, in a country where well-irrigated water is scarce, Afghan farmers' may choose to plant poppies given that poppies require limited quantities of water compared to licit crops. Confirming the importance of water, UNODC writes that the lack of [irrigated land and irrigation infrastructure](#) leads some Afghan farmers to cultivate opium instead of cereals, fruits or vegetables. Furthermore, a recent study on “[Conflict-induced narcotics production in Afghanistan](#)” found that the poor condition of irrigation infrastructure – and the lack of an institutional system for effectively managing irrigation water – are some of the main barriers to alternative crops. Yet others suggest that the high market value of opium may impel many Afghan farmers to choose poppies over licit alternatives – a claim which some experts (*cited in the following pages*) refute.

This chapter addresses these issues and debates, focusing upon factors such as the role of irrigation water, market prices and profitability in farmers' crop selection. The review of expert opinions and studies included within the following pages ultimately suggests that while access to sufficient irrigation water is crucial, water supply, irrigation infrastructure, institutional capabilities, farmers' knowledge and practices and myriad other factors are also crucial in promoting efficient water utilisation. Similarly, while financial motives reportedly exist, research suggests that market prices alone often fail to account for numerous factors that determine what proportion of a crop's value does or does not accrue to the individual Afghan farmer.

Irrigation in Afghanistan

“[Water Resource Management in Afghanistan](#)” states that the primary barrier to Afghan agriculture is not the climate or geography but rather the lack of proper infrastructure to channel water for agricultural use. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, the total water storage capacity of Afghanistan's five river basins (Amu Darya River, Helmand River, Harirod-Murghab River, Kabul River and North River) and groundwater systems is [55 billion](#) cubic meters (bcm) (*see Tables 1 & 2*). The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) estimates that this water supply is sufficient to irrigate approximately [7.7 million hectares](#) (ha) of land, significantly more than the 3.2 million ha that are currently irrigated. However, as Table 2 demonstrates, the challenge is distribution of the water. For example, the Amu Darya Basin has nearly four times the water available than the Helmand River Basin despite having relatively comparable areas of land under cultivation.

Table 1. Afghanistan's Current Water Resources

Water Resources	Capacity (bcm)	Current Use (bcm)	Current Balance (bcm)
Surface Water	57	17	40
Ground Water	18	3	15
Total	75	20	55

Table 2. Water Storage Capacity and Land Use, by River Basin

River Basin (or Area)	Water Storage Capacity (bcm)	Area (ha) Intensively Cultivated ¹²	Area (ha) Intermittently Cultivated	Total Area (ha) Cultivated
Amu Darya River Basin	24	354,000	48,100	402,100
Helmand River Basin	6.5	306,000	178,100	484,100
Harirod-Murghab River Basin	2.5	475,800	900,200	1,376,000
Kabul River Basin	22	172,500	128,400	300,900
Northern River Basin	No Data	237,800	387,000	624,800
Non-Drainage Areas	0	13,880	6,700	20,580
Total	55	1,559,980	1,648,500	3,208,480

Source: *Watershed Atlas of Afghanistan* (2004) and *AQUASTAT* (2010).

According to the FAO Information System on Water and Agriculture known as AQUASTAT¹³, the total irrigated area in Afghanistan amounts to 3.2 million ha (see Table 2). An additional 90,000 ha not listed in the table are used for private gardens, vineyards and fruit trees. In terms of physical infrastructure, Afghanistan is home to approximately 29,000 irrigation systems (see Table 3). Systems drawing surface water, such as from rivers and streams, accounted for 27% of the total. The remaining water is derived from sub-surface sources such as springs, *karez*¹⁴ and wells. Although surface irrigation systems represent just a quarter of the total number of systems, they account for 86% of the total irrigated area. Hence, surface water may be understood as the most common source of irrigation in Afghanistan. For instance, the Helmand River, the Kabul River and the Northern River are responsible for irrigating more than the 75% of all irrigated land in Afghanistan.

¹² With either one or two crops.

¹³ Available information on Afghanistan's irrigation systems is rather outdated. The FAO carried out a satellite survey in the late 1990s to outline the irrigated land for each of the river basins. Similarly, the last survey to classify the different typologies of irrigation systems countrywide was undertaken in the late 1960s. Both are presented in the *Watershed Atlas of Afghanistan*. The following section describes the irrigation systems in Afghanistan using reports which primarily base their analysis on the data provided by these two surveys.

¹⁴ *Karez* (or *Qanat* in Persian) are common irrigation systems in Afghanistan that have been used for centuries. The *karez* are made up of a horizontal series of vertical wells linked by sloped underground canals that take advantage of gravity to transport water from the water table. Most of the length is underground to reduce evaporation. The length of *karez* systems is between 5 and 15 km.

Irrigation systems in Afghanistan are differentiated by their types and by the social factors that regulate their use. The AREU has developed a [classification](#) that groups irrigation systems according to their physical and social characteristics. The AREU’s typology is first divided between formal and informal systems. Formal systems are defined as large irrigation schemes developed with central government assistance, financing, management and operation and maintenance (O&M) and with outside technical and financial support. These systems, originally developed in the late 1940s and the 1970s, were instituted to satisfy water needs and overcome distribution problems that informal systems could not address. Over the past 30 years, however, the quality of these systems has deteriorated due to a lack of funding and capacity. Since the majority of the formal systems are currently operating below capacity, the international community launched a series of initiatives to rehabilitate them over the course of the past decade, says AREU.¹⁵ Although, the 10 formal systems are spread throughout the country, they benefit only 10% of irrigated land in Afghanistan, covering approximately 332,000 ha. The rest of Afghanistan’s irrigated land draws upon informal systems.

Table 3. Irrigation Systems and Land Area Covered

Water Source	Systems (#)	Area (ha)
<i>Rivers and Streams</i>	7,822	2,348,000
<i>Springs</i>	5,558	187,000
<i>Karez</i>	6,741	168,000
<i>Wells</i>	8,595	12,000
Total	28,716	2,715,000

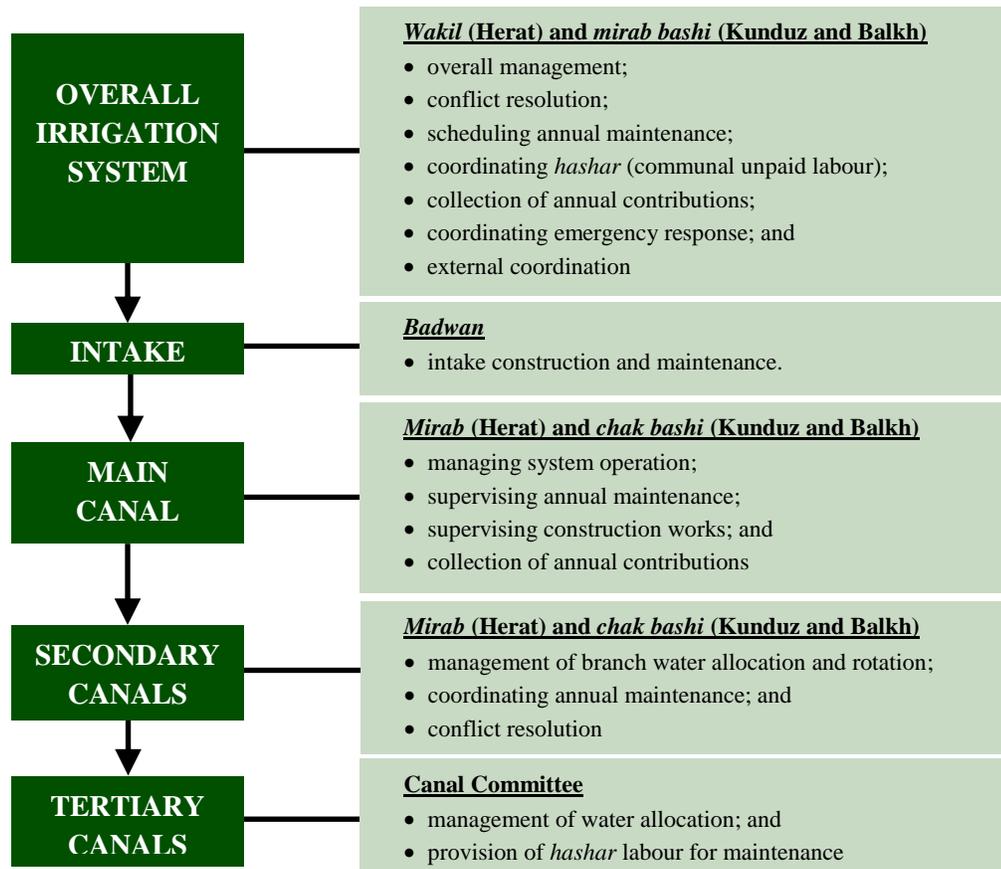
Source: [Watershed Atlas of Afghanistan](#), as cited in AREU, “[A Typology of Irrigation Systems in Afghanistan](#)”.

According to AREU, [informal irrigation systems](#) are those which are traditionally developed and managed by communities with local resources and knowledge. Informal systems, some of which have existed for centuries, account for 90% of the irrigated area and are highly dependent on water availability. Informal irrigation systems consist primarily of surface water, including diversion structures, small dams and water harvesting, in addition to groundwater which is extracted via wells, springs and *karez*. Informal irrigation systems also serve as a source of water for livestock and domestic uses. In the paper entitled “[Water Resource Management in Afghanistan](#)”, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) highlights that these multiple uses of water influence the operation, management and maintenance of informal systems. The organisational structure of informal systems is complex and often differs based on history and size of the system. Figure 1 depicts a standard organisational structure for a surface water system.

Understanding Afghanistan’s irrigation network, including the natural, technical and social elements, is key to understanding the prospects of alternative crops. Thus far, this chapter has primarily reviewed the availability and location of water in Afghanistan in addition to the institutional and socio-cultural structures that govern irrigation water management. In order to understand how the use of these resources could be maximised to make the switch from poppy cultivation to licit crops feasible, the following sections discuss the profitability and water requirements of alternative crops.

¹⁵ Some of the larger and better-known programmes include the Emergency Irrigation and Rehabilitation Program, the Irrigation Restoration and Development Project, the Emergency Infrastructure and Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Project from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Balkh Basin Integrated Water Resource Management Project, the Kunduz River Basin Project, the Western Basins Project and the Amu Darya River Basin Management Programme.

Figure 1. Roles in the Management of Informal Water Systems in Afghanistan¹⁶



Source: Modified from “[How the Water Flows: A Typology of Irrigation Systems in Afghanistan](#)”, AREU.

Alternative Crops: Are They Financially Competitive?

Much has been said about the inability of alternative crops to pay off better than poppies. In “[Challenging the Rhetoric](#)”, David Mansfield, an expert with years of experience in counter-narcotics in Afghanistan, asserts that some development interventions emphasise the profitability of opium and the need to identify other high-value crops and improve market chains to establish a competitive substitute. He further notes that “the claim of the insurmountable profits to be earned from opium poppy is inaccurate” and often based on inappropriate comparisons between the gross returns on wheat and opium poppy. He argues that, partly due to the greater labour costs associated with poppy cultivation, there are a range of different crops that could provide far higher profits under appropriate market and security conditions.

A similar analysis is conducted by Gary Khun, executive director of Roots for Peace, in the paper “[Comparative Net Income from Afghan Crops](#)”. He points out that “the power of the market has proven to be irresistible and unbeatable: if market conditions are right, someone will respond”. However, Khun proposes using the same market forces that moved farmers from wheat to poppies to stimulate Afghan farmers to switch from poppies to alternative livelihoods. Khun says the climatic conditions in Afghanistan make high-value

¹⁶ Names of relevant figures in the administration of informal systems vary from one region to another. Figure 1 reflects the terminology common in Herat, Kunduz and Balkh provinces, which AREU studied.

perennial crops such as grapes, pomegranates and almonds viable. He adds that, with the appropriate market connections, such crops would prove more profitable than opium poppies. He argues that individuals who claim poppies are the most profitable crop in Afghanistan factor gross income and do not consider the net profit accrued by most who grow them. Poppies reportedly require 10 times more labour than perennial crops, thus cutting into the high per-hectare value of the crop, particularly for farmers who are impelled to hire day labourers. Table 4 shows a comparative analysis of the net incomes of selected crops for one hectare of crops. The figures shown in Table 4 support the findings of a paper by Mansfield entitled "[The Economic Superiority of Drug Production: Myth or Reality](#)". That paper considered case studies from countries such as Thailand, Pakistan and Lebanon in which the substitution of poppies with flowers, onions or garlic significantly increased farmers' profits.

Research also shows that factors beyond profits are also a consideration. In order to switch away from a familiar crop, farmers will need to know how to cultivate an unfamiliar, alternative crop. The transition to alternative crops will highly depend on the availability of inputs such as seeds and fertilisers as well as farmers' access to [credit, processing and marketing opportunities](#). In addition, the availability of water and its appropriate management will be a key factor in convincing farmers switching from poppy cultivation to licit crops in some areas in Afghanistan.

Table 4. Net Income for Selected Crops for 1 Ha of Crops, 2009

	Wheat	Opium at 2009 prices	Corn	Onion	Apricot	Sweet Oranges	Apple	Bush- grown Grapes	Opium at historic high	Pomegr anate	Almond	Trellised Grapes
<i>Production (kg/ha)</i>	2,500	52	4,500	17,500	18,000	20,000	20,000	14,235	52	24,000	2,000	29,466
<i>Price (USD/kg)</i>	0.32	48	0.21	0.21	0.24	0.25	0.35	0.7	300	0.6	9	0.7
<i>Other Income from by- products (USD)</i>	--	--	125	--	125	63	125	--	--	125	125	--
Gross Income (USD)	800	2,496	1,070	3,675	4,445	5,063	7,125	9,965	15,600	14,525	18,125	20,626
<i>Seeds (USD/ha)</i>	24	10	26	480	--	--	--	-	10	--	--	-
<i>Soil Amendments (USD/ha)</i>	101	200	140	200	55	55	38	200	200	55	55	200
<i>Mulch/Top Soil (USD/ha)</i>	--	--	--	--	208	208	208	--	--	208	208	--
<i>Integrated Pest Management (USD/ha)</i>	--	--	--	--	15	15	15	20	--	15	15	20
<i>Labour Costs (USD/ha)</i>	172	1,500	250	375	190	190	190	200	1,500	190	190	170
<i>Farm Services (USD/ha)</i>	103	103	103	103	--	--	--	--	103	--	--	--
<i>Taxes to Local Authorities</i>	80	250	107	368	445	506	713	996	250	1,453	1,813	2,063
Total Costs (USD)	480	2,063	617	1,526	690	751	941	1,396	3,373	1,698	2,058	2,433
NET INCOME (USD)	320	433	453	2,150	3,756	4,311	6,185	8,568	12,227	12,828	16,068	18,194

Source: Modified from "*Comparative Net Income from Afghan Crops*", 2009.

Alternative Crops: How Much Water Do They Require?

A paper entitled “[Water Requirements of Different Crops](#)” by the Integrated Sustainable Energy and Ecological Development Association (ISEEDA) says that the success of crops grown in a particular region depend on three basic resources: climate, soil and water. Therefore, under a given set of environmental conditions, crop production may be particularly limited by the availability of water (as well as nutrients, which are commonly supplied through fertilisers). Given the limited access to water resources in Afghanistan, it is important that these resources are used in the most effective manner. One of the key measures to understand the water needs is the Crop Water Requirements (*see Box 1 for related key terms*).

Box 1. Key Terms

The following is a compilation of basic definitions collected from the [FAO](#), [ISEEDA](#) and other organisations.

Evapotranspiration (ET_o): This is a combination of evaporation and transpiration. Given that these two processes occur simultaneously, there is no easy way of distinguishing between them. Evaporation is the process whereby liquid water is converted to water vapour (vapourisation) and removed from a surface. Transpiration is the vapourisation of liquid water contained inside of plant tissues, often through small openings on the plant leaf. When a crop is small, water is predominately lost by soil evaporation. Once a crop is well developed and completely covers the soil, transpiration becomes the main source of plant water loss.

Crop Water Requirements (CWR): This is the quantity of water, exclusive of effective growing season precipitation, winter precipitation stored in the root zone or upward water movement from a shallow water table, which is required (e.g., via irrigation) to meet the evapotranspiration needs of a crop. It also may include water requirements for germination, frost protection, prevention of wind erosion, leaching of salts and plant cooling.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) highlights the importance of knowing [the CWR](#) for a particular crop in a particular agro-climatic context. While there does not seem to be any open-source document which highlights the various CWRs of different crops in different parts of Afghanistan, IUCN data from Pakistani Baluchistan (*see Table 5*) is illustrative.¹⁷ The climate in Baluchistan is arid, similar to [Kandahar](#), [Helmand](#) and [Nimroz](#). However, even this part of Pakistan was found to have six agro-climate zones (thus demonstrating the high degree of variation within particular areas and the need for fine-tuned analysis of CWR).

Comparing Table 4 and Table 5, it appears that crops yielding greater profits tend to require greater amounts of water. For instance, almonds need between 1,326 and 2,125 mm of water but could yield a profit of USD 16,068 per ha. Wheat needs between 338 and 1,013 mm of water and yields USD 320 per ha. Therefore, switching to alternative crops will depend on greater water availability and more effective and efficient water use.

Some increases in water availability may be attained by constructing or rehabilitating irrigation systems. However, an AREU study notes that [improving the efficiency](#) and effectiveness of irrigation water use is particularly crucial. Most water loss is related to the low efficiency of the irrigation systems – that is, the [proportion of water](#) from a source (e.g., a river or well) which ultimately reaches the root zone of crops – and the mismanagement of water distribution.

¹⁷ Comparative figures for opium poppies were not provided and could not be identified from open sources.

The aforementioned AREU report says that there is a dearth of information regarding the efficiency of irrigation systems in Afghanistan except for the fact that both distribution [efficiency and production per area are very low](#). One estimate comes from the UK Department for International Development (DFID), which found that efficiency of both formal and informal systems ranges from 20-40%.

Increasing the efficiency of water usage is critical given that higher-value crops, which may be a viable alternative to opium poppies, tend to require greater amounts of water. To achieve this goal, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) recommends a [micro-watershed management approach](#) in which community-based and diversified water-harvesting initiatives are implemented instead of large-scale schemes. According to IWMI, community-based water-harvesting can provide the right amount of water for irrigation and domestic use in Afghanistan. IWMI says that “during drought years with less than 50 mm of rainfall watersheds larger than 50 ha will not produce any appreciable water yield while small natural watersheds will [continue to] yield between 20 and 40 cubic meters per ha”.

Table 5. Water Loss and Crop Water Requirements

Crops	Evapotranspiration (water loss), in mm	Crop Water Requirements, in mm
<i>Wheat</i>	338 – 1,013	255 – 777
<i>Cotton</i>	984 – 1,341	757 – 1,025
<i>Potato</i>	784 – 1,270	505 – 825
<i>Onion</i>	770 – 1,852	434 – 1,037
<i>Sunflower</i>	651 – 964	560 – 842
<i>Grapes</i>	1,258 – 2,636	566 – 1,209
<i>Dates</i>	2,001 – 3,392	920 – 1,809
<i>Apple/Cherries</i>	1,326 – 2,125	719 – 1,204
<i>Apricot/Almonds</i>	1,326 – 2,125	708 – 1,075
<i>Pomegranates</i>	1,326 – 2,617	740 – 1,353
<i>Pulses</i>	270 – 405	203 – 321
<i>Alfalfa</i>	742 – 2,031	601 – 1,675
<i>Maize</i>	756 – 1,080	657 – 925

Source: “[Water requirements of major crops for different agro-climatic zones of Balochistan](#)”, IUCN, 2006

The International Centre for Agriculture Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) further concluded that increasing efficiency – and providing a greater volume of water for alternative crops – is dependent on farmers’ knowledge regarding [watering techniques](#) and land levelling. Afghan farmers reportedly tend to irrigate based on past experience and visible signs of dryness, thus resulting in over-watering or inappropriately-timed irrigation (with respect to the crop’s stage of development). Validating this point, Afghanistan’s Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) says that [on-farm water management](#) problems are both of a technical and organisation nature. On the technical side, the MAIL points at the absence of farm-level irrigation systems, water losses due to seepage (in earthen canals) and the lack of proper water distribution systems and water storage capacity. On the institutional side, MAIL points to insufficient institutional structures to oversee water distribution and maintain irrigation infrastructure; the Ministry also notes that farmers lack knowledge regarding crops’ water requirements and new technologies. For instance, farmers may not level their land, thus leading them to flood their land in order to ensure that irrigation water covers the highest point. Failing to level land leads to an uneven distribution of water, since low-lying areas will be over-watered while higher patches of land will receive insufficient water, according to a report on “[Sustainable Agricultural Production: Providing an Alternative to Opium in Afghanistan](#)”. Over-irrigation is not only linked to an overuse of water resources but also to a severe reduction of crops yields (i.e., the amount

produced per hectare). ICARDA claims that proper [levelling of fields](#) could reduce the use of water between 33% and 50% and significantly increase crop yields, including for high-value alternative crops.

Alternative Crops: Is It All about Water and Profitability?

Experts have found that, while Afghanistan suffers from patches of water scarcity, the country overall has sufficient irrigation water supplies to meet its needs. The challenge, instead, is to establish appropriate institutions and adequate physical infrastructure to distribute and manage that water in the most efficient way possible. However, other factors beyond irrigation water and profits may also be at play. For instance, AREU examined two provinces in a report entitled “[Opium Poppy Cultivation in Kunduz and Balkh](#)”. Both [Kunduz](#) and [Balkh](#) provinces lie on Afghanistan’s northern plain bordering Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, respectively, and both are fed by the Hindu Kush’s snowmelt through major irrigation systems. Using UNODC data on [opium production by district](#) from 1994 to 2005, AREU found an inconsistent relationship between irrigation and poppy cultivation. Despite strong irrigation infrastructure in both provinces, Kunduz has little poppy cultivation whereas Balkh has a history of growing the crop. In Balkh, the districts growing the most poppies are those which are best irrigated. Rather than facilitating alternative livelihoods and crops, the irrigation in Balkh appears to have fed into poppy cultivation. However, despite having access to irrigation and a ready supply of labourers, few poppies were grown in Kunduz. The AREU report thus points to a combinations of factors beyond infrastructure which feed into farmers’ decisions to grow opium poppies versus alternative crops, including the following: (i) the position of key elites vis-à-vis poppy cultivation, (ii) food security and (iii) social equality. That is, if key government officials or power-holders opposed poppy cultivation, their opposition could prevent farmers from planning the crop even where conditions otherwise seemed ripe. In addition, AREU found that greater food security and social equality lead to reduced poppy cultivation. Ultimately, the study found that that “the absence of opium cultivation was more than a matter of water”. Therefore, the report suggests that water availability is a necessary but insufficient condition to enable a switch to alternative crops and that, under certain conditions, strong irrigation systems may in fact incentivise poppy cultivation.

Further supporting the notion that other factors beyond irrigation and income affect poppy cultivation, Mansfield writes that a singular focus on the profitability of different crops does not capture the [complex socio-economic and political – as well as security – factors](#) at play. He argues that profits present a simplistic economic model that fails to explain complex decision-making dynamics surrounding poppies in Afghanistan, particularly in more insecure areas where insurgent influences and the threat of violence add an additional consideration. Mansfield further differentiates between the farmers located adjacent to provincial or urban centres and the ones who live in remote rural areas. Farmers closer to urban areas, where they have greater, easier and cheaper access to markets, reportedly find it less daunting to shift to crops other than poppies. In addition, because alternative crops are less labour intensive than opium, households near urban areas can more readily combine agricultural activities with other sources of non-farm income (which is more bountiful in densely-populated areas). Conversely, in remote rural areas, the shift to alternative crops can be inhibited more by high transportation costs and constrained commodity and labour markets than by concerns regarding net profits or irrigation water.

Conclusion

Contrary to the claim that poppy cultivation is more profitable than alternative crops, this chapter has cited research showing that there are other alternatives such as grapes, pomegranates or almonds which could yield higher returns than opium poppies. In order to make these alternatives feasible for implementation, farmers

will have to have access to agricultural inputs as well as irrigation water. The water requirements for these alternative crops are much greater than for poppies, thus making it extremely important that water resources are used in the most effective and efficient manner. The documents cited within this chapter provide a number of more specific strategies for doing so than are addressed within this chapter.

Yet, while increased water availability may be an essential precondition for alternative crops, other economic, social and cultural factors must be further studied and considered. Experience has shown that the decision to switch from opium to licit crops widely depends on factors such as good governance, access to agricultural commodities and labour markets as well as transportation and transaction costs.

Opium Poppies and Security

Mark Checchia¹⁸ and Katerina Oskarsson¹⁹

Abstract

Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, and the illicit economy and trafficking it facilitates, is recognised as one of the primary interlinked challenges to the long-term security, sustainable economic development and well-functioning governance of Afghanistan. Afghan President Hamid Karzai has said, “Poppy, its cultivation and drugs are [Afghanistan’s major enemy](#),” with narcotics threatening “[the very existence of the Afghan state](#)”. Security has been singled out as the essential [prerequisite for success](#) in Afghanistan. [Research suggests](#) that corruption at all levels of government enables narcotics trafficking while rendering counter-narcotics efforts ineffective or even counterproductive. [Balancing counterterrorism and counterinsurgency](#) with counter-narcotics efforts has posed a challenge.

The US Congressional Committee report “Warlords, Inc.” says [the Taliban’s principal source of income](#) is its control of the opium trade, as well related sources, such as farming and transportation. Since figures are not officially reported, the estimates of funding the insurgents derive from the drug trade vary widely.

Strategies designed to address Afghanistan’s narcotics problem have reflected lessons learnt from previous counter-narcotics efforts. In 2003, the Afghan government introduced a [National Drug Control Strategy](#) (NDCS) with the objective of eliminating production, consumption and trafficking of opium. [Eradication became the core](#) of the counter-narcotics policy until 2009. Aware [that eradication alienated rural Afghans](#) who depend on opium as the main source of income, the American military distanced itself from eradication, and instead supported provincial governors to conduct operations. In 2009, a new [US strategy placed primary focus on interdiction](#) of the nexus between narco-trafficking and the insurgency, and emphasized agricultural assistance to farmers and rural development. The new US counter-narcotics strategy was developed from lessons learnt in counter-drug campaigns in Colombia, Peru and Thailand.

The [Afghan government is in charge](#) of all counter-narcotics operations, and the Ministry of Counter-Narcotics (MCN) coordinates the efforts of the forces under the control of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Ministry of the Interior (MoI). MoI has the preponderance of forces with the Counternarcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNPA) and the British-trained Afghan Special Narcotics Force (ASNF). The effectiveness of counter-narcotics operations has been mixed. For instance, in Helmand, Afghanistan’s largest poppy-growing province, [cultivation has been declining](#) for three consecutive years. This may be the result of increased eradication efforts, but a fungus has also ravaged the poppies. The same DoD reports says counter-narcotics efforts are hampered by corruption and poor security, and that “greater political will, increased institutional

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capacity, and more robust efforts at all levels of government are required to decrease cultivation and combat trafficking”.

The experts predict that poppy cultivation will increase after international combat forces withdraw, and that it will not severely affect the insurgents’ ability to fund themselves, nor will it have an effect on the powerful “patrons” in the country. The Afghan government’s efforts to control the poppy culture are [interlinked with the other problems](#) of security and corruption. Good governance and an effective program to solve the problems at the same time is essential, according to President Karzai, to solving all of them together.

Introduction

Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, and the illicit economy and trafficking it facilitates, is recognised as one of the primary interlinked challenges to the long-term security, sustainable economic development and well-functioning governance of Afghanistan. Afghan President Hamid Karzai has said, “Poppy, its cultivation and drugs are [Afghanistan’s major enemy](#),” with narcotics threatening “[the very existence of the Afghan state](#)”. Moreover, the illicit drug trade remains a challenge to the overall ISAF counterinsurgency campaign and is believed to [undermine “virtually every aspect”](#) of the Afghan government’s efforts to secure and stabilise Afghanistan, according to a US Government Accountability Office (GAO) report. Along similar lines, a report published by the US Congressional Research Service (CRS) notes that opium poppy cultivation and drug trafficking in Afghanistan [jeopardise the success](#) of post-9/11 counterterrorism and reconstruction efforts.

Sustained development based on a licit economy, governance based on effective rule of law and security based on a capable army and police force are often viewed as the three main components necessary to counter the narcotics threat in Afghanistan. Despite these problems being inextricable, security has been singled out as the essential [prerequisite for success](#) in Afghanistan by William F. Wechlser, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats. As Vanda Felbab-Brown, an expert on illicit economies with the Brookings Institution, [testified](#) before the US Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control, “without [security], the Afghan government cannot be stabilized; nor can counter-narcotics policies be effective.” She further noted that, “without security first, counter-narcotics efforts [including alternative livelihood programs and rural development] have not yet succeeded anywhere”. However, security remains challenged by what research has widely identified as “[the narcotics-insurgent-corruption nexus](#)”, which continues to threaten counterinsurgency efforts and the overall transition in Afghanistan, according to Wechlser, in his testimony before the Senate Caucus.

Against this background, this chapter addresses security aspects of the narcotics trade and trafficking in Afghanistan. Based on a review of open-source research, it first explores how the narcotics-insurgency-corruption nexus perpetuates insecurity in Afghanistan and enables the Taliban-led insurgency and warlords to profit. It reviews the evolution of counter-narcotics strategies that have guided the specific policies and efforts in Afghanistan, namely eradication and interdiction, which have been undertaken to combat the narcotics-related threats. This section addresses the effect of these policies on the political capital of the insurgency. The chapter concludes with an overview of forces available for counter-narcotics efforts, pointing to their progress to date.

Narcotics, Insurgents, Corruption & Insecurity

The direct linkage between the [insurgency, narcotics and corruption](#) constitutes one of the main barriers to the establishment of security in Afghanistan, according to Christopher M. Blanchard with the CRS. Blanchard notes that there is a “symbiotic relationship between narcotics producers, traffickers, insurgents, and corrupt officials,” which facilitates an environment prone to violence and criminality. Proceeds from the opium trade provide financial support to corrupt officials, criminal groups and insurgents which, in turn, protect traffickers and [perpetuate insecurity](#) by undermining the government’s counter-narcotics efforts, according to Blanchard’s report on “Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy.” For instance, local and border police, who are indispensable to the implementation of counter-narcotics activities, are considered “the most compromised” by narcotics-related corruption, according to the report.

Echoing this point, [other research suggests](#) that corruption at all levels of government enables narcotics trafficking while rendering counter-narcotics efforts (*discussed below*) ineffective or even counterproductive. Drawing on [interviews with experts](#), a 2010 report by the US Senate Caucus notes that drug traffickers usually do not take chances by transporting opium without protection. The report notes that “in order to operate in Taliban-controlled space, drug traffickers must pay the Taliban, [and] in order to operate in Afghan-government controlled space the drug traffickers must pay off corrupt officials”. Consequently, the report concludes that anti-corruption efforts must be part of any counter-narcotics strategies for them to be effective.

Counter-Narcotics vs Counterinsurgency

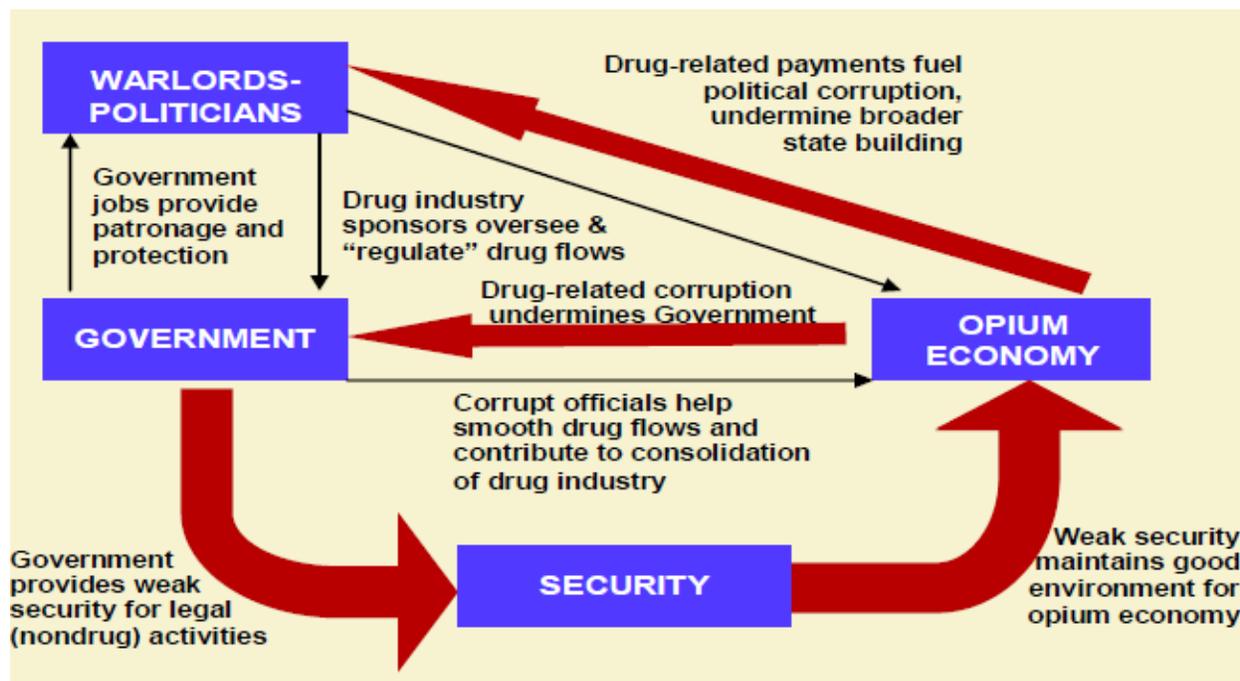
The US Department of Defense (DoD) “[Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan](#)”²⁰ of April 2012 notes that counter-narcotics and counterinsurgency challenges remain most pronounced in southern and south-western Afghanistan, which are enduring areas of priority military and law enforcement effort. These two regions are responsible for the majority of Afghan opium production, accounting for 92% of illicit poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, and serve as a significant base for the Taliban-led insurgency, according to the report.

In September 2009, the former Executive Director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Antonio Maria Costa, stated that “the fates of [counter-narcotics and counterinsurgency](#) are inextricably linked.” However as research outlined below suggests, balancing counterterrorism and counterinsurgency with counter-narcotics efforts have posed a challenge. A US CRS report entitled “War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress” notes that [corrupt officials, militia leaders and narcotics traffickers](#) who are often involved in the narcotics trade are also called upon to play “significant roles” in ISAF’s efforts to combat the Taliban and al Qaeda. This has led to a situation where counterterrorism and counterinsurgency on one hand, and enforcement of counter-narcotics policies on the other, can contradict each other. The report states that “some of these figures and their political allies have been incorporated into government and security structures, including positions of responsibility for enforcing counter-narcotics policies.” Another problem is that some Afghan officials are reluctant to [challenge the narcotics industry](#) because “its tentacles are so deeply entwined with Afghan governing structures at all levels,” a US CRS report by Steve Bowman and Catherine Dale claims. This increased merging of the drug industry, where traffickers and warlords are incorporated into the governmental institutions that are [responsible for implementing counter-narcotics policies](#), is depicted in a 2008 World Bank study by William A. Byrd (*see Figure 1*). Moreover, in testimony before the British Parliament on counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan, Fabrice Pothier, Director of Carnegie Europe, pointed

²⁰ These semi-annual reports will be referred to as “Security and Stability Reports” by month and year, e.g., April 2012

out that counterinsurgency and counter-narcotics have different sequencing and timelines. Pothier notes that while successful counterinsurgency would need to be achieved in the course of several years to sustain the support of population both in the West and in Afghanistan, counter-narcotics “is a generational effort which may take around 25 years to successfully conclude” – as the experience from Thailand, Pakistan, and Latin America suggest, Pothier notes.

Figure 1. Consolidation of the Drug Industry



Source: William A. Byrd, “Responding to Afghanistan’s Opium Economy Challenge”, World Bank, 2008.²¹

Funding Insurgents

Since figures are not officially reported, the estimates of funding that insurgents derive from the drug trade vary widely. The US Congressional Committee report “Warlords, Inc.” states that the Taliban’s principal and most lucrative source of income in Afghanistan is its control of the opium trade. However, as an article from the Afghanistan Analysts Network, “Afghanistan’s Fluctuating Poppy Production: More Than a Poverty Problem” notes, due to the lack of data on the distribution aspects of the opium trade, it is not clear how much the insurgency actually derives from the narcotics trade. Likewise, Pothier asserts there is not enough evidence that would confirm the figures and clarify the extent of relationship between the Taliban and the narcotics economy.

The wide range of estimates cited by different experts illustrates Pothier’s claim. According to UNODC estimates, the Taliban receives approximately 10% of the value of opiates transported by traffickers. UNODC estimates that USD 90-160 million per year is channelled to the insurgency. *The New York Times* article estimates the proceeds the Taliban derives from the drug trade alone may range from USD 70 million to USD 400 million a year. According to Carnegie Endowment, USD 100 million a year would account to about 40%

²¹ Byrd’s report notes that the Taliban insurgency in the South that is not depicted in the Figure 1 adds complexity to the problem.

of the [Taliban's alleged "war budget"](#). In contrast, the *Strategic Studies Institute* claimed in 2007 that [around 70% of the Taliban's income](#) came from protection money and the sale of opium.

Research has pointed to many sources related to narcotics from which the Taliban and other criminal groups derive their revenues. In addition to a [10% "levy" on opium farmers](#), "Warlords, Inc." notes that there is also an "additional tax on the traffickers, a per-kilogram transit tariff charged to the truckers who transport the narcotics, protection money from the drug traffickers who smuggle drugs through their territory, and a fee for operating in Taliban controlled areas". The report estimates that all-in-all, the Taliban earns nearly USD 300 million annually from the opium trade. As early as 2006, there had been growing evidence that the Taliban not only taxed the trade but also branched out into protecting opium shipments, [running heroin labs](#) and organising farm output in areas they control, according to the Kabul Police Anti-Criminal Branch. Also, a senior Afghan security official quoted in the *Christian Science Monitor* said that captured Taliban confessed that [most of the insurgent group's funding](#) comes from narcotics.

Role of Insurgents

Research shows there is disagreement on whether and to what extent has the Taliban has achieved vertical integration, that is, top-to-bottom control, of the drug business. For instance, there are concerns that the [Taliban has evolved into a narco-cartel](#) that not only provides protection to traffickers but also operates heroin processing labs while integrating itself vertically with criminal groups, according to a 2010 report by the US Senate Caucus. In 2009, the former Executive Director of UNODC [Costa stated](#):

"A marriage of convenience between insurgents and criminal groups is spawning narco-cartels in Afghanistan linked to the Taliban. As in other parts of the world, like Colombia and Myanmar, the drug trade in Afghanistan has gone from being a funding source for insurgency to becoming an end in itself."

The report also draws an analogy between the Taliban and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a [narco-terrorist organisation funded by the drug trade](#). Citing a 2010 statement of Anthony P. Placido from the US Drug Enforcement Agency, the report notes that:

"The FARC began taxing farmers, one of the oldest forms of organized crime, and has evolved into a full fledged international drug trafficking organization. Getting its start in the drug trade the same way, estimates show that the Taliban is currently at the organizational level of operations at which the FARC operated ten years ago."

However, as Felbab-Brown's 2009 report "Narco-belligerents Across the Globe: Lessons from Colombia for Afghanistan?" points out, strong evidence that [the Taliban directly engages in trafficking](#) at the international level is scant.

Furthermore, the relationship between the Taliban and narcotics is ["opportunistic and ambiguous, rather than symbiotic"](#) according to the report entitled "Reframing Counter-narcotics Policy in Afghanistan", published by the Carnegie Endowment. For comparison, the FARC directly controls the narcotics economy due to its control over the arable lands that produce coca. The Taliban control is "much more nuanced" because the Taliban lacks direct control over territory, the report notes.

Counter-Narcotics Strategies & Approaches

Strategies designed to address Afghanistan's narcotics problem have evolved over time and reflect lessons learnt from previous counter-narcotics efforts. In 2003, the Afghan government introduced a [National Drug Control Strategy](#) (NDCS) with the overall objective of eliminating production, consumption and trafficking of opium, according to UNODC. Upon assuming office in 2004, President Karzai declared a "[jihad against poppy](#)", proclaiming that growing poppy was illegal under Islam, *Pajhwok Afghan News* stated. His stand was emphasized by adoption of a "[zero-tolerance](#)" counter-narcotics decree in January 2005 which banned the cultivation, production, abuse and trafficking of narcotics, according to the "US International Narcotics Control Strategy Report".

Eradication Policy

In 2005, in response to growing opium cultivation in Afghanistan, the [United States assumed a greater role](#) in Afghanistan's counter-narcotics efforts, according to a GAO report. In coordination with the United Kingdom and the Afghan government, the United States developed its first, five-pillared, counter-narcotics strategy for Afghanistan. The strategy introduced eradication, defined as the "elimination of opium poppy cultivation by destroying illicit opium plants before farmers are able to harvest them," which had not been a major focus of previous efforts, according to the report.²²

[Eradication became the core](#) of the counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan until 2009, according to a report by Brookings Institution. In 2006, the government of Afghanistan issued an updated five-year, [eight-pillared strategy](#)²³ which also incorporated eradication. [The Afghan strategy](#) states that the goal is to "secure a sustainable decrease in cultivation, production, trafficking and consumption of illicit drugs with a view to complete and sustainable elimination". While in early 2002, the United Kingdom assumed "[lead nation](#)" [responsibility](#) for coordinating international counter-narcotics activities, that responsibility shifted to the Afghan government under the 2006 Afghanistan strategy, according to the CRS report "War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress".

A report on "Afghanistan Drug Controls" indicates that, while maintaining its five pillars, the US counter-narcotics strategy [has changed emphasis](#) across programme areas over time to align with the counterinsurgency campaign. Unable to curb narcotics cultivation and exports, and reduce financial support to the Taliban-led insurgency, the administration of US President George W. [Bush introduced a refined strategy](#) in 2007. The "US Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan" states its aim to:

"Amplify the scope and intensity of interdiction and eradications operations; coordination of counter-narcotics and counterinsurgency planning and operations with a particular emphasis on integrating drug interdiction into the counterinsurgency mission; and to increase development assistance to encourage licit economic development."

²² The five pillars include: Alternative Livelihoods, Elimination/Eradication, Interdiction, Law Enforcement/Justice Reform, Public Information. Serving as a deterrent to poppy cultivation, the strategy also incentivises governors of individual provinces by providing rewards to provinces for reductions in opium poppy cultivation, according to the GAO report. Through the so-called "governor-led eradication program," governors that self-initiate eradication of poppy in their provinces are reimbursed at the rate of USD 135 per hectare. The strategy also shifted from central eradication to governor-led eradication.

²³ The eight pillars include: Public Awareness, International & Regional Cooperation, Alternative Livelihoods, Demand Reduction, Law Enforcement, Criminal Justice, Eradication, and Institution Building.

The strategy was underlined by a ‘carrot and stick’ approach, providing more financial incentives for provincial governors that [initiate eradication](#), and giving them more money to pursue economic development, *The Washington Post* reported. The strategy was updated because, according to the UNODC, total poppy production in Afghanistan [increased by 49% in 2006](#) and accounted for about 90% of the global opium supply. Since the ouster of the Taliban in late 2001, the area under poppy cultivation has risen from roughly 8,000 hectares to an estimated 165,000 hectares. *Eurasianet* expresses that, in light of this increase, the administration of President Bush called for eradication by aerial spraying, which had been introduced in Colombia. However, the Afghan government rejected the spraying, preferring a method which involves beating the heads of the poppy plants with sticks, notes the article by *Eurasianet*.

The Brookings paper “New Counternarcotics Strategy in Afghanistan: Its Promises and Potential Pitfalls” suggests that factors other than eradication usually lead to a decline in cultivation of illicit crops. During the 2008-09, [the poppy cultivation in Afghanistan fell](#) by 22% to 123,000 hectares and opium production fell by 10 percent to 6,900 metric tons (mt), according to the Brookings Institution report. However, according to Felbab-Brown’s testimony before the Senate Caucus, the decline in cultivation was to a great extent driven “[by market forces largely unrelated to policy](#)”. She further notes, “After several years of massive overproduction in Afghanistan that surpassed the estimated global market for opiates by almost three times, opium prices were bound to decline”. Furthermore, based on a 2009 UNODC survey of Afghan farmers who abandoned poppy cultivation, [only 1% of respondents identified fear of eradication](#) as a their motive.

In 2009, under US President Barack Obama’s Administration, the US [strategy was further refined](#) and adjusted to overall counterinsurgency efforts, according to a Congressional report on “Afghanistan Drug Control”. The strategy [discontinued the US-led poppy crop eradication](#), concluding that the strategy was “ineffective and drove farmers to side with the Taliban”. Aware [that eradication alienated rural Afghans](#) for whom opium constituted the main or sole source of income, the American military distanced itself from destroying poppy crops and instead financially supported provincial governors who initiated eradication with the use of Afghan forces, according to *The New York Times*. Therefore, as the previously-cited report by the [Senate Caucus points out](#), “eradication is still conducted by the Afghans at the province level by the governors and carried out by the Afghan National Police”.

Interdiction Policy

The [new US strategy placed primary focus](#) on interdiction of the nexus between narco-trafficking and the insurgency, but also emphasised agricultural assistance to farmers and comprehensive rural development, the US DoD’s April 2010 Security and Stability Report notes. The [objective of interdiction operations](#) is to decrease narcotics trafficking and processing by disrupting and dismantling drug trafficking organisations. This is achieved by raiding drug laboratories; destroying storage sites; arresting drug traffickers; conducting roadblock operations; seizing chemicals and drug, and conducting undercover drug purchases, according to the US GAO’s “Afghanistan Drug Control” report. The Interagency Policy Group’s [strategic review white paper](#), released in March 2009, said that despite the emphasis on interdiction, eradication would scale back but continue. Both eradication and interdiction efforts would, however, shift toward targeting high-level traffickers, particularly those linked to the Taliban. By [targeting drug processing facilities](#) and traffickers rather than farmers, the counter-narcotics efforts would precisely address the narcotics-insurgency nexus, the GAO report notes.

“By not targeting the farmers, a counter-narcotics strategy can be [synchronized with the counterinsurgency efforts](#) because it can deprive the Taliban of a critical source of support,” a report from the Brookings Institution

notes. While supporting the Afghan governments' eight-pillar NDCS, the US government strategy announced in 2009 has two main goals:

- Counter the link between narcotics and the insurgency and significantly reduce the support the insurgency receives from the narcotics industry.
- Address the narcotics corruption nexus and reinforce the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Figure 2. Evolution of Counter-narcotics Strategies in Afghanistan



Source: “*Afghanistan Drug Control*,” United States Government Accountability Office, 2010.

Deficiencies of Eradication and Interdiction Policies

As Felbab-Brown noted previously, the 2009 US counter-narcotics strategy was developed in light of lessons learnt from counter-drug efforts pursued between 2004 and 2008, the main lesson being that aggressive eradication and interdiction are counterproductive and enhanced the Taliban’s political capital. Similar to counter-drug campaigns in Colombia, Peru and Thailand, neither eradication nor interdiction policies have bankrupted the Taliban. According to Felbab-Brown’s report “Narco-belligerents Across the Globe: Lessons from Colombia for Afghanistan”, between 2002 and 2004 the Taliban lost access to the drug economy, “but paradoxically since 2004, crucially facilitated by eradication and the way interdiction has been carried out, the Taliban have been able to plug themselves back into Afghanistan’s drug trade by protecting the traffickers’ shipments and the rural population poppy fields”. Felbab-Brown summarises the setbacks of eradication and interdiction policies in a 2009 testimony on “U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy in Afghanistan.”

Box I. Setbacks of Eradication and Interdiction

- Eradication efforts cement the bonds between the marginalized population dependent on illicit crops and undermines the motivation of the local population to provide intelligence on the Taliban to the counterinsurgent forces, including Afghan National Arm and NATO. Rather, eradication motivates the population to provide intelligence to the Taliban.
- Eradication strengthens the Taliban physically by driving economic refugees into its hands.
- It alienates the local population from the national government and from local tribal elites that agree to eradication. This creates a key opening to the Taliban.
- The eradicators themselves are in the position to best profit from eradication, being able to eliminate competition. Consequently, jobs such as police chiefs are highly coveted and people are willing to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to obtain such jobs or place friendly individuals in such jobs.
- Interdiction efforts undertaken between 2003 and 2009 did not lead to a reduction in trafficking and the power of crime groups.
- Interdiction efforts have been manipulated to eliminate drug competition and ethnic and tribal rivals. Instead of targeting the top echelon of the drug economy, interdiction operations were largely conducted against small vulnerable traders who could neither sufficiently bribe nor adequately intimidate the interdiction teams and their supervisors within the Afghan government. Paradoxically, as small and vulnerable traders operating largely at the village or district level were removed by interdiction operations, large traffickers with substantial political control only consolidated their control over the drug industry, thus giving rise to a significant vertical integration of the trade.
- Interdiction allowed the Taliban to integrate itself back into the Afghan drug trade. When the Taliban was pushed out of Afghanistan, it was also pushed out of the drug trade. But as a result of the way interdiction measures in Afghanistan were adopted, the Taliban after 2004 was once again needed to provide protection to traffickers targeted by interdiction and was once again able to penetrate the drug trade and obtain significant financial resources from protection rents.
- Alternative livelihoods programs, although key for any sustainable reduction in opium poppy cultivation, had been slow to reach the vast majority of Afghanistan's population.

Source: *U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy in Afghanistan*, Brookings Institution, 2009.

The April 2012 Security and Stability Report notes the US has been [revising its counter-narcotics strategy](#) for Afghanistan since October 2011. The report states that this revision “will prioritize [counter-narcotics] assistance during the security transition and drawdown of US and coalition combat forces.” Furthermore, the same report notes that COMISAF signed a new counter-narcotic Campaign Strategy. This campaign strategy reiterates “the importance of continuing to degrade the insurgent-narcotics nexus.” Also, ISAF will assist the Afghan government in [developing its counter-narcotics capacity](#) and capability for the eventual transition to greater Afghan responsibility.

Effectiveness of the New Strategy

Felbab-Brown's Brookings “Afghanistan Trip Report VI” of April 2011 notes that this new strategy's effectiveness has been impeded by “[major implementation difficulties](#).” First, the implementation is challenged by insufficient security and weak governance which continue to be hampered by “corruption, abuse and

incompetence,” the report indicates. Second, interdiction has lost its selective focus on high-level Taliban-linked traffickers and become indiscriminate in targeting small-level farmers. Last, eradication and bans on poppy growing continue, distressing farmers and driving instability and conflict, the report states. Consequently, the current governor-led eradication suffers from similar setbacks as the previous centrally-led aggressive eradication.

Institutions & Forces Available

According to the 2012 Security and Stability Report, the [Afghan government is in charge](#) of all counter-narcotics operations. However, the US State Department’s 2012 “International Narcotics Control Strategy Report” (INCSR) on Afghanistan states that the Afghan government “[generally relies on assistance](#) from the international community to implement its counternarcotics strategy”. Afghanistan’s Ministry of Counter-Narcotics (MCN) is in charge of coordinating efforts and it is directly responsible for implementing Afghanistan’s NDCS. Despite being the lead agency, the MCN has few resources, no enforcement mechanism, and limited capacity, making it “heavily dependent” on other government agencies and the international community, according to the 2012 INCSR. MCN also runs the US-funded Governor Led Eradication (GLE) programme.

Ministries Involved

The Ministry of Counter-Narcotics and the Ministry of Interior (MoI) are [responsible for the policy](#) and coordination of the Afghan government’s counter-narcotics efforts, according to a report published by the *Strategic Studies Institute*. The MoI is the lead agency in implementing counter-narcotics policies, and has the greater part of the ANSF involved in counter-narcotics.

MoD: The Ministry of Defence lends support to the MoI as required, coordinating operations and providing forces if necessary. MoD has instituted the Counternarcotics Infantry Kandak (CNIK) as its contribution to government counter-narcotics efforts. The CNIK, operational in 2009, is the security element for the counter-narcotics forces when required. The unit was intended to provide area security in direct support of [Poppy Eradication Force](#) deployments, but the PEF was disbanded 2009, and the CNIK was redirected to support other counter-narcotics efforts by the ANA as well as general security efforts. The CNIK is intended to help the counter-narcotics forces to focus on their core competencies and reduce the security burden on international forces. The US DoD is coordinating with the Afghan MoD to develop the requirements to field a [fully air-mobile unit](#) with appropriate combat enablers to deter security threats posed to counter-narcotics forces by the insurgents and the drug traffickers. The creation of the unit is part of the US counter-narcotics strategy for Afghanistan

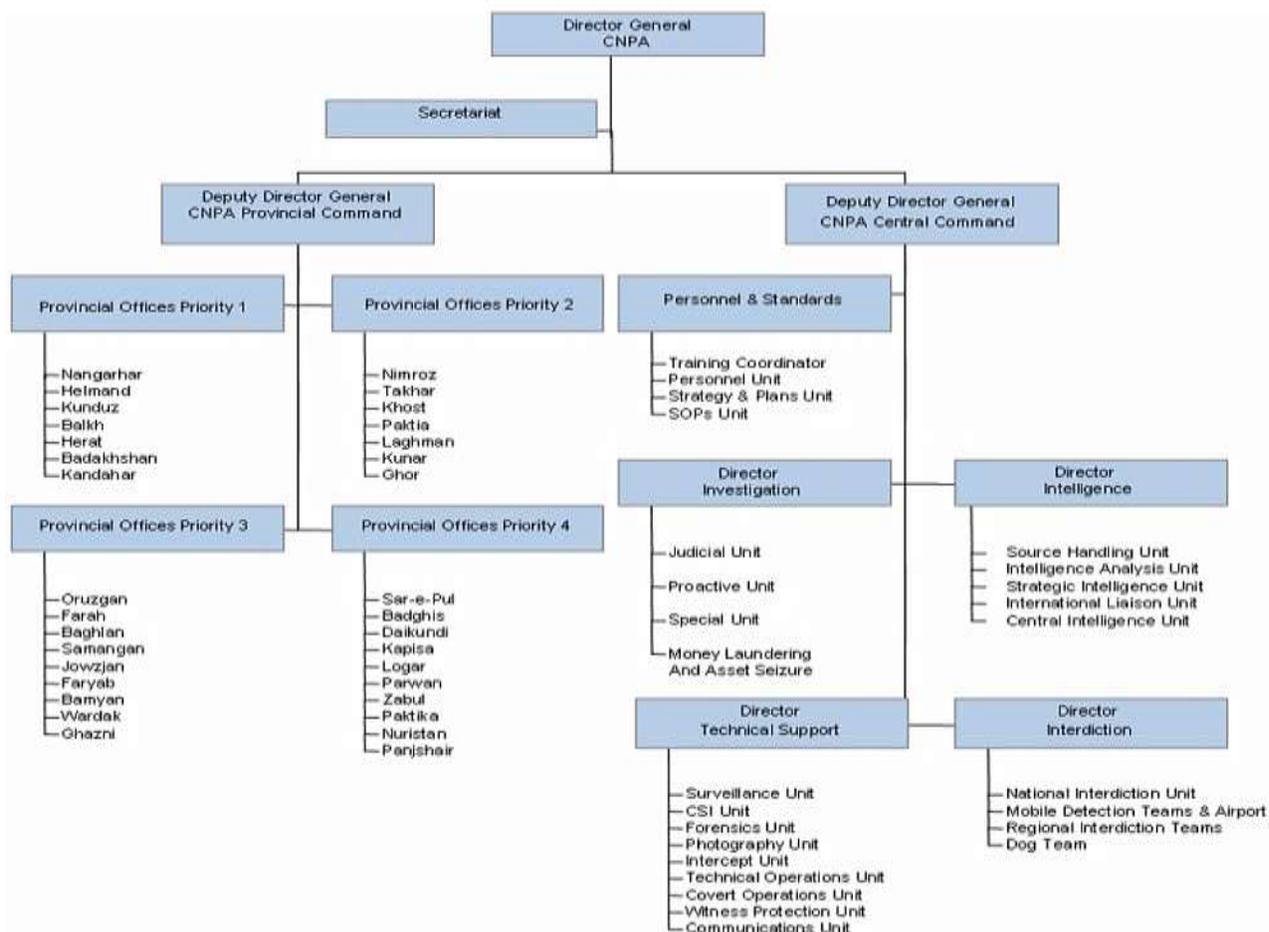
MoI: The Ministry of the Interior, in addition to its policy duties, has the Counternarcotics Police of Afghanistan and the British-trained Afghan Special Narcotics Force (ASNF), which are responsible for executing these policies. The report further states that Afghanistan relies on the US, UK, and other nations for funding.

The Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNPA)

The CNPA was established in 2003 as the [component of the Afghanistan’s National Police](#) (ANP) within Afghanistan’s MoI, according to the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). It is responsible for counter-narcotics investigation and enforcement. In 2011 the CNPA’s staff amounted to around 2,500. However, as the [March 2012 report](#) issued by the US Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs indicates,

only a small number of these officers are sent to the Helmand and Kandahar, which constitute the two leading opium provinces, with many being assigned duties other than counter-narcotics. The INCSR states that the CNPA “continued to make progress” in developing three elite units that are in charge of investigating “high-value targets”. The three units are “trained, equipped and sustained” jointly by the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the US Department of Defense, a report by GAO indicates. They include the National Interdiction Unit (NIU) which conducts raids and seizures, the Sensitive Investigative Unit (SIU), a 77-person Afghan law enforcement unit which gathers evidence and develops cases for narcotics investigations, and the Technical Investigative Unit (TIU) which develops intelligence used by the SIU.

Figure 3. Structure of Counter-narcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNPA)



Source: “Afghanistan: Counter Narcotics Law Enforcement,” UNODC, January 2006.

According to the April 2012 Security and Stability Report, DEA anticipates the NIU to increase its staff from current 470 to 538 officers. The TIU’s staff includes 9 specially vetted officials and 200 linguists and translators who work with judicial wire intercepts. Despite being small, these units provide “significantly greater capabilities than the larger CNPA force”, the report states. There is also a Tactical Operations Centre (TOC) which produces materials to support counter-narcotics operations, including development of procedures to satisfy operational requirements. DEA agents in Afghanistan mentor these units in areas such as investigations and arrest techniques. The MoI also dispatches the Air Interdiction Unit (AIU) to provide aviation support during counter-narcotics operations. The AIU operates 20 Mi-17 helicopters. From October

2011 to March 2012, the AIU supported 22 counter-narcotics missions. The report states that 21 of the 22 counter-narcotics missions were flown with Afghan crewmembers. The April 2012 Security and Stability Report states that the AIU will require “significant coalition assistance for several more years, especially due to aviation maintenance.”

In addition to the air-mobile capability in MoD mentioned above (and separate from the AIU), the US Department of Defense supports CNPA through capacity building and is also funding the CNPA Development Unit (CDU) whose goal is to transition counter-narcotics responsibility to the Afghan government, according to a report “United States Plan for Sustaining the Afghan National Security Forces”.²⁴ The report published in April 2012 notes that the CNPA is completing a Ministerial Development Plan which serves as a roadmap for CNPA development and the transition of greater security responsibility to CNPA at the 2014 transition.

Separate from the CNPA is the Afghanistan Special Narcotics Force (ASNF), an elite paramilitary force that reports directly to the President and Minister of Interior and carries out interdiction missions against high-value targets in remote areas, according to *the Long War Journal*. Further information on the ASNF is hard to come by because of the sensitive nature of the mission and operations.

Effectiveness

The record of the effectiveness of counter-narcotics operations is mixed. For instance, the April 2012 Stability and Security report states that in southern Afghanistan—particularly in Helmand, Afghanistan’s largest poppy-growing province, cultivation has been declining for three consecutive years. The report attributes this to the increased presence and expanded operations of ISAF and ANSF in this area. Moreover, poppy eradication increased by 65% in 2011, however, this large-seeming percentage only eliminated about 3% of total cultivation in 2011, according to 2011 “Afghan Opium Survey” issued by UNODC. Also, this Survey points to “a dramatic increase of 133% in the farm gate value of opium” compared with 2010. Furthermore, Zazar Ahmad Muqbel Osmani, the Minister of Counter-narcotics, said in May 2012 that the price of opium is expected to rise because of diminished supply. This supply crunch results from two things: increased eradication efforts of the security forces, and a fungus that ravages the poppies, *Reuters* reports. The rise in opium prices, even with a reduced supply, may translate into more revenue for insurgents.

Similarly, the effectiveness of the institutions involved in counter-narcotics efforts remains mixed. The March 2010 GAO report notes that the National Interdiction Unit (NIU) “was capable of conducting its own operations, including requesting and executing search and arrest warrants,” also singling out the Sensitive Investigative Unit for being “able to independently initiate and complete investigative and undercover cases”. Furthermore, the March 2012 INCSR notes that “Afghan authorities made some progress in developing Afghan capacity to interdict large quantities of narcotics, and arrest and prosecute narcotics traffickers”.

On the negative side, the report indicates that counter-narcotics efforts are continuously hampered by corruption and poor security, and that “greater political will, increased institutional capacity, and more robust efforts at all levels of government are required to decrease cultivation and combat trafficking”. Similarly, the 2010 report by CSIS, entitled “Afghan National Security Forces,” writes that corruption has been a challenge for CNPA even more than for the rest of the Afghan National Police (ANP). Along similar lines, the 2010 GAO report “Afghanistan Drug Control” notes that other challenges include drug abuse and addiction

²⁴ The US DoD supports counter-narcotics operations in Afghanistan also by improving border security, promoting information sharing, and fostering regional and international cooperation, the report indicates.

prevalent among the ANP, of which CNPA is a part. Specifically, the report states “CNPA personnel are [more susceptible to corruption](#) than regular Afghan National Police officers due to the lucrative nature of the narcotics trade”, further stating that Department of Justice and Afghan officials revealed that “in about one-third of cases from provinces, provincial CNPA personnel have submitted drugs as evidence to the Justice Center but did not arrest the criminal suspects.”

CSIS notes another drawback. The report quotes an interview with Major General Sadaat, Director General of the Afghan Public Protection Force (APPF), who said “miscommunication and redundancies abound in the British and American CNPA development program.” According to Sadaat, the units are partially redundant and “regularly interfere with each other,” the CSIS report notes.

“The picture as sketched within the opium survey is one that is to be [taken very seriously](#),” said Jean-Luc Lemahieu, head of the UNODC in Afghanistan, speaking to the *Christian Science Monitor*. “We have an increase, an increase, which is limited compared to the increase in prices. The situation could have been much worse if it was not for the actions taken” by Afghan and international partners.

The 2009 INCSR section on Afghanistan states that: “the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) generally cooperates with the international community in implementing its national counter-narcotics strategy. However, more political will and effort, at the central and provincial levels, is required to decrease cultivation in the south, maintain cultivation reductions in the rest of the country, and combat trafficking in coming years.”

The report concludes that “the Afghan government has been unwilling or unable to fully implement [its National Drug Control Strategy] and has, in some cases, failed to provide adequate support to provincial leaders who have shown greater willingness to take serious steps to combat narcotics cultivation, production, and trafficking in their provinces.” The 2009 INCSR concludes that “many Afghan government officials are believed to profit from the drug trade,” and “narcotics-related corruption is particularly pervasive at the provincial and district levels of government.

The report indicates that operational coordination among various specialised units in the CNPA “continued to improve” during the reporting period. The NIU, SIU, and TIU, and the CNPA’s AIU play a strategic role by enabling the elite Afghan counter-narcotics law enforcement personnel and their DEA partners to conduct missions in dangerous areas and remote terrain.

Conclusion

Afghanistan’s former counter-narcotics minister, General Khodaidad, warned in late 2011 that [opium poppy cultivation will dramatically increase](#) as coalition combat forces head home, by the end of 2014. Farmers and insurgents are taking advantage of a withdrawal, and insecurity in poppy growing regions along with the expectation among insurgents and farmers that the country will be under the full control of Afghan forces within years is driving production, he said.

The UNODC also asserts opium production will rise across Afghanistan in 2012, spreading to more parts of the country than it has in the last few years, according to their new [annual assessment](#). “We are back in the situation we had in 2007-08,” UNODC country representative Jean-Luc Lemahieu told *The Guardian*. “The Taliban definitely get income from opium cultivation ... but the lion’s share of the income still disappears here, [into the hands of the big patrons of this country](#).”

Felbab-Brown notes that “[a]lthough hundreds of interdiction raids have now been conducted, especially in southern Afghanistan, and large quantities of opium and IEDs have been seized in these operations, it is questionable whether the impact on the Taliban’s resource flows has been more than local”. She asserts that [military operations to clear the Taliban from individual areas](#) have reduced the insurgents’ funding flows specifically in those areas, but that effect is not country-wide. She concludes that the cumulative effects of the narcotics interdiction effort to suppress financial flows “do not appear to be affecting the Taliban at the strategic level.” The Taliban’s method to raise funds has long been to tax any economic activity, licit or illicit, in the areas where the insurgents operate.

The experts predict that poppy cultivation will increase after international combat forces withdraw, that it will not severely affect the insurgents’ ability to fund themselves, nor will it have an effect on the powerful “patrons” in the country. The GIRA’s efforts to control the poppy culture are interlinked with the other problems of security and corruption. Good governance and an effective program to [solve the problems at the same time](#) are essential, according to President Karzai, to solving all of them.

Afghan Opiates: A Regional Dilemma

Stefanie Nijssen²⁵ and Raj Salooja²⁶

Abstract

Officials in Afghanistan’s Ministry of Counter-Narcotics (MCN) announced this year that the annual value of the opium trade alone – which excludes cannabis and other narcotics – [reached USD 70 billion](#), *Khaama Press* reports. An estimated [16.5 million people](#) use illicit opiates annually, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the majority of these originate in Afghanistan. Opiates are first trafficked out of Afghanistan through Iran, Pakistan and Central Asia. From this point a portion of the opiates are consumed domestically in the countries along the transport routes, and the [remainder is trafficked](#) on to transit countries further afield.

Afghan farmers and low-level drug smugglers account for only a small fraction of the total revenue generated by the opium trade, since most of it leaves Afghanistan through international drug smuggling networks. The value of raw opium at one end of the chain comprises only a tiny portion of the final retail value of the heroin that is sold to consumers. The 2011 World Drug Report by UNODC states that one gram of heroin [costs less than USD 4](#) in Afghanistan while users in West and Central Europe pay an average of USD 40-100 per gram. According to US financial crime experts cited in a United States Institute of Peace report, some [funds originating](#) from the Afghan drug industry also up in Western banking institutions. The movement and layering of drug funds from informal to formal institutions [blurs the boundary](#) between the licit and illicit economies. It is widely understood that groups engaging in drug trafficking also engage in other sorts of [violent and criminal enterprise](#), says Global Financial Integrity’s 2011 report on “Transnational Crime in the Developing World”. These activities can range from human smuggling to the funding of insurgents groups such the Taliban. DEA officials even indicate that al Qaeda is “[heavily involved](#)” in Afghan opium trafficking. In the last few years, there is evidence of a [significant regionalisation](#) of organised crime, according to a UN assessment. For example, according to the US government, there have been instances of Afghan drug trafficking organisations [operating with those](#) in West Africa to smuggle heroin to Europe and the United States. Moreover, UNODC reports that since drug trafficking has connections to [corruption within the public sector and among elected officials](#), counter-narcotics efforts demand effective criminal justice systems and independent judiciaries.

In addition to national efforts, a [number of international conventions](#) relating to combating the drug trade have been ratified. Under the Paris Pact Initiative (PPI), for example, participating nations have agreed to “combine their will and efforts to step up national capabilities” against drug trafficking. In addition to expert-level talks, the PPI promotes the coordination of technical assistance in the field of counter narcotics through, in part, the use of online tools and systems. Other institutions include the Central Asian Regional and Information

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Coordination Centre (CARICC), the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, the Central Asia Border Security Initiative and the International Narcotics Control Board. Despite the continued growth in commitment and ambition of the Paris Pact partners, the problem of opiate trafficking from Afghanistan continues to worsen, according to a discussion paper issued by the PPI. The Center on International Cooperation at New York University states that continued mistrust among Central Asian states have often hampered their collaboration on pressing regional issues. Case in point, officials have noted a need for increasing the capacity to monitor and search shipping containers in airports, seaports and dry ports at key transit points and in destination countries, one of several challenges which requires greater regional engagement.

Introduction

Officials in Afghanistan’s Ministry of Counter-Narcotics (MCN) announced this year that the annual value of the country’s opium trade — which excludes cannabis and other narcotics — has reached USD 70 billion, *Khaama Press* reports. Afghan farmers and low-level drug smugglers account for only a fraction – 5% according to some estimates – of that total revenue, since most of the proceeds leave Afghanistan through regional and international drug smuggling networks. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) states that illicit trafficking in opiates and other drugs adversely impacts governance, security, stability and development in Afghanistan, among its neighbours and in the broader region. Opiates originating in Afghanistan threaten the health and well-being of people in many regions of the world. The World Bank reports that drug trafficking through an area can increase addiction rates, encourage organised crime and contribute to corruption. Thus, all of the countries in the region have a strong interest in restraining the opium trade. This chapter first addresses how these opiates are trafficked out of Afghanistan. In order to better understand the demand-side of drug trafficking, it then touches upon the relationship between addiction and trafficking both within Afghanistan and the surrounding region. Finally the authors provide a brief overview of the various regional and national efforts that are in place to combat the drug industry emanating from Afghanistan.

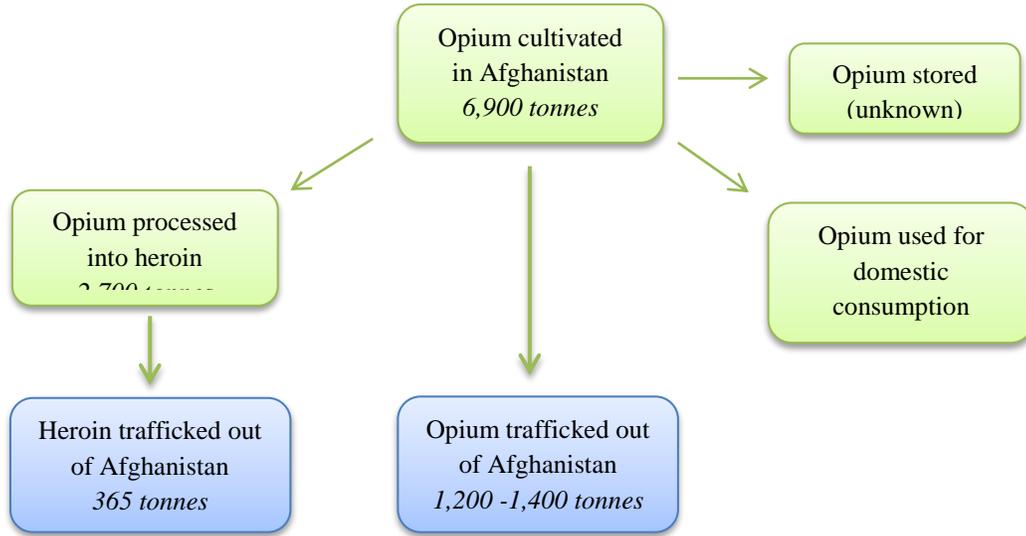
UNODC’s “World Drug Report” states that the illicit drug market can be divided into four main categories: cocaine, opiates, amphetamine-type stimulants and cannabis. Though opium and heroin are considered opiates, raw opium can be obtained directly from the poppy plant, whereas heroin is derived from chemicals inside the opium.²⁷ Although UNODC has a relatively good understanding of the size and value of the global opiate market, information on the cannabis and synthetic drug markets is comparatively scarce. The cannabis market, to which Afghanistan contributes, is dominated by local cultivation and consumption, according to UNODC’s report entitled “Estimating Illicit Financial Flows Resulting from Drug Trafficking and Other Transnational Organised Crimes”. Hence, this chapter focuses primarily on the trafficking in Afghan opiates.

Trafficking in Opiates

According to “The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment”, opiates are trafficked out of Afghanistan directly through Iran, Pakistan and the Central Asian republics. From this point, a portion of the opiates are consumed within the countries through which they are being transported, and the remainder is trafficked onward to countries further afield.

²⁷ Although some experts categorise heroin as an opioid since it is partially synthetic, UNODC refers to heroin as an opiate.

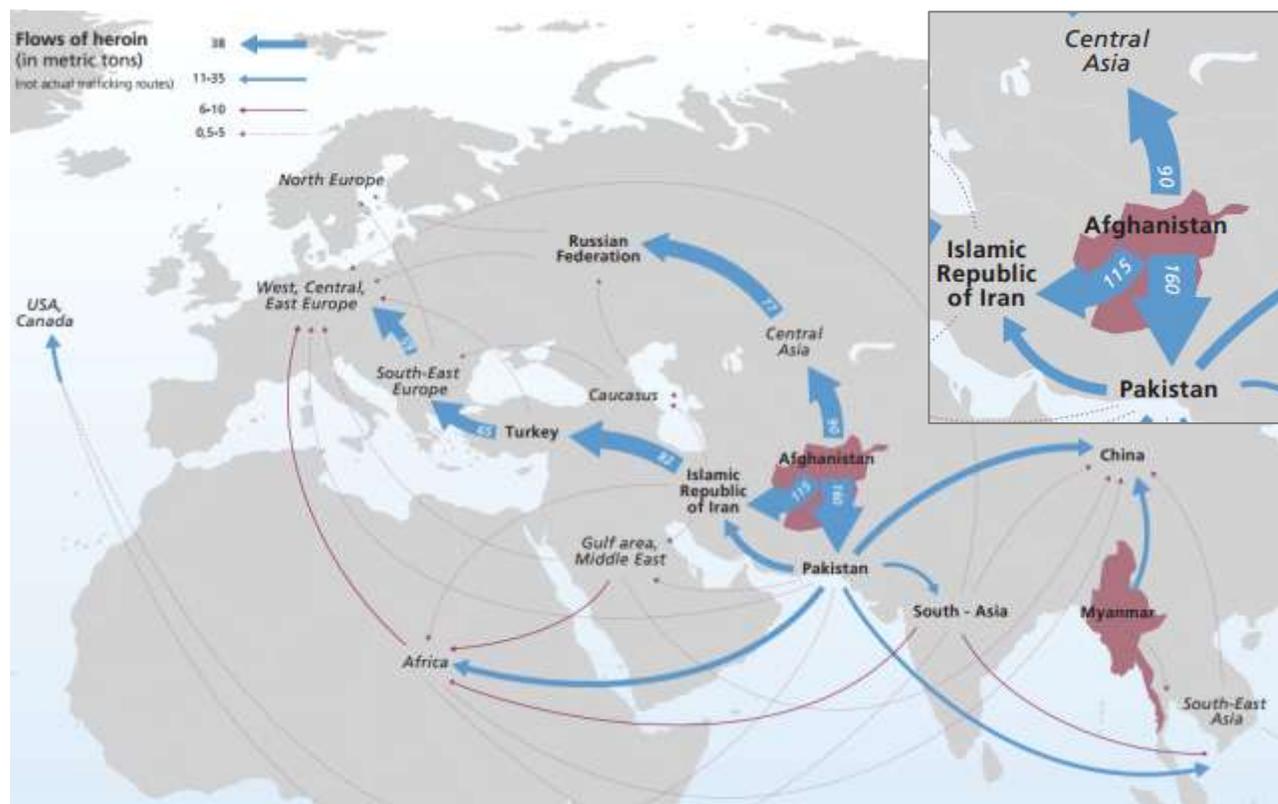
Figure 1. The Path of Opium



Source: Adapted from UNODC's *"The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment"* 2011 (2009 data).

The aforementioned threat assessment notes that 160 tonnes of heroin were trafficked to Pakistan in 2009, 115 tonnes to Iran and 90 tonnes to Central Asian countries (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan). According to the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, transit zones for drug trafficking, such as Central Asia, Iran and Pakistan, have experienced strong increases in domestic drug abuse, thus transforming transit states into consumer states. From Pakistan, Iran and the Central Asian republics, heroin reaches global consumers in Europe, Asia and Africa through a number of trafficking corridors (see Figure 2). UNODC reports that Africa has received increasing Afghan heroin flows, emerging as a trafficking route to Europe. A US government policy document notes that there have been instances of Afghan drug trafficking organisations operating with those in West Africa to smuggle heroin to Europe and the United States. Accordingly, trafficking has also reportedly contributed to rising rates of drug abuse in parts of Africa.

Figure 2. Flows of Heroin in Metric Tonnes (mt)



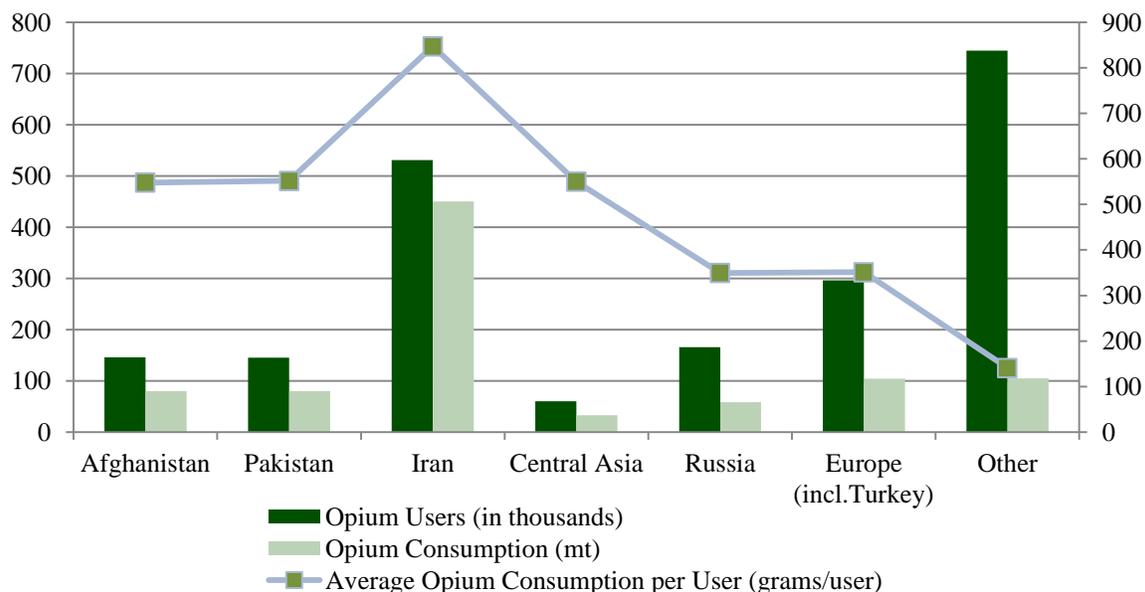
Source: UNODC, “*The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment*” 2011 (2009 data).

Unlike heroin, the majority of raw Afghan opium is consumed within the region, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). UNODC confirms that the demand for raw opium is geographically more limited than that of heroin, since 84% of all raw opium users are in Asia. Of the approximately 1,200-1,400 tonnes smuggled out in 2009, 1,050 tonnes left through Iran. Of this, 132 tonnes were consumed domestically and 25 tonnes seized. The report entitled “Opiate Flows Through Northern Afghanistan and Central Asia” notes that, as of 2010, approximately 35-40 tonnes of opium and 25% of all heroin manufactured in Afghanistan were smuggled through Central Asia (18-20 tonnes through Tajikistan, 15-17 tonnes through Uzbekistan and 1-3 tonnes through Turkmenistan). A further 35% of the 380 tonnes of Afghan heroin were trafficked out through Iran and 40% through Pakistan. According to UNODC, the opium “trafficking routes, traffickers and methods are almost exactly the same” as those used for heroin trafficking to Iran, Pakistan and Central Asia. The Transnational Institute cautions that an overproduction of opiates in Afghanistan may lead to new trafficking routes, “especially further eastwards where shortages are more likely to appear and prices may rise”.

Consumption and Addiction Rates

Globally, around 16.5 million people use illicit opiates, including opium, heroin and morphine, annually, reports “The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment”. Drug abuse kills 200,000 people per year, according to WHO data. UNODC reports that Afghan opium alone is responsible for 100,000 of those global deaths every year. According to an article by *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)*, Afghanistan is the source of 90% of the world’s illicit opium and heroin production. Europe and Asia are the key opiate consumption markets, says the 2011 World Drug Report.

Figure 3. Opium Use



Source: UNODC, “[World Drug Report 2010](#)”.

Opium use in Afghanistan increased by more than 50% between 2005 and 2009, and heroin use increased by 140%.²⁸ An estimated 1.4% of the Afghan population aged 15-64 used opiates in 2005; this number increased to 2.7% in 2009, according to the 2011 World Drug Report.²⁹ Data from UNODC’s report “The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment” indicates that, of the 365 tonnes of heroin exported out of Afghanistan in 2009, approximately 47 tonnes were used by residents of Iran, Pakistan and Central Asia (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan). The latest data for Iran shows that 2.3% of its population aged 15-64 uses opiates.³⁰ Despite efforts to cope with drug trafficking, Iran is swamped by Afghan opium with an estimated one million opiate users, according to a UNODC counter-narcotics site. As a key transit route from Afghanistan to Russia and Europe, Central Asia also has a significant opiate abuse problem, with an estimated 358,000 opiate users.

UNODC reports indicate that in Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries, the level of opiate consumption has risen sharply in the last decade. The impact of opiate addiction has also played a role in the HIV epidemic within Afghanistan, where 7% of the population of intravenous drug users in Herat, Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif were afflicted with the syndrome, according to a study conducted by the US Center for Disease Control (CDC). Rainer Gonzalez-Palau, in “Drug Abuse & Treatment Facilities in Afghanistan”, writes that 694,000 Afghan who wish to receive treatment for drug addiction have been unable to access relevant services. Treatment for drug addiction both in Afghanistan and its surrounding countries remains inadequate relative to the need that presents itself, the CDC reports.

²⁸ UNODC notes that the estimates for drug use rely, to a large extent, on information submitted by Member States through the Annual Report Questionnaire. Nonetheless, challenges remain in making such estimates because of data gaps and the varying quality of the available data.

²⁹ In opium-cultivating countries such as Afghanistan, Laos, Iran and Myanmar, opium use is more common than heroin use, says the “World Drug Report 2011”.

³⁰ In Iran, the rate of drug-related deaths was 91 per million people aged 15-64; the majority of these related to opiate use.

Yury Fedotov, executive director of UNODC, said that it is part of the international community's [shared responsibility](#) to address the demand-side of the global drug problem; "heroin-consuming countries need to do more to provide treatment, care and support for drug users to help them kick the habit, and also to prevent drug use". As of 2006, UNODC noted that there was relatively little data about the [changing nature](#) of the demand-side for opiates in the region, as many countries have only recently begun to keep track of drug usage and abuse.

Financing the Drug Trade

The laundering of illegal proceeds from Afghan opium has grown to "become a [significant threat](#) to the regional states", according to legal expert Kairat Osmonaliev. UNODC's "Afghanistan: Opium Survey 2011" found that the total potential net income from [exporting opiates](#) out of Afghanistan grew from USD 1.2 billion in 2010 to USD 2.4 billion in 2011. Though Afghan farmers earned some [USD 440 million](#) in 2010 from the opiate market, organised crime groups in the main countries of consumption gather the largest profits, the World Drug Report states. This is in part because the value of raw opium at one end of the chain comprises only a tiny fraction of the final retail value of the heroin that is sold to consumers. Although prices increased in 2010, one gram [costs less than USD 4](#) in Afghanistan. In West and Central Europe, users paid some USD 40-100 per gram, in the United States and northern Europe, USD 170-200, and in Australia, the price reached USD 230-370. The flow of drug money globally is an essential [facilitating element](#) for the drug industry (including in Afghanistan), according to UNODC's "Afghanistan's Drug Industry" report.³¹

The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) reports that profits from drug originating in Afghanistan are primarily laundered between Karachi in Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates, and US financial crime experts suspect some [funds end up in Western banking](#) institutions. According to GFI, developing countries and [countries in transition](#) are particularly affected by such "dirty money" flows. While efforts have been made to combat money laundering, UNODC reports that "there remain considerable knowledge gaps, including on the extent to which these [proceeds flow](#) through the international financial system." Of the illicit funds that are circulated as a result of drug trafficking, a portion of profits can frequently make their way back into the licit economy. A 2011 UNODC report on illicit financial flows reveals that the investment of crime-related funds in the formal sector can have numerous [negative consequences](#) for the economy at large, including the distortion of prices in real estate and unfair competition through the crowding out of licit activities.³²

Transnational Organised Crime and Insurgent Groups

In Afghanistan and elsewhere, [drugs are smuggled](#) and transported by transnational organised crime groups, according to the US National Security Council (NSC). It is widely understood that groups engaging in drug trafficking also engage in other sorts of [violent and criminal enterprise](#), says GFI's 2011 report on "Transnational Crime in the Developing World". These activities can range from human smuggling to the funding of insurgents groups such the Taliban. The Afghan opiate trade involves a [complex distribution network](#) covering many countries. However, UNODC states that relatively little effort has gone into quantifying the numbers of traffickers involved. According to the aforementioned US NSC document, many of the [well-established organised criminal groups](#) that had not been involved in drug trafficking — including those in Russia, China, Italy and the Balkans — are now establishing ties to drug producers to develop their

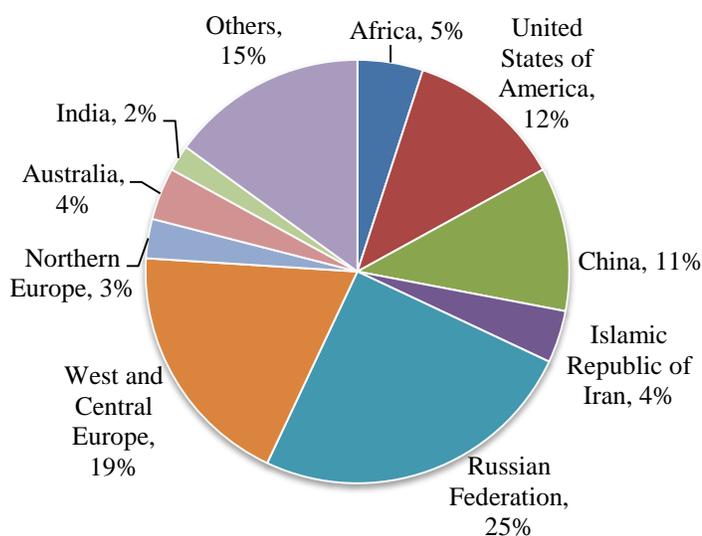
³¹ There are complex linkages between the trafficking of drugs, and the import of other illegitimate or legitimate goods into Afghanistan, such as arms, cars, drugs, edible oil, fuel, and other consumer goods.

³² D. Masciandaro, E. Takáts and B. Unger. *Black Finance: The Economics of Money Laundering*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Company, 2007, p. 96 and p. 178.

own distribution networks. An assessment of crime in Central Asia also indicates that criminal organisations in the region have developed operations that are increasingly regional rather than national in scope; for instance, Tajik organised crime is no longer confined to its own territory. Many Tajiks have become involved in the drug trade as both couriers and organisers, with the result that, in recent years, the number of Tajik drug traffickers arrested in other countries such as Russia has increased significantly. The UNODC country office for Uzbekistan also reported how two of the country’s leading criminals have tried to expand their influence in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan’s authorities have reportedly also told UNODC that criminal organisations in Kazakhstan not only remain in contact with their criminal associates in other Central Asian countries, the Russian Federation and the Baltic states but also that they have criminal linkages in some European countries, Turkey and China.

According to the US government’s Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime, terrorists and insurgents are increasingly turning to transnational organised criminal networks for funding and logistical support. Gretchen Peters writes that Turkmenistan, for instance, “undoubtedly has issues with opium smuggling from Afghanistan, and rumors abound that smugglers are closely aligned with the Taliban”.³³ In Afghanistan’s poppy-rich South and South-West, links also exist between Taliban insurgents and drug traffickers who operate along the Pakistani border, USIP states. Mullah Obaidullah, for instance, was responsible for Taliban military and financial supplies, but also worked closely with senior traffickers to move drugs out of the region and bring weapons back. Moreover, UNODC found that while most insurgent elements tax the trade rather than become active participants, it now appears that some insurgents involve themselves directly in the heroin supply chain. Michael Braun, the former DEA chief of operations, recently said there are also strong indications that al Qaeda is “heavily involved” in Afghan opium trafficking. USIP recorded multiple accounts of how al Qaeda operatives protect drug shipments as they leave the region.³⁴ Even though there is only fragmentary evidence that al Qaeda operatives are using drug money to fund themselves in the Afghanistan-Pakistan war theatre, European police have linked drug money to the 2004 train blasts in Madrid, the 2003 attacks in Casablanca and the 2002 bombings of US and British ships in Gibraltar, according to USIP. The aforementioned report also details the case of Haji Juma Khan, an Afghan tribesman once ranked as the top smuggler in the region that moved an estimated USD 1 billion worth of opium in a year. His network illustrated a close relationship between traffickers, Taliban leaders and corrupt officials he could call on for help across South Asia and the Persian Gulf.

Figure 4. Shares of the Global Opiate Market Value



Source: UNODC, “World Drug Report 2011”.

³³ Gretchen Peters. *Seeds of Terror: How Heroin Is Bankrolling the Taliban and Al Qaeda*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2009, p160.

³⁴ USIP notes it remains unclear if these operatives were operating within a larger, centrally directed policy to raise funds.

Links to Corruption

A UNODC report on illicit financial flows notes that trafficking and corruption are seen to be [mutually reinforcing](#). Traffickers can induce state officials to [abandon their commitment](#) to uphold the rule of law, according to GFI. Indeed, according to Mark Shaw's "Drug Trafficking and the Development of Organized Crime in Post-Taliban Afghanistan" Afghanistan's drug industry appears to have [secured influence](#) in some government and political circles through its financial resources, leading to widespread perceptions that government officials are involved in the trade. Traffickers can also use profits to influence electoral campaigns. The Brookings Institution details several examples where Afghan political entrepreneurs who sponsor the drug trade have used their illicit funds to [buy votes](#). With regard to Afghanistan, William Byrd and David Mansfield point out that "[c]areful management will be required to mitigate [the] use of [drug money in election campaigns](#) and involvement of local and regional powerholders as well as some at the central government level in the drug industry".

The drug trade "generates a [large income](#) for numerous ex-warlords (many of whom are now officials at various levels of government)" says that Brookings Institution. [Corrupt officials](#) within the Afghan government, the Afghan National Police (ANP), and various provincial administrations receive funds from opium traffickers, and recent media reports have suggested that some senior officials themselves engage in drug trafficking, according to USIP.³⁵ The International Crisis Group (ICG) also points out that there is "pervasive [political interference](#) in major drug cases". According to UNODC, 395 drug cases were recorded in Afghanistan, and [499 people](#) were arrested in 2009; of those, 23 were Afghan public servants.

According to "An Assessment of Transnational Organized Crime in Central Asia" all five Central Asian [states](#) have provisions within their Constitutions that guarantee the rule of law and a functioning judiciary. However, at the UNODC expert meeting on countering organised crime in the region, one of the challenges identified was that presidents [had powers enabling them](#) to enact laws, to annul acts of parliament, to appoint and to dismiss any public official, including judges, to order any investigation by the prosecutor's office and even to overrule judgements of constitutional courts.³⁶ According to the aforementioned crime assessment, many states that are heavily involved in Afghan drug trafficking are in a [transitional period](#) with relatively weak governance. This factor, combined with low levels of economic development and high unemployment, reportedly contributes to the region's vulnerability to organised crime. Specifically, UNODC states that Central Asian governments suffer from [various functional gaps](#), especially in the areas of criminal justice, financial and business regulation, social services and medical and health care, including treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts.

Moving Forward in the Fight against Drugs

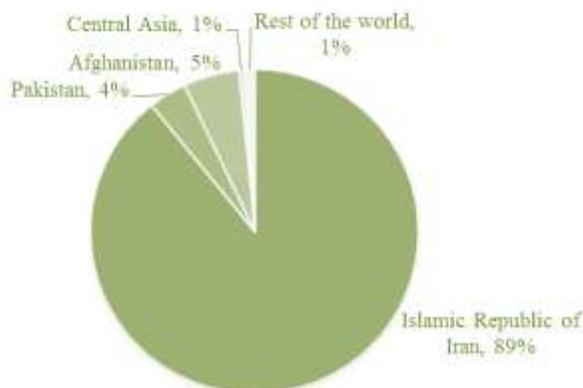
The Century Foundation notes that drug trafficking emanating from Afghanistan constitutes a [primary security](#) challenge to its neighbours and the region at large. Hence, there have been vigorous endeavours by the affected

³⁵ Thomas Schweich. "Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?" *The New York Times*. 27 July 2008.

³⁶ Until 2001, the Uzbek justice system kept [no accurate records](#). The United Nations country assessment of Uzbekistan noted that judges decisions or opinions were rarely written down or published and not widely available to legal practitioners and the public.

countries to combat organised crime and, in particular, to address the link between drug trafficking and terrorism.³⁷ This has occurred through national, bilateral and regional programmes and agreements.

Figure 5. Opium Seizures (% of total)



Source: Adapted from 2009 data in UNODC's "*The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment*".

In 2009, Pakistani authorities arrested Haji Bagcho, an Afghan drug lord who was once responsible for trafficking a fifth of the world's heroin supply, according to *The Telegraph*.³⁸ Bagcho was subsequently transferred to Afghan control before extradition to the US. Several more alleged Afghan drug lords are awaiting trial in the US and Afghanistan. Neighbouring Iran's fight against drug trafficking has so far claimed 3,600 lives and caused 12,000 others to become disabled, according to statement made by the Iranian government in October 2010. Tajikistan has also focused law enforcement efforts on its border with Afghanistan, according to UNODC. Similar to the Drug Control Agency in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan established its Drug Control Agency in June 2003. Kazakhstan too has strengthened its border controls, especially through joint patrols with Russian counterparts. UNODC

reports that, in 2009, law enforcement bodies seized almost 76 tonnes of heroin worldwide. A report entitled "Illicit Drug Trends in Pakistan" details how Pakistani law enforcement agencies seized 13,736 kg of heroin/morphine base in 2007 and 15,362 kg of opium.³⁹ The country's Anti-Narcotics Force collects and publishes annual statistics on drug related crime. Additionally, UNODC notes that several changes in the Pakistani penal code have had positive implications for the prosecution of drug related cases.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, a number of international conventions related to combating the drug trade have been developed, signed and ratified.⁴⁰ Indeed, international and regional cooperation is listed as one of eight key pillars supporting Afghanistan's National Drug Control Strategy. For the past decade, regional cooperation on counter-narcotics has been guided by the principles established at the Ministerial Conference on Drug Routes from Central Asia to Europe which was held in Paris in May 2003. According to the UNODC website, more than 55 countries and international organisations subscribed to the principle of shared responsibility in the fight against opium and heroin trafficking from Afghanistan in what has become known as the "Paris Pact".

The Paris Pact

Under the Paris Pact more than 70 partner countries and organisation agreed to "combine their will and efforts to step up national capabilities" against drug trafficking of opiates originating in Afghanistan. The coordination

³⁷ A special convention focussing exclusively on money laundering does not exist. However, many existing conventions on drug trafficking, corruption and other areas of organised crime also demand the contracting parties to criminalise activities undertaken to hide or launder the proceeds related to such predicative crimes and foresee measures to confiscate such proceeds.

³⁸ Bagcho was reportedly arrested in Pakistan "for unknown reasons" according to case documents.

³⁹ In 2006, Pakistani agencies seized 35,478 kg of heroin heroin/morphine base and 8,907 kg of opium.

⁴⁰ This started with the 1909 Opium Conference in Shanghai and the 1912 Hague International Opium Convention. The organised crime aspect related to drug trafficking was implicitly present from the start and was particularly highlighted in the 1936 Geneva Convention for the Suppression of the Illicit Traffic in Dangerous Drugs.

role of UNODC was recognised as essential and the organisation accordingly leads the follow-up to these Ministerial Conferences through the Paris Pact Initiative (PPI), a technical assistance project. The PPI consist of [three pillars](#):

- *Consultative Mechanism*: The Consultative Mechanism has been established to act as a forum to facilitate periodical consultations at the expert and policy levels between partners. The aim of this forum is to identify and initiate coordinated actions to stem the increasing levels of opiates trafficked from Afghanistan and address the drug abuse situation in priority countries. Senior-level policy makers meet in Vienna every year to review and endorse expert recommendations, as well as to [decide on joint priorities](#) for the following year.⁴¹
- *Automated Donor Assistance Mechanism (ADAM)*: This [internet-based tool](#) offers a unique opportunity to provide partners with “a real time assessment of assistance needs in Afghanistan and in priority countries along the Afghan opiates trafficking routes”, says the PPI website. An independent evaluation undertaken at the end of Phase I concluded that while ADAM was a well-designed and impressive system, the [level of commitment](#) to ADAM by partners was lacking and participation and sharing of information in ADAM was seen as optional.
- *National Strategic Analysts (NSAs)*: Under Phase II the PPI recruited a network of NSAs. The NSAs have reportedly [forged effective links](#) with governments and law enforcement agencies and have taken the lead in inputting activities into the ADAM database.

UNODC has also developed the “Rainbow Strategy”, which is an umbrella framework to facilitate the implementation of policy level recommendations. The Strategy consists of [several operational](#) plans and includes the Regional Programme on Afghanistan which was launched in December 2011. Agreed to by Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, this programme focuses on regional law enforcement cooperation, regional cooperation in criminal matters, prevention and treatment of addiction among vulnerable groups. The Caspian Sea Initiative was also established in September 2007 as [part of UNODC’s Rainbow Strategy](#) and focuses on engaging countries sharing borders with the Caspian Sea to cooperate in regional and international counter narcotics efforts.⁴² In February 2008, the government of Turkmenistan and UNODC also established the [Turkmen Border Initiative](#). The programme consists of strengthening investigation capacity, increasing interdiction through the deployment of Mobile Team units inside the country and alongside the borders and interagency cooperation focusing on Afghanistan and Iran.

⁴¹ This first phase was principally a [regional coordination programme](#) for countries affected by Afghan heroin trafficking, and concentrated principally on strengthening border controls, continuing to develop regional cooperation, and on activities within the field of Counter Narcotics Enforcement (CNE) including legal reform and institutional frameworks.

⁴² In December 2010, Russia and Iran announced that they [signed a Memorandum of Understanding](#) outlining cooperative efforts for both countries to address drug trafficking on the Caspian Sea.

Box 1. In pursuit of Acetic Anhydride

Acetic anhydride is a precursor chemical essential to the production of heroin. Afghanistan has approximately [300-500 laboratories](#) in operation with an output of approximately 380-400 tons of heroin per year, UNODC estimates. According to “The Global Afghan Opium Trade: A Threat Assessment”, only 0.02% of the [legitimate global trade](#) in acetic anhydride needs to be diverted to satisfy the needs of Afghanistan’s heroin processors. Europe and East Asia are the main regions of origin of the acetic anhydride trafficked into Afghanistan. Acetic anhydride trafficking for Afghan heroin production is multi-directional, but Central and South-Eastern Europe appear to straddle a major artery. Pakistan and Iran are positioned between acetic anhydride-producing regions and an acetic-consuming Afghanistan, making them transit countries for the chemical. According to UNODC, Iran [receives the chemicals](#) across its border with Turkey from northern Iraq and through its southern seaports. Pakistan reportedly accounted for 70% of acetic anhydride seizures in countries bordering Afghanistan (excluding China). In the high-seizure countries of Pakistan and the Iran, 80% of the acetic anhydride seized in 2008-2010 was interdicted in seaports.

The Triangular Initiative was also established as a result of the Paris Pact Expert Round Table recommendations, and aims to [enhance cross-border cooperation](#) in counter-narcotics enforcement among Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. According to UNODC, the Initiative has been a major stimulus in drawing together Ministers and senior officials from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran to discuss and agree upon measures to improve cross-border cooperation. In 2009 a Joint Planning Cell was established in Tehran as a platform for information and intelligence sharing. As of March 2011, joint operations between Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan have resulted in more than three tonnes of drugs seized.

Other Regional Bodies

The Central Asian Regional and Information Coordination Centre (CARICC) was established in 2004 and aims to [facilitate information](#) exchange among Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. According to UNODC, CARICC also assists in the coordination of law enforcement operations of which some have resulted in the disruption of drug trafficking channels, seizures of drugs and arrests of drug dealers, according to UNODC.⁴³ INTERPOL reports that under an agreement signed in April 2012, CARICC will have direct access to INTERPOL’s police information system and global databases, enabling the organisations to [exchange information](#) on drug traffickers and members of terrorist organisations, and identify the proceeds of drug trafficking being used to fund terrorist activity.

The International Narcotics Control Board is a [permanent and independent body](#) which monitors the implementation of the conventions and, where appropriate, makes recommendations to states. It also administers the statistical control of drugs on the basis of data supplied by governments and assesses world requirements of licit drugs with a view to the adaptation of production to those requirements.

UNODC also incorporates counter-narcotics into their various [country programmes](#). For instance, in Pakistan, the Promoting the Rule of Law and Public Health in Pakistan (2010-2014) project contains responses to drug trafficking, including activities to enhance legislative regimes, increase knowledge and capacity of drug enforcement officials and improve interdiction capabilities.

⁴³ CARICC also collaborates with the other regional frameworks in place. For example, in October 2011 officers from the Triangular Initiative’s Joint Planning Cell visited CARICC to practice the use of secure communication channels between the two centres.

Challenges Ahead

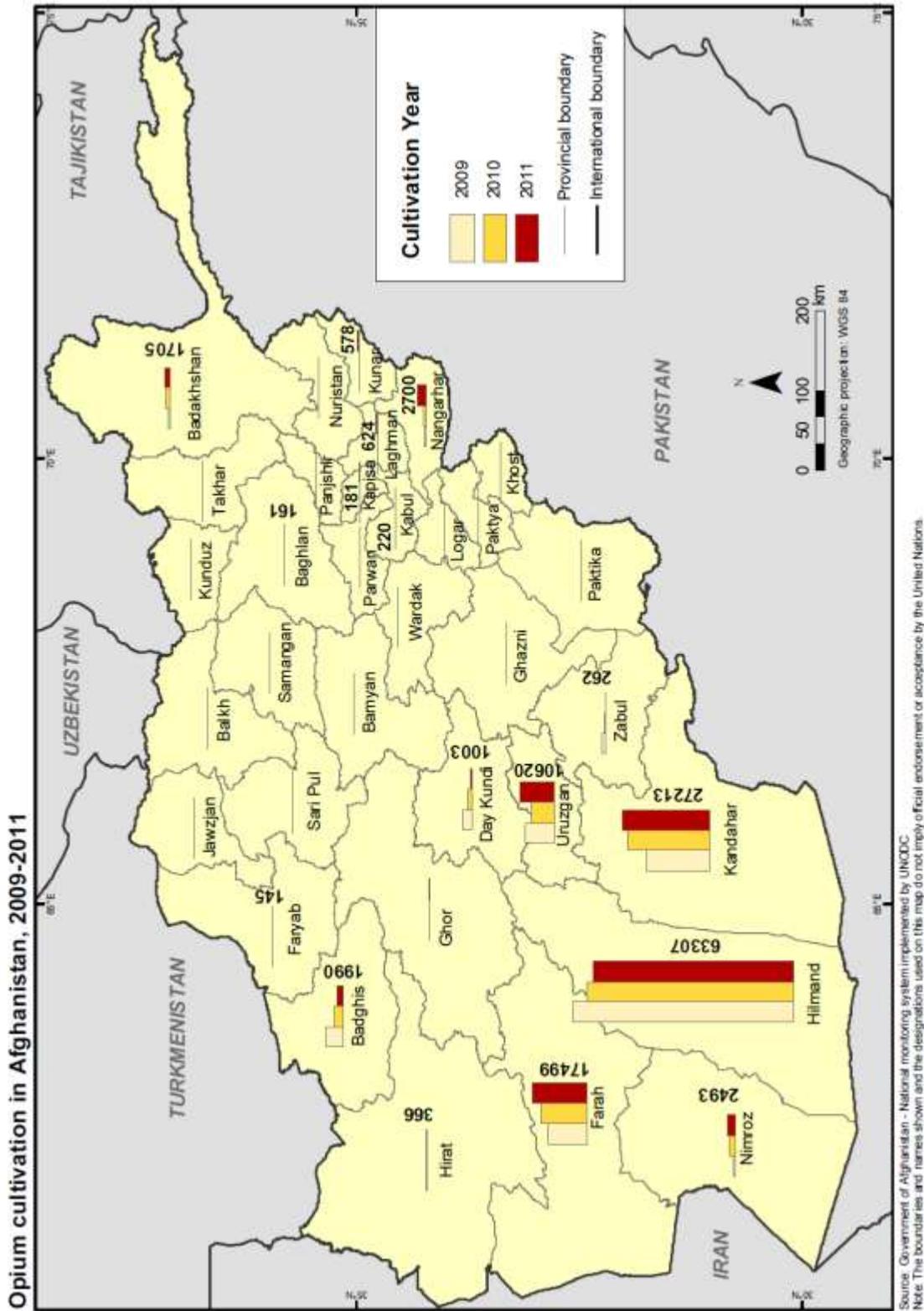
Despite the continued growth in commitment and ambition of the Paris Pact partners, the problem of opiate trafficking from Afghanistan continues to worsen, according to a discussion paper issued by the PPI. According to the Paris Pact, poppy cultivation in Afghanistan was 50% higher from 2006-2009 than when the PPI began in 2003. UNODC and other sources note various challenges continue to hamper the progress in counter-narcotics. A selection of these are summarised below.

- According to the Brookings Institution, interdiction efforts so far have targeted mainly small traders while large traffickers have been left unaffected. Moreover, “interdiction has been manipulated by officials at all level of the government to eliminate drug competition and political opposition”.
- The Center for International Cooperation’s Review of Political Missions for 2011 states that continued mistrust among Central Asian states have often hampered their cooperation on pressing regional issues.
- In the last few years, UNODC has noted a significant regionalisation of organised crime; contacts between criminal groups have become more interregional and more transnational. According to development expert Edwina A. Thompson, the overlapping nature of formal and informal financial services in the region complicates efforts to counter drug money laundering.
- Drug trafficking organisations are usually well connected to the apparatus of government power, whether in the political leadership or local administration, according to “Afghanistan’s Drug Industry”. Moreover, drug trafficking organisations do not necessarily utilise a formal hierarchical structure. Criminal networks can have a core group that makes key decisions and provides strategic direction; the implementation of these decisions is then carried out by other parts of the network organisation. This makes it difficult to track and prosecute those involved.
- Officials have noted a need for increasing the capacity to monitor and search shipping containers in airports, seaports and dry ports at key transit points and in destination countries. Fostering intelligence sharing between ports and law enforcement authorities in key countries and regions would, according to UNODC, help step up interdiction of both opiates and precursor chemicals. Only some 2% of the millions of containers shipped every year across the globe can be physically searched.

Conclusion

According to a recent UNODC threat assessment, the further drugs move away from their source, the more fragmented drug shipments become, thus making it extremely difficult for law enforcement agencies to detect and intercept them. According to a World Bank working paper, global experience suggests that success in eliminating or at least sharply reducing narcotics production in one country has not reduced global production on a sustained basis — production instead tends to shift to other countries with weak governance and other conditions conducive to narcotics production. The paper finds that, without measures to reduce demand in the destination markets, there is a risk that reduced opium production in Afghanistan would merely result in the “displacement” of production elsewhere.

Annex A. Opium Cultivation in Afghanistan (Hectares) by Province, 2009-2011



Source: UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011, Summary Findings.

Annex B. Opium Cultivation (2006-11) and Eradication (2010-2011) in Afghanistan⁴⁴

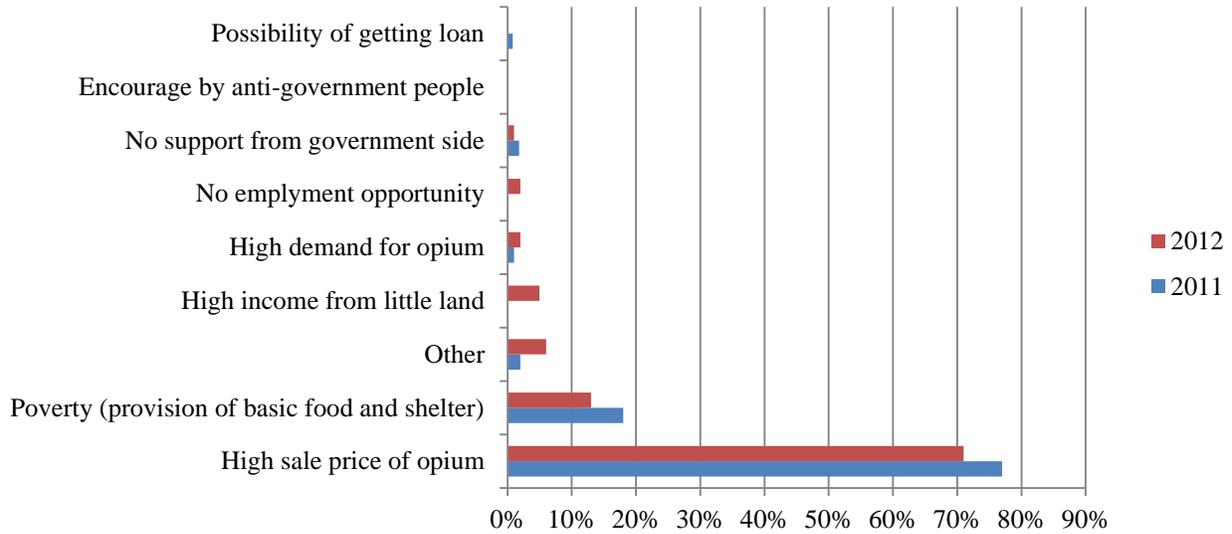
PROVINCE	Cultivation 2006 (ha)	Cultivation 2007 (ha)	Cultivation 2008 (ha)	Cultivation 2009 (ha)	Cultivation 2010 (ha)	Cultivation 2011 (ha)	Change 2010-2011 (%)	Eradication in 2010 (ha)	Eradication in 2011 (ha)
Kabul	80	500	310	132	152	220	+45%	0.48	80
Khost	133	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Logar	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Paktia	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Panjshir	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Parwan	124	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Wardak	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Ghazni	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Paktika	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Central Region	337	500	310	132	152	220	45%	0.48	80
Kapisa	282	835	436	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	181	NA	1	5
Kunar	932	446	290	164	154	578	+275%	0	1
Laghman	710	561	425	135	234	624	+166%	10	21
Nangarhar	4,872	18,739	Poppy-free	294	719	2,700	+276%	16	61
Nuristan	1,516	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Eastern Region	8,312	20,581	1,151	593	1,107	4,082	269%	27	89
Badakhshan	13,056	3,642	200	557	1,100	1,705	+55%	302	367
Takhar	2,178	1,211	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	12	0
Kunduz	102	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
North-eastern Region	15,336	4,853	200	557	1,100	1,705	55%	314	367
Baghlan	2,742	671	475	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	161	NA	0	31
Balkh	7,232	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Bamyan	17	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Faryab	3,040	2,866	291	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	145	NA	0	2
Jawzjan	2,024	1,085	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Samangan	1,960	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Sari Pul	2,252	260	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	0
Northern Region	19,267	4,882	766	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	305	NA	0	34
Hilmand	69,324	102,770	103,590	69,833	65,045	63,307	-3%	1,602	1,940
Kandahar	12,619	16,615	14,623	19,811	25,835	27,213	+5%	0	287
Uruzgan	9,703	9,204	9,939	9,224	7,337	10,620	+45%	15	154
Zabul	3,210	1,611	2,335	1,144	483	262	-46%	0	85
Day Kundi	7,044	3,346	2,273	3,002	1,547	1,003	-35%	0	235
Southern Region	101,900	133,546	132,760	103,014	100,247	102,405	2%	1,617	2,701
Badghis	3,205	4,219	587	5,411	2,958	1,990	-33%	0	36
Farah	7,694	14,865	15,010	12,405	14,552	17,499	+20%	198	212
Ghor	4,679	1,503	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	Poppy-free	NA	0	43
Hirat	2,287	1,525	266	556	360	366	+2%	159	227
Nimroz	1,955	6,507	6,203	428	2,039	2,493	+22%	0	20
Western Region	19,820	28,619	22,066	18,800	19,909	22,348	12%	357	539
Total (rounded)	165,000	193,000	157,000	123,000	123,000	131,000	7%	2,316	3,810

Source: *UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011.*

⁴⁴ A province is defined as poppy-free when it is estimated to have less than 100 ha of opium cultivation. Due to administrative boundary changes, estimates for Farah and Nimroz for 2009 and later were calculated considering parts of Khash Rod district, the main opium cultivating district in Nimroz, as being in Farah province. Figures for 2008 and before include all of Khas Rod district in Nimroz Province.

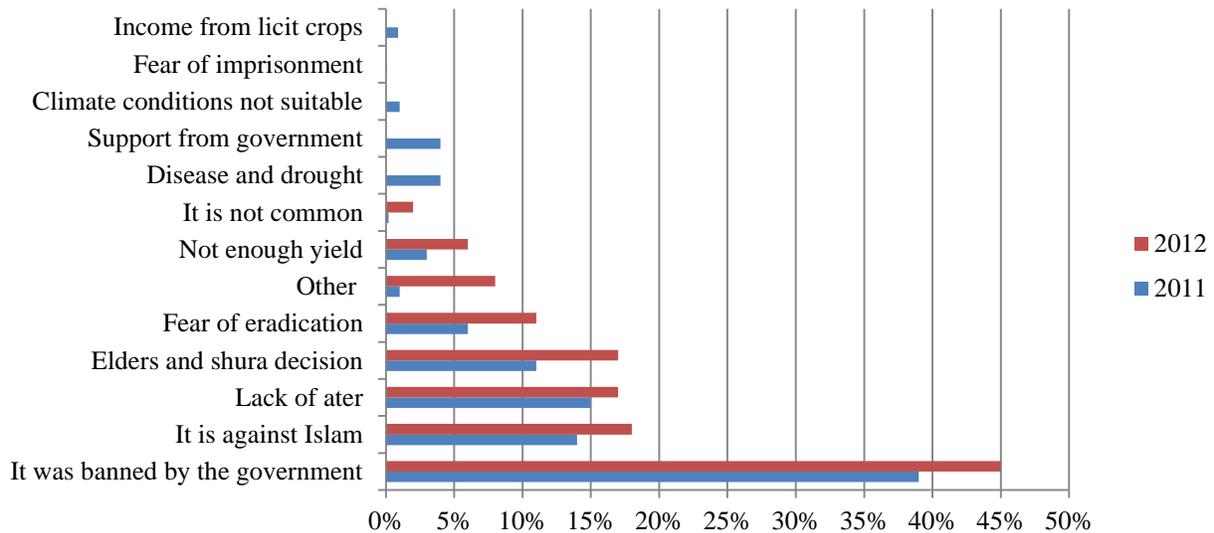
Annex C. Reasons for Cultivating & Not Cultivating Opium

Reasons for Growing Opium Poppies Cited by Farmers



Source: [UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Risk Assessment, April 2012.](#)

Reasons for Not Growing Opium Poppies Cited by Farmers



Source: [UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Risk Assessment, April 2012.](#)

Annex D. Further Resources on Poppies and Illicit Drugs in Afghanistan

Readers interested in this issue may wish to refer to the documents listed below, several of which have been specifically referenced in this volume.

- Adam Pain and Paula Kantor, “[Local institutions, livelihoods and vulnerability](#): lessons from Afghanistan”. London: Overseas Development Institute, Humanitarian Policy Group, April 2012.
- Christopher M. Blanchard, [Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy](#) Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, August 2009.
- Christopher Ward, David Mansfield, Peter Oldham and William Byrd, “[Afghanistan: Economic Incentives and Development Initiatives to Reduce Opium Production](#)”. Kabul: World Bank, 2008.
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- David Mansfield, “[Between a Rock and a Hard Place](#)”. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit and the European Commission, October 2011.
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- Doris Buddenberg, [Afghanistan’s Fluctuating Poppy Production: More Than a Poverty Problem](#), Kabul: Afghan Analysts Network, May 2012.
- Fabrice Pothier, [Reframing Counter-narcotics Policy in Afghanistan](#), Carnegie Endowment, Washington, DC: April 2009.
- Felbab-Brown, [U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy in Afghanistan](#) Brookings Institution, Washington, DC: October 2009.
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- John A. Glaze [Opium And Afghanistan](#): Reassessing U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, October 2007.
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- UNODC, "[The Global Afghan Opium Trade](#)". Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, October 2011.
- URD (NGO), "[Strategies to Counter Opiate Production in Afghanistan: Are we on the right track?](#)". Kabul: URD, June 2010
- US Department of Defense, "[Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan](#)", Washington DC: April 2012.
- Vanda Felbab-Brown, "[International Counternarcotics Policies](#)". Testimony Before the US House of Representative, July 2010.
- Vanda Felbab-Brown, "[International Counternarcotics Policies](#)". Washington DC: Testimony Before the US House of Representatives, July 2010.
- William A. Byrd [Responding to Afghanistan's Opium Economy Challenge](#) Washington DC: World Bank, March 2008.
- William Byrd and David Mansfield, "[Drugs in Afghanistan: A Forgotten Issue?](#)" Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, May 2012.
- William F. Wechsler, "[Counternarcotics Efforts in Afghanistan](#)" Washington DC: Statement Before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control July 2011.

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