



Afghanistan Policy Page

A one-page brief on a major issue concerning U.S. policy and engagement in Afghanistan.

11 February
2010

Counternarcotics in Afghanistan

Take Aways

- The growing of poppies is a **symptom of the lack of effective State governance** in Afghanistan.
- The growing of poppies, production and trafficking of narcotics, and stockpiling of opium **corrupts the whole of Afghan society** and State.
- The illegal narcotics industry in Afghanistan is an **important source of funding for insurgents**.
- Farmers will not starve if they cease growing poppies. Many analysts believe **farmers will be better off without poppies**.

In Quotes

"We take 3% of the revenue and 100% of the blame." **President Hamid Karzai** discussing opium.

Key Facts

123,000 hectares of poppies (the size of **Los Angeles**) were cultivated in 2009, and each year Afghanistan exports approximately **3,500 tons of opium**.

The UK is the lead nation coordinating Afghanistan Counternarcotics issues.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency has been assisting with counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan since 2005 with **Foreign-deployed Advisory and Support Teams**.

- Nearly 100 DEA agents are currently in Afghanistan.
- Three DEA officers were killed in October 2009.

Afghanistan's Counternarcotics Strategy involves the efforts of **several Afghan ministries**:

- The **Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics**, headed by Minister Zarar.
- The **Ministry of the Interior's** Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan enforce Afghanistan's drug laws.
- Several Ministries, including **Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Agriculture, Water and Energy**, share the mission of providing alternative livelihoods for poppy farmers.

Counternarcotics under the Taliban: The Taliban regime only had one year (2000) during which they declared that opium cultivation was illegal. *However, the export of opium was not forbidden*, and the Taliban regime profitably cornered the market with their stockpiles during the following harvest season.

In the News

In a report issued on 10 February 2010, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime projected a stable opium crop in Afghanistan in 2010. Opium cultivation in Afghanistan has decreased by one third (36%) over the past two years, from a record high of 193,000 hectares in 2007 to 123,000 hectares in 2009. [UNODC](#)

Further Reading

[United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#)

Key Issues

Illicit Opium Production – Afghanistan currently supplies **over 90% of the global supply** of illicit opiates, including heroin.

Opium Funds the Insurgents – Currently **insurgents accrue over \$125 million annually** (10-15% of their total funding) through levies on poppy farmers, protection fees on processing labs, transit fees on drug convoys, and taxation on imports of opium chemical precursors.

Revenue and Trafficking – The equivalent of 3,500 tons of opium is trafficked through Afghanistan's porous borders each year: **40% through Iran, 30% through Pakistan**, and the rest via Central Asia. Between 2002 and 2008 Afghan farmers earned a total of about \$6.4 billion, and Afghan traffickers earned around \$18 billion from opiate processing and trade.

Production and Stockpiling – Due to the dramatic production increases after 2005, around 12,000 tons of opium are stockpiled in Afghanistan. 13,000 tons of heroin precursor chemicals (controlled and non-controlled) are imported annually into Afghanistan; very little is intercepted.

Major Challenges

Large Criminal Networks – Groups with vertical integration in the illicit narcotics industry with links to corrupt government officials or Taliban militants violently resist interdictions.

Banking – 5-10% of the \$65 billion annual opium revenue is laundered by informal banking systems; the rest is laundered through complex, though legal, international trade activities.

Security Environment – 98% of Afghan opium production is concentrated in the unstable south and west, making enforcement and rural development for alternative livelihoods difficult.

Unemployment – Poppy cultivation and harvesting is very labor intensive. Wheat cultivation, a proposed alternative, would employ 88% less labor; unemployment is already around 40%.

Government Credibility – Analysts have commented that the lack of a credible counternarcotics communications campaign has slowed progress towards convincing Afghans to stop growing poppy.

Possible Questions

- What is being done to persuade farmers to stop growing poppies?
- How is the effectiveness of alternative livelihood programs being measured and evaluated?
- What is being done to encourage regional cooperation for drug interdictions and precursor chemical interception?
- How are international development assistance and counternarcotics programs being coordinated in Afghanistan?

The [Afghanistan Congressional Communications Hub](#) serves Members and staff by providing relevant and accessible information on Afghanistan. It is non-partisan.

Contact ACCH@NewStrategicSecurityInitiative.org if you would like a specific issue paper or to be placed directly on the distribution list.