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MASTERARBEIT / MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Masterarbeit / Title of the Master's Thesis

Poppies and Power – How hegemonic powers
influenced the Afghan opium economy from the 19th
century to the present day

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2017 / Vienna 2017

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

A 066 805

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Masterstudium Globalgeschichte und Global Studies

Betreut von / Supervisor:

a.o.Univ.-Prof. Dr. Erich Landsteiner

Acknowledgments

I want to thank all those who took the time to read my thesis, and who helped me through it – especially my family (Philip, Heidi and Chris), my friends (Julia and Alex) and Rolf Bauer of the University of Vienna.

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Glossary

Ashar: Reciprocal labour arrangements with relatives, neighbours and friends.

Charas: Cannabis

Faraday: Operation Faraday was led by the British and aimed to support the Mujahedeen in their fight against the Soviet Union.

Golden Crescent: Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan form the Golden Crescent, one of the world's most important areas of production of opium and heroin.

Golden Triangle: The Golden triangle is formed by Laos, Thailand and Myanmar. The term describes one of the areas of primary production of opium and heroin.

Haram: Forbidden. In Islamic countries, all drugs, including alcohol, are haram.

Hisb-e Whadat: a party founded in 1989, combining several previously existing groups. The Hisb-e Whadat is known for its pro-Hazara stance.

Jirga - Loya Jirga: The Jirga is a mode of government used by Pashtuns in Afghanistan, by which tribes, in a meeting, make decisions important to them. The Loya Jirga is the mode by which the ruler of the country was decided in the past.

Jerib: Unit of land measurement (roughly 1/5 hectare).

Kafirs: Unbelievers of the west.

Khans: Landowners who hold power, on a regional, local, or national level. Khans played a large role in traditional Afghanistan.

Lancing: The process of lancing refers to the incision of an Opium poppy pod to access the raw Opium within.

Northern Alliance: A military front, consisting of former Mujahedeen that formed in 1996 in order to fight the Taliban.

Pashtun: Afghan ethnicity.

Pashtunwali: A sort of code of conduct used by Pashtun tribes in Afghanistan. It sets out some laws, as well as indications of how a Pashtun is to behave socially.

Salaam: Informal credit system, often taken out against Opium.

Sura: A section of the Koran.

Shabnama: „night letters“; these are notes, usually in the form of handwritten posters or pamphlets, circulated with information, for instance information about how an enemy will be defeated.

Zakat: Zakat is an Islamic tax, usually at 2.5 % of the annual disposable income and savings that each Muslim is expected to give to the needy.

Abbreviations

CTPC: Centre for International Crime Prevention; A forerunner of UNODC, was to united with UNDCP

DCCU: Drug Control and Coordination Units. These are the drug control authorities of the Taliban, who occupied offices in a number of provinces in 2001.

HVA: Helmand Valley Authority

IMU: Islamic Movement for Uzbekistan

INCB: International Narcotics Control board

ISAF: International Security Assistance Force

ISI: Pakistani Inter Services Intelligence

KLA: Kosovo Liberation army

MCN: Ministry of Counternarcotics in Afghanistan

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

OAC: Opium advisory committee of the League of Nations

PDPA: People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan

PKK: Kurdistan Worker's Party, Azerbaijan

SAS: Special Air Service – Part of the British army

SCN: Supervisory Council of the North

UNDCP: United Nations International Drug Control Programme, which later merged with the CTPC to become a forerunner of the UNODC

UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

UNODCCP: United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention. In 2002 this became the UNODC

1. Introduction

The country of Afghanistan has, especially in recent years, become infamous for two things: Its flourishing drug production and terrorism, which are often analysed in tandem. Politicians or researchers trying to limit the drug economy from a supply-side perspective are thus drawn to the country, and in recent years have tried to limit the opium output through a number of, largely inefficient, measures.

When production levels of opium first began to soar in the 1980s, and Afghanistan became the subject of many discussions, few considered or even realised that the country had had a long history with opium. While we cannot be sure when exactly the opium poppy was first grown in the country, some sources state that it was brought in by Alexander the Great's armies, in the fourth century BCE or imported from Greece or Egypt as a trade commodity.¹ Definitive accounts of the country's opium economy exist from the 18th century CE onwards.² Opium was not newly introduced to the market at this stage, as it had played a role culturally, but was irrelevant for the economy.

Opium was first illegalised in Afghanistan in 1945, a factor which would fundamentally change many aspects of the opium production chain, especially as illegality heightened the profits. In the following decades quantities of opium produced in Afghanistan increased, and as new production processes arrived, alongside new technologies, a variety of work within this shadow economy emerged.

This thesis argues that, in order to understand the opium economy in Afghanistan today, we have to be able to place it into a wider context of drug production in Afghanistan over the past centuries, thus, a long time period will be analysed (1809-present day). The primary focus will be on the role of hegemonic powers within the country, and how they have affected this economy. Additionally, we will consider internal factors profiting this economy. The overarching research question of the thesis is as follows:

What international and internal factors led to an increasing opium production within Afghanistan?

¹ David Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan: Opium, Outlaws and Scorpion Tales* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), pp. 59–60.

² Graham Farrell and John Thorne, 'Where Have All the Flowers Gone?: Evaluation of the Taliban Crackdown against Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan', *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 16.2 (2005), 81–91 (p. 81).

Opium is considered in the thesis primarily as a commodity, which has played a role within and beyond the country. It will analyse the role of this commodity for the country of Afghanistan, and it will take into account external influences and pressures on it.³

The first chapter of this thesis will review the existent research on the subject, while the second chapter will give an overview of the chain of production of opium. The main section will consider the growth of the opium economy throughout the past decades. Due to the extent of the time period covered by the research, the main section has been divided into five phases, each of which was marked by different hegemonic influences.

The **first phase** (1809-1945) examines British influence on Afghanistan and its opium economy. This was the only phase in which opium was produced and traded legally in Afghanistan. Within this phase, there was a small but steady production of opium, which saw consumption within the region, as well as a growing export structure to other states and continents. The **second phase** (1946-1978) is the first in which opium was traded illegally, but on a much smaller scale than was to follow. While opium was first formally outlawed in 1945, it continued to be traded much in the same way it had been before, without any real fear of repercussion for the grower, before there were further bans on production, this time alongside attempts to actually decrease production. After opium was effectively outlawed, its profitability grew, as there was an increased market for the product. Additionally, there were fewer supplier countries with a decreased supply, especially within the region. Both the US and the Soviet Union exercised influence on Afghanistan within this period. The **third phase** (1979-1989) focuses on Soviet presence in the country, a period in which opium production grew to unprecedented scales. As the licit economies decreased in this phase, opium quickly became a major source of income in the war-torn country. In part, it was also used as a method of funding the war against the invading forces. This time period is also of interest, as there was a very clear hegemonic interest in the central Asian country. The **fourth phase** (1989-2000) examines a period in which, at least at first sight, Afghans governed their own country. The chapter will consider what international influences we can find in the period of renewed Afghan civil war and the rulership of the Taliban. Once more, opium became a de-facto licit economy, as most rulers in the country did nothing to suppress opium production. During this period, there was no consistent rule, rather different sections of Afghanistan were ruled by different rulers and by different interests. The fifth and **final period** (since 2001) will take an in-depth look at the influence of the international forces on the opium economy in Afghanistan. From 2001

³ Carl Trocki, *Opium, Empire and the Global Political Economy: A Study of the Asian Opium Trade 1750-1950*, New. (London ; New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 8.

onwards, there was once more an obvious international presence, which took particular interest in suppressing the ongoing opium economy. The various attempts to offer alternative income sources have not led to a decrease in the size of the opium production.

In order to analyse the role of illicit drugs in Afghanistan, the thesis will focus primarily on the production and consumption of opium, as well as in the later years that of heroin. While there also has been a significant hashish culture in Afghanistan throughout the country's history, opium consumption is usually considered a more important and pressing issue, and thus is worth of an in-depth analysis.

The thesis will take into account both policies of rulers targeted at drug production and those only indirectly affecting the economy. As such, we will consider economic and political policies that benefitted the emergence of a shadow economy. Finally, the thesis will examine the influence of the opium industry on the Afghan population, state, and national economy.

There are a number of factors, generally, that benefit the emergence of a shadow economy, like Afghanistan's opium economy. While this thesis will consider the reasons for the growth of this economy in more detail throughout, we must first attempt to answer a more general question: What conditions need to be fulfilled for a country such as Afghanistan, which only supplied a very small share of opium to the world market in the 19th century, to become the world's largest producer of illicit opium in the 21st century? We can identify some general factors that hold true not just in Afghanistan, but also in other countries supplying illegal drugs to the world market: These factors are demand, economic factors, a culture of prohibition and a weak central state. There are also more general advantages that allow a state to become a larger producer than other, potential producer countries, such as the soil or the climate, which may positively impact the potential output and thus profitability of the production of illicit drugs. All of these factors influence whether a country becomes a manufacturer of illicit goods, and to what extent. These factors represent the framework in which we can consider the changes brought about by the hegemonic powers in Afghanistan. We can examine the growth of the illicit economy, through this framework and consider why it grew so substantially in the 1980s, and not before this period.

The first factor to be considered is that of **demand**: There must be demand for the drug in question. It is difficult to state exactly how elastic the demand for illegal drugs is, as there are two different factors: For heavy users, demand is very elastic, meaning they will continue to purchase drugs even with increased prices and difficulty. Casual users meanwhile have a much less elastic demand, so that the demand will decrease through external factors. We can, factoring in these two types of drug users, assume that there is probably a relatively low

constant demand that may increase due to external factors.⁴ This question of demand can be of increased importance if other countries cease or stall production of an illicit substance, benefitting states who continue to produce a substance. If demand remains the same, many theorists confirm, production will not cease but rather shift to different centres of production.⁵ For instance, a consistent demand for opioids meant Afghanistan could become a producer when other countries, such as Turkey, ceased their production in the 1970s. The global demand remained a constant, but a lack in suppliers in certain countries saw a shift in production centres.

The state of a country's **national economy** may also encourage production. For instance, a country may suffer from high unemployment, or underdevelopment in other areas, such as issues in the agricultural sector or transport sector, leading to a low profitability of other agricultural products.⁶ A weak overall economy can therefore be a contributing factor when considering the production of illicit substances, as it is an additional incentive, due to the relative profitability of narcotics over other products.

Additionally, the **international economy and environment** may affect the production of narcotic drugs. Not only can they cause a rising demand, but they could also incentivise producers to turn to other substances. One example for this are the falling prices of cocoa and coffee in the 1990s on the world market, which led to an increase in drug production worldwide, which was more profitable.⁷ This was facilitated by the fact that the climatic conditions were also suitable for these types of crops.

Related to the economic factors is the **culture of prohibition**, meaning the drug in question must be illegal. This increases the drugs' profitability, but also causes insecurity and the criminalisation of cultivation and trafficking. This policy of prohibition has been used in the fight against drug consumption in the past decades, despite most theorists now confirming it is ineffective and does not limit production.⁸ Prohibitionist policies towards drug consumption and production have seen reduced support in recent years. The current consensus

⁴ Jeffrey A. Miron and Jeffrey Zwiebel, 'The Economic Case against Drug Prohibition', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 9.4 (1995), 175–92 (p. 186).

⁵ Charles A. Laffiteau, 'The Balloon Effect: The Failure of Supply Side Strategies in the War on Drugs', *Ecpnet.eu*, p. 3
<https://www.academia.edu/889972/The_Balloon_Effect_The_Failure_of_Supply_Side_Strategies_in_the_War_on_Drugs> [accessed 1 May 2017].

⁶ Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, *Opium: Uncovering the Politics of the Poppy*, First American Edition edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010); p. 73.

⁷ Norbert Neumann, 'Einführung', in *Der Planet Der Drogen: Analyse Einer Kriminellen Weltmacht*, by Alain Labrousse (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996), pp. 9–20 (pp. 14–15).

⁸ Julia Buxton, *The Political Economy of Narcotics* (Black Point, Canada; London; New York: Zed Books, 2006) p. 2.

among most commentators is that prohibition cannot work, as the burden of eradicating a drug problem is simply shifted to the producing countries.⁹ In a case like Afghanistan it must be clear that prohibition is not a viable solution: The state was unable, in many of the examined periods, to truly attempt to eradicate drugs and as such a prohibitionist campaign would not work at a state-level. From a more global perspective, prohibitionist policies actually contribute to the increase in drug production, as they help in raising prices of illicit drugs, thus providing further incentive to produce them. While there was, then, a global prohibitionist policy, driving up the prices of drugs, and increasing profits, internally, little was being done to enforce these policies. Rather the prohibitionist policies of the surrounding countries, as well as of other states, meant Afghanistan was becoming a perfect candidate to turn into one of the world's leading producer of drugs.

The country may also have some **advantages** over others in producing the drugs, or in trafficking them. While the country may have become a producer regardless, this would see it rising as a producing state more quickly, and having a potentially higher output. For instance, there may be some previous expertise: The country may have produced the substance before it became illegal. Additionally, geographical features play a role. This can mean a wide variety of factors, for instance if a neighbouring country has a high demand for illicit substances, or if routes that can be used for trafficking already exist.¹⁰ A country must also have the right climatic conditions needed for planting specific crops: countries can be particularly well suited to produce certain crops due to natural factors. This also holds true for Afghanistan, where poppy fields have a much higher yield than in other producing countries.

There may be a **weak central state**, unable to exert enough power to regulate its illegal economies. This can include, in some cases, corruption within the state, which prevents drug control measures from being carried out effectively. This becomes clear in the case of Laos and Thailand, to name a few. Both had opium production that declined significantly as stability within the country increased.¹¹ It is also no coincidence that some of the countries exporting the most illicit substances world-wide also show signs of a weak central state.¹² Next to Afghanistan, we can observe this also in Columbia¹³.

⁹ Daniel Mejia and Pascual Restrepo, 'Why Is Strict Prohibition Collapsing?', in *Ending the Drug Wars- Report of the LSE Expert Group on the Economics of Drug Policy* (London, 2014), p. 28.

¹⁰ (UNODC) United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2015* (New York, 2015), p. xii.

¹¹ Hermann Kreutzmann, 'Afghanistan and the Opium World Market: Poppy Production and Trade', *Iranian Studies*, 40.5 (2007), 605–21 (p.608).

¹² Robert I. Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 6.

¹³ Francisco Thoumi and Susan Windybank, 'What Creates Competitive Advantage for Drug Production? Lessons from Colombia', *Policy*, 23.1 (2007), 16–21 (pp. 18–19).

Goodhand¹⁴ additionally introduces the idea of a borderland spaces, which are usually non-state areas. This concept can be used to give a definition of the Afghan situation. Goodhand argues that in borderland countries, to which he counts Afghanistan, state-building has often been met with resistance, and that the occurrence of such a borderland makes possible an increased production of drugs. He identifies three different types of borderland, namely the conventional borderland, those borderlands lying within states and lastly state-wide borderlands. These three types do overlap: For instance, we can see the conventional borderlands on the Afghan-Pakistani or Afghan-Tajik border, incidentally both regions are major players in the opium economy. The second type of borderlands are those regions which, partially due to geographical reasons, are inhabited by people who tend to be more resistant towards the central state's modernising attempts. This can be seen in particular in Afghanistan, with its mountainous regions and arid landscapes, which have often been an impediment to centralising and modernising movements. Lastly Afghanistan as a whole could be identified as a state-wide borderland region. Examples of this can be found throughout Afghan history, where the country often acted as a buffer zone between different imperial forces, and thus was at the intersection of different hegemonic powers.¹⁵

Within Afghanistan, one major reason for the weakened central state is the diversity of its nation, which causes the population to identify only to a limited extent with the central rulers, and rather turning towards smaller identity groups. The country is not a homogenous state. With different ethnicities, varying landscapes, and opposing religious views, it can be seen as a melting pot. The difference in ethnicity, visible through people's appearance and sense of identity, is largely due to the country's history.¹⁶ In Afghanistan a sense of nationalism in the western sense is rare, existing primarily among the urban elites. These are quite unrepresentative of the country's other parts, where the population lives in rural and remote areas with only minimal state-wide political consciousness.¹⁷ Nationalism only really exists when opposed to foreign invaders: This explains the increased sense of unity visible at times of foreign occupation, such as the British or the Soviet Union's invasions. Generally speaking, we can assume that there is only very little national consciousness, due to the great number of ethnicities, and conflicting languages, customs and physical appearance. We can identify a

¹⁴ Jonathan Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars: The Opium Economy in Afghanistan', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 5.2 (2005), (191–216), pp. 193–95.

¹⁵ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', pp. 193–95.

¹⁶ Peter Snoy, 'Die Ethnischen Gruppen', in *Afghanistan - Natur, Geschichte Und Kultur, Staat, Gesellschaft Und Wirtschaft*, ed. by Willy Kraus (Tübingen / Basel: Erdmann, 1972), pp. 165–94 (p. 165).

¹⁷ Anthony Hyman, 'Nationalism in Afghanistan', *International Journal of Middle East Studies (Special Issue: Nationalism and the Colonial Legacy in the Middle East)*, 34.2 (2002), 299–315 (pp. 299–300).

number of foreign influences when considering culture and physical appearance: Arab, Moghul, Central Asian, Persian, European, Sino-Siberian, Turkish and Indian influences are clearest. Only very few ethnicities are actually indigenous to the region.¹⁸ The different ethnicities prevalent in the country indicate the difficulty of a national identity¹⁹: In the case of some of these groups the ethnicity may have its 'own' state outside of Afghanistan²⁰. This means that a sense of national identity and allegiance may be difficult, or even impossible, to achieve.²¹ Estimates tell us that Pashtuns, at 42%, form the largest ethnicity in Afghanistan. Pashtuns have been a majority ethnicity in Afghanistan throughout its history, and particularly in the last three centuries.²² Pashtuns are divided by tribes, which are also independent unities. Identification is usually stronger towards one's tribe than the ethnicity as a whole.²³ Pashtuns have historically dominated administration (both the military and the bureaucracy).²⁴ There are several nomadic Pashtun groups. Pashtuns are almost always tribally organised, and tend to live in the mountainous regions in the east and south.²⁵ The second largest group are the Tajiks, who tend to live in settled communities, making up 27% of the population. Uzbeks (9%) are the largest of the Turkman groups, the smaller of which tended to be nomadic. Hazaras (9%), who are Shia, were often enslaved and suffered severe discrimination.²⁶ Other minority groups include Aimaq (4%), Turkmen (3%), Baluch (2%), Nuristani, Pashai, as well as several smaller groups (the latter make up a total of 2% of the population).²⁷

But even the groups as such are not homogenous. To name one example from the Pashtu ethnicity groups: In some tribes, especially near the bigger cities, a process of 'Tajikizing' could be observed in the 1980s, which meant that a tribe's mother tongue changed from Pashto to Dari, even though said tribe may still be a Pashto-majority in terms of ethnicity.²⁸ Generally

¹⁸ Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 55–57.

¹⁹ The following aims to give a brief overview of the different ethnicities inhabiting Afghanistan today. It does not include every ethnicity to be found in Afghanistan, as the country continues to be in a state of change, with ethnicities and identities overlapping, and reforming.

²⁰ See: Tajikistan

²¹ Zalmay Khalizad, 'The Politics of Ethnicity in Southwest Asia: Political Development or Political Decay?', *Political Science Quarterly*, 99.4 (1984), 657–79 (p. 660).

²² Thomas T. Hammond, *Red Flag Over Afghanistan: The Communist Coup, The Soviet Invasion, And The Consequences* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1983), p. 5.

²³ Snoy, 'Die ethnischen Gruppen', p. 166.

²⁴ Khalizad, 'The Politics of Ethnicity in Southwest Asia', p. 660.

²⁵ Richard Newell and Nancy Peabody Newell, *The Struggle for Afghanistan* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ Press, 1981), pp. 23–25.

²⁶ Newell and Newell, *The struggle for Afghanistan*, pp. 23–25.

²⁷ Wiebke Lamer and Erin Foster, 'Afghan Ethnic Groups: A Brief Investigation', *Civil-Military Fusion Centre*, 2011, p. 1

<http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/CFC_Afg_Monthly_Ethnic_Groups_Aug2011%20v1.pdf> [accessed 14 June 2017].

²⁸ Khalizad, 'The Politics of Ethnicity in Southwest Asia', p. 660.

Dari and Pashto are the most commonly spoken languages,²⁹ although there are 18 languages in the country, originating from four linguistic families^{30, 31} Afghanistan also has different types of settlements. While a large part of the population has always been, and continues to be, dependent on farming, the number of nomads³² also continues to be high.³³

In terms of religion, 80% of the population are Hanafi Sunni. There is also a Shiite minority, as well as Buddhist, Sikh and Jewish Afghans, but only small minorities of other religions. Before the Taliban take-over and the increased presence and prevalence of religion in Afghanistan, the version of Islam practiced and known by most Afghans would have been almost incomparable to the Islamic practices in other states. The faith many Afghans have is supplemented by pre-Muslim practices, and some of these are actually contradictory: For instance, Pashtunwali³⁴ contradicts Suras in regard to the celebration of saints. In the early to mid 20th century however, Pashtunwali would have been adhered to far more strictly than the Koran or the Shari'a.³⁵

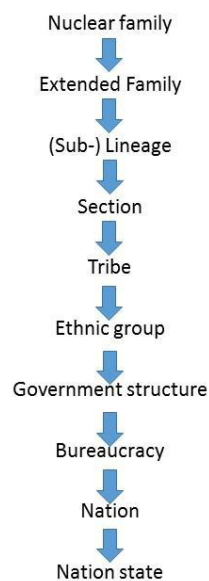


Figure 1 Afghan identification and identities, according to Louis Dupree³⁶

The structure of the state, or at least the past states, formed by Afghans themselves, is quite complicated. Generally, it is a patriarchal society, where women hold, at least formally,

²⁹ Dupree, *Afghanistan*, p. 66.

³⁰ Indo-European, Semitic, Sinic and Dravidian

³¹ Newell and Newell, *The struggle for Afghanistan*, p. 19.

³² Estimated at 2 million 'true' nomads in 1981

³³ Newell and Newell, *The struggle for Afghanistan*, p. 301.

³⁴ A glossary is to be found at the beginning of this thesis.

³⁵ Dupree, *Afghanistan*, pp. 103–11.

³⁶ Dupree, *Afghanistan*, pp. 184–90.

a very weak position, although informally it is much stronger. There are different levels of both a sense of identity and governing, these are shown on the above diagram (**Figure 1**):

According to Dupree, the nuclear family, followed by the extended family, are the smallest units to which Afghans are accountable. The extended family can be seen as the most important social and economic unit, especially among non-literate groups. Generally, the extended family will live in the same village or valley, or if they are nomads, travel together. These smallest, and usually self-reliant, units play the most important role in Afghanistan.³⁷ They are exceptionally important in Afghanistan, as these units fulfil many of the functions the state is not able to: They are responsible for the welfare and social security of the group members. The sub-lineage has residual economic and political functions, but Afghans of the same sub-lineage do not usually live near each other, so these functions are lessened. Section and tribe are each important to Afghans, and far more so than the actual ethnic group to which one belongs. The government to which Afghans formally adhere, as well as the nation-state of which they form a part only play a minor role compared to the former and smaller units.³⁸

In the literature about Afghanistan the *qawm* is often referred to as the most important identity group. This poses a significant challenge to any author writing about Afghanistan, as it is not a truly defined term. It can mean extended family, ethnic group, or anything in-between. *Qawm* identity is “considered to be the lowest common denominator of group affiliations in Afghanistan” – it can essentially mean any solidarity group. Everyone belongs to a *qawm*, specifically in the more rural regions, but not necessarily to a tribe.³⁹

We can see that Afghanistan is defined by the different structures, from village level to the central state, in which a sense of community or identity may reside. This makes it difficult to form a strong central state, which would constantly have to consult, or at least take into account, the opinions of the smaller groups residing within the country. Today, there are only few institutions within the country that came into being through its citizens, while most were implanted during periods of hegemonic influence on the country.⁴⁰

To take this into account, however, we have to look back at the country’s history in some more detail: Before the drug economy led to Afghanistan becoming known as a narco-state, Afghanistan had gained another nickname: The graveyard of empires. Afghanistan had

³⁷ Newell and Newell, *The struggle for Afghanistan*, pp. 19–20.

³⁸ Dupree, *Afghanistan*, pp. 184–90.

³⁹ Olivier Roy, ‘Afghanistan: Back to Tribalism or on to Lebanon?’, *Third World Quarterly*, 11.4 (1989), 70–82 (p. 71).

⁴⁰ Barnett R. Rubin, ‘The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan’, *World Development*, 28.10 (2000), 1789–1803 (pp. 1188–89).

The term ‘The Great Game’ describes the Anglo-Russian rivalry over central Asia in the 19th and 20th centuries.

been invaded by several rulers and empires throughout its history, which caused it to be known as a place where emperors were doomed to fail, a rhetoric that influences reporting on the country to this day. We will first consider Afghanistan's history with invasions and other empires, to reach conclusions about the countries' present and more recent past; its history explains, for instance, the ethnic make-up of the country. Afghanistan has been, not just for centuries but for millennia, a region of interest to larger empires, as it was a land passed through by traders, conquerors and nomads. In its earliest history, whose starting point is disputed by about a thousand years (2000 BCE-1000 BCE) the country seems to have been developing towards city states.⁴¹ Early cultural interchange was facilitated by trade movements, as well as invasions (for instance by Indo-Iranians). Nomadic movements of people enabled a particular cultural exchange with the Arabic world, as well as other regions: The Silk Road, which connected China and Europe, crosses through Afghanistan.⁴²

The strategic importance of the region which we now know as Afghanistan was not lost on empires: In the sixth century BCE the Achaemenid empire began encroaching on the area, bringing with it the establishment and development of urban centres.⁴³ This development was to continue in the next centuries, which also saw Greek influences. The Achaemenid empire under Darius III experienced significant resistance by the Afghan kingdoms they subdued. Nonetheless, when Alexander the Great fought against the former, a cavalry was supplied by Afghans. Alexander the Great won the battle despite this increase of the Achaemenid's forces, and his empire did not disintegrate until after his death.⁴⁴ The Greek states south of the Hindukush, including the then independent kingdom of Afghanistan, fell to the Saka-Parthian kings by the beginning of the Christian era. The Parthians grip soon weakened, to be followed by the rise of the Kushans.⁴⁵ The period in which the Kushan empire ruled over Afghanistan, around the 2nd century CE, can be seen as a sort of Golden Age for the region, as trade increased and cities developed further. However, a growing threat by the Sasanians and the Hiung-nu would put an end to this. The following centuries would be marked by conflicts and coalitions between Sasanians, Hephthalites and the West-Turks. In Afghanistan, the states, ruled by Kushano-Sasanians, were disunited. In the seventh century, Arabs started moving towards the country. Parts of the country, including Kabul, would remain undefeated for another 300 years.

⁴¹ Klaus Jäkel, 'Fünftausend Jahre Geschichte Auf Dem Boden Des Landes', in *Afghanistan - Natur, Geschichte Und Kultur, Staat, Gesellschaft Und Wirtschaft*, ed. by Willy Kraus (Tübingen / Basel: Erdmann, 1972), pp. 95–125 (pp. 96–99).

⁴² Jäkel, 'Fünftausend Jahre Geschichte Auf Dem Boden Des Landes', pp. 99–101.

⁴³ Dupree, *Afghanistan*, p. 266.

⁴⁴ Dupree, *Afghanistan*, pp. 274–83.

⁴⁵ Dupree, *Afghanistan*, p. 299.

The continuous Arabic influence, as well as a later reform by the Ghaznavids in the 9th century CE, reformed the country, as well as its core religion: Afghanistan, once a majority Buddhist country, became Islamic.⁴⁶ By the 12th century Arab domination of Afghanistan had been more or less broken, the country was now being ruled by the Turks.⁴⁷ Many more influences would follow in the next centuries, including that of Genghis Khan and the Mongolian occupation that would follow his invasion in the 13th century. Between 1501 and 1747 the region of Afghanistan was defined by rivalry between the Persian Safavid dynasty and the Moghul one.⁴⁸ In the 16th and 17th century Afghanistan was marked by increased revolts, alongside increased political involvement by Afghans. Attempts to truly found an empire or state were unsuccessful until the rulership of Ahmad Shah Durrani began in 1747. The rulership of Ahmad Shah is oftentimes seen as the beginning of a modern Afghan state, even though the empire whose size he increased swiftly, would also fall apart with unprecedented speed after his death. The following decades would first see increased prosperity, and then, finally, rivalry between French, British and Russian hegemonies in the beginning 19th century.⁴⁹ Afghanistan truly gained strategic importance in the 19th century, as both Britain and Russia expanded their empires towards Central Asia. The countries eventually decided to leave Afghanistan as a sort of buffer state⁵⁰ – a decision which will be expanded on in Chapter 4.1. This then is where the story of opium truly starts in Afghanistan.

This brief history allows two conclusions about Afghanistan as a country: Firstly, we can see that Afghanistan as we know it today is a very heterogenous state, which was formed, to a large extent, through the interests of neighbours and hegemonic powers. It was influenced over millennia by other empires, who would finally cause the country's borders to become as they are today. The hegemonic influence on Afghanistan in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries was not an entirely new development. Borders in Afghanistan were essentially fluid, due to the great number of rulers.⁵¹ Secondly this history of invasions by so many different states, explains the country's ethnic diversity – it is a melting pot of cultures, ethnicities, languages and even religions, something that must be taken into account when considering its past and future.

⁴⁶ Jäkel, 'Fünftausend Jahre Geschichte Auf Dem Boden Des Landes', pp. 113–15.

⁴⁷ Dupree, *Afghanistan*, p. 315.

⁴⁸ Dupree, *Afghanistan*, p. 319.

⁴⁹ Jäkel, 'Fünftausend Jahre Geschichte Auf Dem Boden Des Landes', pp. 119–21.

⁵⁰ Hammond, *Red Flag Over Afghanistan*, p. 6.

⁵¹ Hyman, 'Nationalism in Afghanistan', p. 301.

2. Review of primary and secondary sources

The following paper will mainly be based on existent literature. This poses some difficulty, as there is a limited amount of literature which considers the opium economy in Afghanistan over a longer timespan. While there is a significant amount of research on the past decades, where the Afghan opium production has become more prominent, the previous centuries are only mentioned in selected works. This however does not mean there is no literature available. Overall, there has been a good deal of research done on the countries' general history, which is useful as this paper relies on a context within which to place the opium economy. This includes Dupree's *Afghanistan*⁵² and Martin Ewan's *Afghanistan – A new history*⁵³ – both of which supply a useful overview over the country's entire history.

Some works, especially Macdonald's *Drugs in Afghanistan*⁵⁴, David Mansfield's *A state built on sand*⁵⁵ and Blanchard's *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. history*⁵⁶ offer a more extensive account of the countries' longer history with opium; although the focus continues to be on the more modern history of the country. Macdonald is particularly useful due to his outline of the production processes of opium. Additionally, the earlier periods under consideration are considered by, for instance, Bradford⁵⁷, whose work is especially interesting as it outlines the increased dependency of the country on international support.

An interesting aspect is the connection between Afghanistan's opium supply and the neighbouring markets, which is showcased for instance by Gerard McLaughlin⁵⁸ or Ikramul Haq⁵⁹, the former of which considers the Iranian situation, while the latter gives an extensive account of the connections between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

After the 1980s the search for literature becomes easier. While the majority of research is focused on the general history, rather than opium production, this is important as once more we are supplied with a context for the opium industry. Here there a number of works considering different aspects of the Soviet invasion, for instance Hammond's *Red Flag over*

⁵² Dupree, *Afghanistan*.

⁵³ Martin Ewan, *Afghanistan – A New History*, 2 edition (London; New York: Routledge 2002).

⁵⁴ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*.

⁵⁵ Mansfield – a state built on sand

⁵⁶ Christopher M. Blanchard, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy* (New York: Nova Science Publishers Inc, 2009).

⁵⁷ J. Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty: State Formation, Diplomacy and Drug Control in Afghanistan during the Musahiban Dynasty, 1929-1978*, PhD Thesis (Boston: Northeastern University, 2013).

⁵⁸ Gerald T. McLaughlin, 'The Poppy Is Not an Ordinary Flower: A Survey of Drug Policy in Iran', *Fordham Law Review*, 44.4 (1976), 702–72.

⁵⁹ Ikramul Haq, 'Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective', *Asian Survey*, 36.10 (1996), 945–63 (pp. 947–48) <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2645627>>.

*Afghanistan*⁶⁰ or Kakar's *Afghanistan: The Soviet invasion and the Afghan Response*,⁶¹ both of which are valuable for this research as they consider the impact of the invasion on Afghans. Goodson offers a connection between this war and the opium industry, as well as an overview of the country's earlier history.⁶² In the 1980s the increased fragmentation of Afghanistan profited the opium industry. This is outlined well by Barnett Rubin.⁶³

The history of the Taliban with opium is covered by Graham Farrel and John Thorne⁶⁴, who focus on the Taliban ban on production. Hermann Kreutzmann meanwhile considers the opium trade during this period in its entirety⁶⁵, while Julien Mercille considers the US influence⁶⁶. Finally, an interesting book has been published by Tamim Ansary, who considers a longer time-span of Afghan history, but whose analysis of the Mujahedeen and the war against the Soviets is used within this thesis.⁶⁷

The lion share of research on the connection between Afghanistan and opium tends to be focused on recent years. This is the case with Vanda Felbab-Browns work⁶⁸, who focuses largely on Counternarcotics measures. Other publications on this topic include Anderssons' *Counterproductive Narcotics Measures*⁶⁹ and Goodhand's *Corrupting or Consolidating the Peace? The Drugs Economy and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Afghanistan*⁷⁰. Goodhand is also notable as he provides excellent framework in which to place the Afghan situation, through

⁶⁰ Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan*.

⁶¹ M. Hassan Kakar, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979-1982* (University of California Press, 1997).

⁶² Larry P. Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War: State failure, Regional Policies, and the Rise of the Taliban* (University of Washington Press, 2001).

⁶³ Barnett R. Rubin, *The fragmentation of Afghanistan: State formation and Collapse in the International System* (Yale University Press, 2002).

⁶⁴ Farrell and Thorne, *Where have all the flowers gone?*.

⁶⁵ Kreutzmann, 'Afghanistan and the Opium World Market'.

⁶⁶ Julien Mercille, 'The U.S. "War on Drugs" in Afghanistan', *Critical Asian Studies*, 43.2, 285–309.

⁶⁷ Tamim Ansary, *Games without Rules: The Often-Interrupted History of Afghanistan* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2012).

⁶⁸ Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs* (Washington DC: Brookings, 2009); Vanda Felbab-Brown, 'Opium Licensing in Afghanistan: Its Desirability and Feasibility', *Brookings Institute Press; Foreign Policy Studies Paper*, 1 (2007) <<https://www.brookings.edu/research/opium-licensing-in-afghanistan-its-desirability-and-feasibility/>> [accessed 24 June 2017]; Vanda Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2013) <<https://www.brookings.edu/book/aspiration-and-ambivalence/>> [accessed 26 June 2017]; Vanda Felbab-Brown, 'Peacekeepers Among Poppies: Afghanistan, Illicit Economies and Intervention', *International Peacekeeping*, 16.1 (2009), 100–114; Vanda Felbab-Brown, 'No Easy Exit: Drugs and Counternarcotics Policies in Afghanistan', *Global Initiative* <<http://globalinitiative.net/documents/no-easy-exit-drugs-and-counternarcotics-policies-in-afghanistan/>> [accessed 12 March 2017].

⁶⁹ Camilla M. Andersson, 'Counterproductive Counternarcotics Strategies', *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 95.4, 917–31.

⁷⁰ Jonathan Goodhand, 'Corrupting or Consolidating the Peace? The Drugs Economy and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Afghanistan', *International Peacekeeping*, 15.3 (2008), 405–23 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/13533310802058984>>.

his definition of borderland spaces, which is used extensively in the thesis⁷¹. Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy gives a more general insight, considering the general relevance of opium, a historical overview, and the more recent changes in how it is grown.⁷² More information on the importance of opium in Afghanistan as well as in other countries is supplied by Thomas Dormandy⁷³. Some authors have chosen to consider in detail the producer side, analysing why farmers choose to participate in the illicit economy. One example of this is Qasseem's *Afghanistan: Imperatives of Stability Misperceived*⁷⁴. Other authors have published histories of drugs, especially in the context of states and the role they play in this context in different countries, such as Francisco Thoumi⁷⁵ or, for a general history, Julia Buxton, who offers an interesting analysis of the shortcomings of prohibitionist policies.⁷⁶

Fascinating insight can also be gained when considering more personal accounts. In the case of Fariba Nawa, for instance, we can find an account of an expatriate Afghan woman who returns to the country to gain insight into the opium economy with a more personal focus and interviews with locals involved in the economy on various levels.⁷⁷

Primary sources are difficult to find for the first centuries under consideration in this thesis, however, after the 1980s, interesting insight can be gained from the UNODC's annual opium surveys⁷⁸. The earlier lack of research poses a significant challenge for the author, as the thesis relies on numbers to explain the changing importance of the opium industry, which means that in the first section we will also depend on estimates as far as they are available. Here an additional issue is that where data does exist for the period before 1970, this varies greatly between authors, so reliable data is difficult to find.

However, in part, primary sources will be used. These are partially based on policy papers by international governments over the time period covered by this paper, but to a large extent will be UN sources. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime⁷⁹ has conducted annual opium surveys since 1994, as well as additional research. These surveys will be used to supply data

⁷¹ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars.

⁷² Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, *Opium*;

Pierre-Arnaud Chouvy, 'Drug Trafficking in and out of the Golden Triangle', in *An Atlas of Trafficking in Southeast Asia. The Illegal Trade in Arms, Drugs, People, Counterfeit Goods and Natural Resources in Mainland* (IB Tauris, 2013), pp. 1–32.

⁷³ Thomas Dormandy, *Opium: Reality's Dark Dream*, 1st edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

⁷⁴ Shaye Qasseem, 'Afghanistan: Imperatives of Stability Misperceived', *Iranian Studies*, 42.2 (2009), 247–74.

⁷⁵ Thoumi and Windybank, 'What Creates Competitive Advantage for Drug Production?'.
⁷⁶ Buxton, *The Political Economy of Narcotics*.

⁷⁷ Fariba Nawa, *Opium Nation: Child Brides, Drug Lords, and One Woman's Journey Through Afghanistan*, 1st edn (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011).

⁷⁸ UNODC, Afghanistan Opium Survey, various years
⁷⁹ For the sake of simplicity this paper will refer to the UN Drugs office as UNODC, despite the name having changed in the past.

where appropriate. However, the UNODC surveys do not come without their own issues, and must be considered cautiously, firstly because of the context they have been created in, meaning that countries submitting their information are not necessarily unbiased, and secondly as the data is not necessarily entirely accurate. All information used in this paper is based on estimates, and the annual figures of drug production, for instance, are always based on higher and lower estimates of production, which means that the final number used is merely the best estimate and not a precise number. We must consider how the UNODC gathers their data. This is important as the data collected by the UNODC varies greatly from the data collected by other sources. For instance, we can consider the following two graphs which showcase the difference in data collected by the US Government and the UNODC together with the MCN. Despite the trends being similar, there can be a difference of over 2,000 tons in some years and the spike in 2009 does not appear in the UNODC's data.

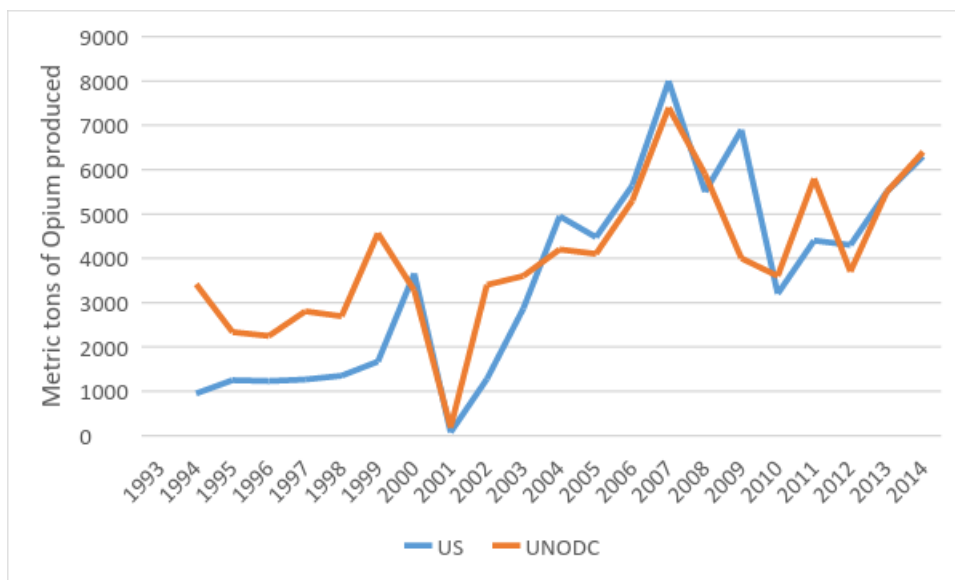


Figure 2 Opium produced in Afghanistan in metric tons;⁸⁰ contrasting US and UNODC/MCN results⁸¹

⁸⁰ Tables containing the data used for this diagram can be found in the appendix

⁸¹ Data from: UNODCCP, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2002* (2002), UNODC and MCN, *Afghanistan Opium surveys 2003-2014*

US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 1994-2014*

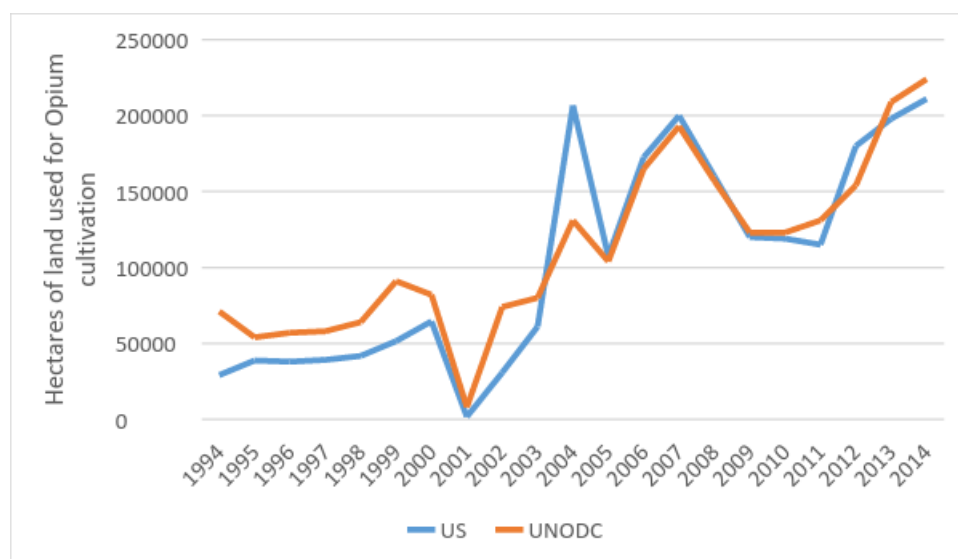


Figure 3 Land used in Afghanistan for opium cultivation, contrasting US and UNODC/MCN results⁸²

The US and the UNODC use a similar methodology in gathering data. Both use remote sensing methods⁸³, but with slight differences, resulting in the deviations in their estimates.⁸⁴ The UNODC, in cooperation with the MCN, relies to a large extent on information and data submitted by member states, which in itself can cause issues as this data is sometimes incomplete, and the reports are submitted irregularly in many cases.⁸⁵ For Afghanistan the necessary information is submitted by national monitoring systems, which are supported by the UNODC under the Global Illicit Crop Monitoring Programme.⁸⁶ Since 2002 the area used for opium cultivation has been calculated through the use of remote sensing methods. Provinces with historically high opium cultivation use a sampling approach, while in those with low cultivation a targeted approach is used. Village surveys are carried out where no cultivation is suspected. Through these methods, the UNODC supplies the numbers which are most commonly used for estimations of opium production and in academic works.

⁸² Data from: UNODCCP, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2002* (2002), UNODC and MCN, *Afghanistan Opium surveys 2003-2014*

US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, 1994-2014

⁸³ Remote sensing is the practice of obtaining information without physically being present in the area surveyed. This is done usually through the use of airplanes or satellites

⁸⁴ J. C. Taylor and others, 'Survey and Monitoring of Opium Poppy and Wheat in Afghanistan: 2003-2009', *Remote Sensing Letters*, 1.3 (2010), 179-85 (p. 180).

⁸⁵ (UNODC) United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Methodology - World Drug Report 2016* (Vienna, 2016), p. 1.

⁸⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Methodology - World Drug Report 2016*, p. 12.

The USG uses similar techniques. However, estimates are only produced for the areas in which drug production is likeliest.⁸⁷ Agricultural surveys, scientific studies and satellite images are then used to produce data.⁸⁸

The thesis will use the data provided by the UNODC, which is always an estimate. Thus the numbers should be considered with some caution, as they are estimates, and not precise data.

⁸⁷ This likelihood is calculated by taking into consideration data from previous years, law enforcement information, eradication data and information on drug seizures

⁸⁸ Bureau of international narcotics and law enforcement affairs, 'International Narcotics Control Strategy Report Volume I: Drug and Chemical Control', 2016, p. 25
<<https://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/2016/vol1/index.htm>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

3. Specifics of the opium production in Afghanistan

Before we can consider what influence foreign powers have had on the production of opium in Afghanistan, we must understand what is required to produce the illicit substances of opium and heroin. In order to do this, this section will first offer an examination of how opium poppies are grown and then give an overview of the steps of production, and the involvement and roles of different players in the process. This section examines the opium production in Afghanistan today, rather than the historic aspects, primarily because there is more data available on this period. However, despite this more modern focus, this introduction to the production processes can still be useful. It enables a reader to better understand the production of opium, thus also giving an insight into the potential advantages and downfalls of engaging in this industry. More details into the production in the earlier periods will also be given throughout the thesis.

The chain of production of opium has changed much in recent years. Opium production has seen a steady increase, and previously unused trafficking routes have surfaced. Until the late 1970s the opium economy in ‘The Golden Crescent’ was more or less self-contained. Most of the opium was sold on within Afghanistan or its neighbouring countries, Iran and Pakistan. This was usually where most of the drugs were consumed as well. Only small amounts were refined to heroin. However, as of the 1980s we can observe a change within this economy: By 1982 laboratories in Pakistan supplied more than half of the heroin consumed in America and Europe and soon after, the refining process moved into Afghanistan itself.⁸⁹

The profits of opium are distributed extremely unequally across the supply chain, with the farmer gaining the least profit.⁹⁰ The type of work required at each step of the chain of production will be explained in the following section, which will consider the role of farmers, laboratories and traffickers and also briefly consider how the consumption of opium has changed. The participants of the opium economy are worth consideration, especially as around 9% of the population participate in the illicit economy.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 86.

⁹⁰ Kreutzmann, ‘Afghanistan and the Opium World Market’, p. 620.

⁹¹ Blanchard, *Afghanistan*, p. 3.

3.1 Poppy Cultivation

Despite the importance of the opium economy internationally and within Afghanistan, only a small overall area of the country is used for the cultivation of opium.⁹² In the 1930s and 1940s opium was only grown in a small number of provinces.⁹³ In 1949 the Afghan government submitted a report stating that, in 1937, 3,846 hectares were used for opium cultivation.⁹⁴ During these years, the report said, opium production specifics had not changed much, despite the fact that it had been outlawed in 1945. By 2016 the annual production was carried out on 201,000 hectares of the land. This increase is part of the trend visible throughout Afghan history, especially in the past decades, where production of opium has seen a steady increase. However even today the land on which opium is grown amounts to only 0.3% of the total size of Afghanistan.

Nonetheless, opium poppies are now grown all over the country, although the specific regions constantly change, due to factors such as law enforcement, or droughts. However, the main centres of production lie in the southern provinces, including Nangarhar, Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz, Farah and Orozgan.⁹⁵ In 2016 however, these main provinces had already undergone change, seeing Kandahar, Helmand, Bagdhis, Orozgan and Nangarhar becoming main centres of production, showcasing the constant change in areas of production. Even though certain provinces may have been, in the past, particularly present in the production, this may change on a yearly basis.⁹⁶

Opium is not an easy crop. One of the main factors discouraging the cultivation from a farmer's perspective, is the labour-intensive nature of the process. While there are many costs associated with the cultivation of a new crop, such as the costs of seed, fertiliser, land and water, labour costs remain the most expensive, accounting for up to 80% of the costs. Compared to wheat, one hectare of poppy needs roughly six times the work. In order to grow opium, a farmer first has to plough the land, which is usually done with a swing plough in Afghanistan, thinning and weeding the field.⁹⁷ Around 60,000-120,000 poppies are planted on one hectare.⁹⁸ In the early stages of growing, the crop has to be thinned and weeded extremely

⁹² Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, pp. 61–62.

⁹³ David Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand: How Opium Undermined Afghanistan* (London: C Hurst & Co, 2016), p. 103.

⁹⁴ Bulletin on Narcotics, *Opium Production throughout the World*, Bulletin of Narcotics, 1949, i, pp. 6–38.

Since Afghanistan measures a total of over 65,000,000 hectares, this means only 0.006% of all land were used for opium cultivation. By 2016 this number had increased to 0.3%

⁹⁵ Qassem, 'Afghanistan', pp. 267–68.

⁹⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016* (Vienna, 2016), p. 11.

⁹⁷ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 127.

⁹⁸ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 128.

carefully. Around four months after planting the crop the opium can be harvested. At this stage the opium poppy capsules are immature, but swollen and green.⁹⁹ The harvest is the most time-consuming step in the production. Here the capsules first have to be lanced¹⁰⁰, a job which requires a significant amount of expertise. The difficulty herein is that the poppies need to be lanced at precisely the right time, and to exactly the right depth: If the capsule is cut before maturity, the yield is reduced. If it is scored too deeply the capsule is oxidised, while if it is not cut deep enough the flow of the resin is reduced. The amount of raw opium extracted from an opium poppy pod varies greatly, from 10 to 100 milligrams per pod, usually averaging around 80 mg.¹⁰¹ Despite the difficulty inherent in the lancing process, someone with expertise in the manner can lance up to 200 capsules an hour. After the poppies have been lanced the opium sap is left to ooze and dry, and is then scraped out of the capsules. After the first lancing opium poppies are left on the field and lanced multiple times, each a few days apart to ensure a maximum amount of opium is harvested. The harvest generally lasts about 2-3 weeks. After the lancing, the opium poppies are left on the field for another 3-4 weeks, until the poppy seeds have finally matured. At this stage the capsules are laid out to dry, and then slashed. This is how the seed crop is obtained. It is only at a later stage in the production chain that the raw opium is refined into heroin.¹⁰²

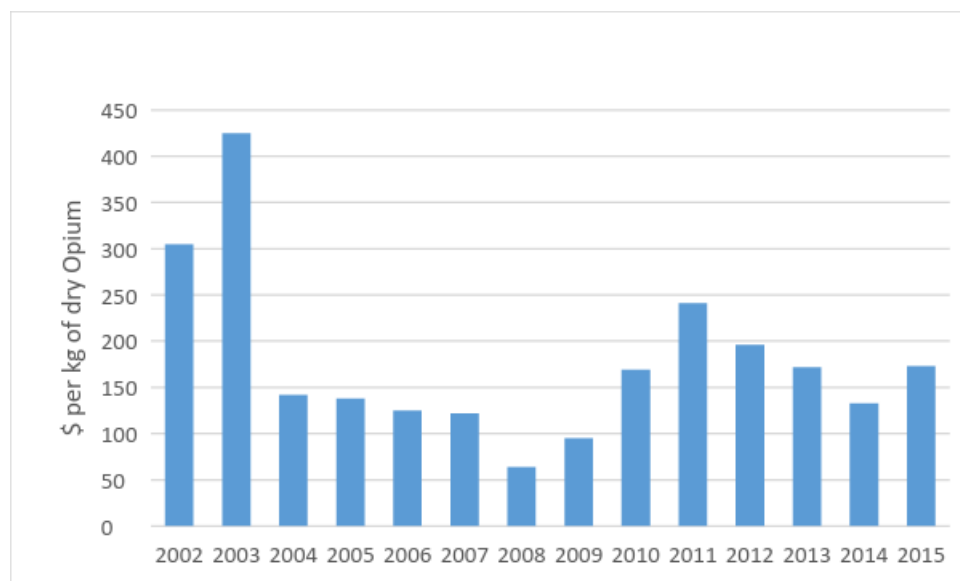


Figure 4 Average farm-gate price of opium at harvest time¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 127.

¹⁰⁰ Lancing means the incision, or scoring, of the pod, which is required to extract the raw Opium.

¹⁰¹ US Department of Justice, *Opium Poppy Cultivation and Heroin Processing in Southeast Asia* (Washington DC, 1992), p. 10.

¹⁰² Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 128.

¹⁰³ Data from: UNODC, Afghan drug survey (2002-2015)

The profits from opium vary from year to year, alongside the price of opium, which is based on a variety of factors. The above chart (**Figure 4**) shows how farm-gate prices of opium changed from 2002 to 2015: The change in farm-gate value, which is usually caused by factors such as the changing size of production, growing or shrinking demand or natural factors such as droughts, transfers directly to the profit margins of a farmer growing opium. This means that the income of a farmer varies greatly from year to year: In 2011 a farmer earned an average of \$9,300 per hectare of opium cultivated, by the following year this had been reduced to a third (\$3,300).¹⁰⁴ A similar trend can be observed on the graph, which shows farmers earning \$240 per kg of opium in 2011, but only \$190 per kg the following year.

The fluctuations in prices hold true for other crops as well, as is shown in the following graph (**Figure 5**). However, the fluctuations here are much less pronounced, and changes are usually confined to less than 10% difference between harvest prices. Opium prices meanwhile will change by a third from year to year in most cases, and vary by 100-200% in some months. This is due to the different factors affecting farmgate prices: While a drought, conflict or a year of high production will still affect licit crops, they are not subject to law enforcement, and changes brought about as a consequence of illegality do not exist for wheat or saffron.¹⁰⁵

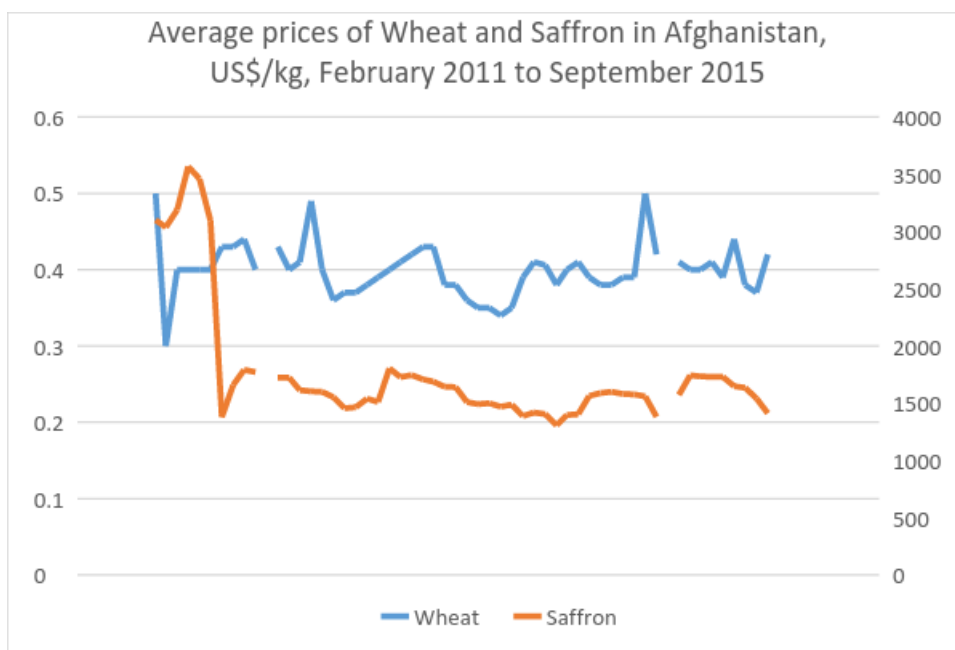


Figure 5 Average prices of Wheat and Saffron, collected monthly by the Afghan government ¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2012* (Vienna, 2012).

¹⁰⁵ (UNODC) United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Afghanistan - Farmers' Intentions Survey 2003/2004* (Vienna, 2004), p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ Ministry of Narcotics (MCN), *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report* (Reports from 2011 to 2015)

Wheat and saffron are two very different types of cash crop, not just in how they are grown but also in the potential income. Since the Afghan economy has been, and continues to be a subsistence-based one, and most farmers will grow their own crops, not much money can be made by selling wheat, whereas saffron is often seen as a viable alternative to opium growing in development programmes. The average farmgate prices over the past four years have been \$0.4 and \$1762.7 per kilogram respectively.¹⁰⁷ If one calculates this per hectare, we can see that opium earns more than wheat per hectare, but less than saffron. Wheat has an average yield of 1750kg per hectare, meaning that the potential income is \$700 per hectare, far less than opium. However, it is also much less labour-intensive, thus meaning the costs involved in the production are also less. Saffron meanwhile, similar to opium, needs a lot of labour. It also has a much lesser yield, averaging at 3.21 kg/hectare¹⁰⁸. This means the potential income is around \$5658 per hectare.¹⁰⁹ To compare: The average income of opium per hectare, calculated from the available numbers between 2004 and 2015, has been \$4975.¹¹⁰

We can see that saffron and wheat also experience price deviations, but these are not as extreme as in the case of opium. Many researchers cite the profitability of opium as an inherent advantage. However, this is often overstated. As we have seen already, farm-gate prices for licit crops, such as saffron, can be much higher than those for opium. And the price-instability of the crop is an additional disadvantage, which farmers have to take into account. Despite this price-instability, the opium poppy has several advantages over other crops in Afghanistan.

Firstly, it is a crop, which is easy to sell and to transport, as it has a relatively high value for a relatively low volume, more so in recent years since it became illegal. This makes trading it easier. Not much is needed for a trader to transport the crop, and barely any infrastructure is required. The opium poppy is also relatively drought resistant – an important factor in Afghanistan with its largely arid landscape. This means that, even in a bad year, profit can still be gained from the production of opium, while this may not be possible from other crops.

Numbers for some months have not been published by the MCN, leading to some incompleteness in the graphic representation. Additionally, in order to make the graph legible the author has chosen not to include an exact timescale by month on the graph, due to the great number of data.

¹⁰⁷ Ministry of Narcotics (MCN), Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report (Reports from 2011 to 2015)

¹⁰⁸ This average is calculated by the only available numbers: The average yields from 2004-2007; however many Afghans have been seeing above-average yields, thus the potential yield may be much higher than the above number, therefore also increasing the income.

¹⁰⁹ DACAAR, Icarda, DFID; *Saffron Manual for Afghanistan, Planting, maintenance, harvesting and Processing* <http://afghanag.ucdavis.edu/b_field-crops/other/Man_Saffron_Afghanistan_ICARDA.pdf> [accessed 25 August 2017], p.33

¹¹⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015- Socio-economic analysis* (Vienna, 2016), p. 17

Additionally, opium is used as a break crop, usually grown in rotation with other crops, such as wheat. It is almost never grown as a mono-crop.¹¹¹ Financially, the opium economy has in the past decades contributed a lot to the national economy of the poverty-stricken country, as well as being an important source of income for its citizens: In 2003, the average income of those growing opium in Afghanistan was \$594, which was more than three times the per capita GDP.¹¹² It also contributes to the Afghan economy: In 2015, 5% of the country's GDP were made up of the farmgate - price of opium. This, of course, excludes the profits from trafficking, refining or smuggling the drug.¹¹³

Another advantage of opium growing for farmers in the country is the fact that it is a non-perishable and exchangeable commodity that can act as a credit and a family's private savings bank at the same time.¹¹⁴ Afghanistan's small credit systems tend to be privately organised, and many loans are based on opium. Most of these fall under the *salaam* system. *Salaam* is not exclusive to opium and can also be taken out on other agricultural products,¹¹⁵ but most farmers take it out against their opium crops. When a farmer agrees on a *salaam*, which tends to be offered by traders or shopkeepers, they receive an average of 50% of the market price of the opium they promise to the lender. This loan is received immediately, and the opium then handed over at harvest time. The farmer receives an immediate influx of cash, used often to buy farm supplies, agricultural products or basic necessities, but in the process, loses at least 40% of the income they would have usually gained if they had sold the crops directly to the trader, rather than taking out *salaam*. This system is a necessity in the country, which lacks other micro-financing credit systems due to its weak central state and barely-existent financial system¹¹⁶. *Salaam* also encourages continuous growth of opium as it, like all forms of such debts in a poor society, creates a cycle of debt and repayment. The loan can be taken out by those without land, as well as by landowners. The value of *salaam* increases closer to harvest time, with the loan's value increasing from 42%-54%.¹¹⁷

There are different types of cultivators. Landowners may grow opium themselves, or rent out land to cultivators, collecting some of the income. Landowners and poorer growers profit in different ways from the production of the illicit substance: For landowners, it is a

¹¹¹ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, pp. 61–62.

¹¹² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003* (Vienna, 2003), p. 5.

¹¹³ UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016*, p. 7.

¹¹⁴ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 64.

¹¹⁵ *Salaam* can also be taken out against wheat or cumin, for instance.

¹¹⁶ Afghanistan does have a financial sector, but this is extremely underdeveloped, especially in the country's rural regions

World Bank, Project Information Document (PID) Concept Stage – Afghanistan access to finance (2013), p. 2-3

¹¹⁷ Adam Pain, *Opium Poppy and Informal Credit* (Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2008), pp. 4–5.

method of maximising one's profit, while resource-poorer farmers need the crops to ensure their survival. These farmers, if they do not own land, have the possibility of entering into share-cropping or tenancy agreements with a landowner that are often exploitive. Here they gain a small share of the profits through the agreements, which can be as little as a third of the final profits. The exact share of the crop gained by each of the partners in a share-cropping agreement also depends on the region. For instance, in the Eastern districts this is divided almost equally. In the Southern districts the landowner gains two-thirds of the crop's profit.¹¹⁸ They are however, also allowed to plant food crops, thus earning some food security.¹¹⁹ We must consider then, that the main motivation for farmers to participate in the trade is not necessarily profitability, as farmers without access to their own land do not profit as much as is often thought. In fact, many farmers' debt under the *salaam* system would actively prevent any real profit. However, the growing of the drug may improve access to land, water, credit and agricultural supplies, all of which are not easy to come by in the country, which has been damaged by the wars it has faced. Thus, many farmers turn to opium as the only option to feed their families. In the past, many landowners have also been pushed into opium production by hegemonic groups, such as Mujahedeen or Taliban¹²⁰

One major disadvantage is the high labour cost of planting and harvesting the crop. To combat this, farmers will attempt to maximise the forms of labour available to them as much as possible. This includes staggered planting¹²¹. Staggered planting means the cultivation of several different forms of poppies, each of which will have different maturation cycles. This has several advantages, as the sowing and harvesting of the plants is then divided over a longer period, allowing farmers to minimise their labour expenses. Staggered planting bears the additional advantage of reducing the risks to crops, as weather damage or droughts are less likely to affect the entire potential harvest.¹²² Next to these methods, household labour, including women and children, is also used. Some farmers also make use of *ashar*, which is a form of reciprocal labour arrangement between neighbours, friends or relatives.¹²³ Due to the different climatic zones lying close to each other in Afghanistan, it is easy for *ashar* to be maximised, as it can be practised over a wide geographic area over several weeks. This means

¹¹⁸ David Mansfield, 'The Economic Superiority of Illicit Drug Production : Myth and Reality : Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan' (presented at the International Conference on Alternative Development in drug control and cooperation., Felfafing, 2003), p. 5.

¹¹⁹ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 65.

¹²⁰ Blanchard, *Afghanistan*, pp. 9–10.

¹²¹ Staggered planting is the practice of growing one crop, but planting the seeds at different times throughout the year, to also stagger the harvest, thus spreading out the work-load throughout the year

¹²² Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 129.

¹²³ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 64.

the men, women, and children practising *ashar* can exchange work with their extended families over up to two months.¹²⁴

The next step in the production chain is to transform the opium sap, extracted through lancing, into a consumable product. This process is, in essence, a simple one. Apart from empty containers and cloth only a small number of chemicals are needed. Due to this, farmers can refine opium themselves. How exactly opium is transformed into consumer products will be examined in the next section.

3.2 Laboratories in Afghanistan

The refining process usually takes place in laboratories. However, even the word laboratory may be an exaggeration in some aspects: Laboratories in Afghanistan have existed in two different forms: Smaller ones, located usually within house compounds, bear the advantage of being very easy to move or disassemble should the need arise, but produce much less than the larger ones. The larger sites may have a daily output of 100 kg of morphine base and 100 kg of brown opium – a refined version of raw opium. with a staff of 30 people. The labs tend to be well-protected, especially due to the value of the products confined in them.¹²⁵ The refining process has changed in recent years. While such laboratories used to be located mainly in Pakistan, this changed due to a military crackdown, and since 2004 most laboratories are in Afghanistan. These now supply over three quarters of heroin in Europe and most of the heroin of neighbouring countries.¹²⁶ While the smaller laboratories, operated often out of house compounds, are run more or less privately, the larger ones were run, for instance, by Mujahedeen leaders during the civil war years.¹²⁷ The following map shows where the laboratories tend to be located in Afghanistan. We can observe a trend that has become clear throughout Afghanistan's history, and that is also visible in other aspects of the opium production: Laboratories tend to increase in number in those provinces further removed from the capital, as the influence of the central state is lessened in these areas, and thus law enforcement may be less effective, allowing drug production to take place in greater numbers.

¹²⁴ Mansfield, 'The Economic Superiority of Illicit Drug Production : Myth and Reality : Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan', p. 11.

¹²⁵ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 102.

¹²⁶ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, pp. 86–87.

¹²⁷ Christoph Reuter, "Mired in Deception" - Narcotics and Politics in Afghanistan', in *Transnational Organized Crime: Analyses of a Global Challenge to Democracy*, ed. by Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung and Regine Schönenberg (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2013), pp. 91–108 (p. 93).

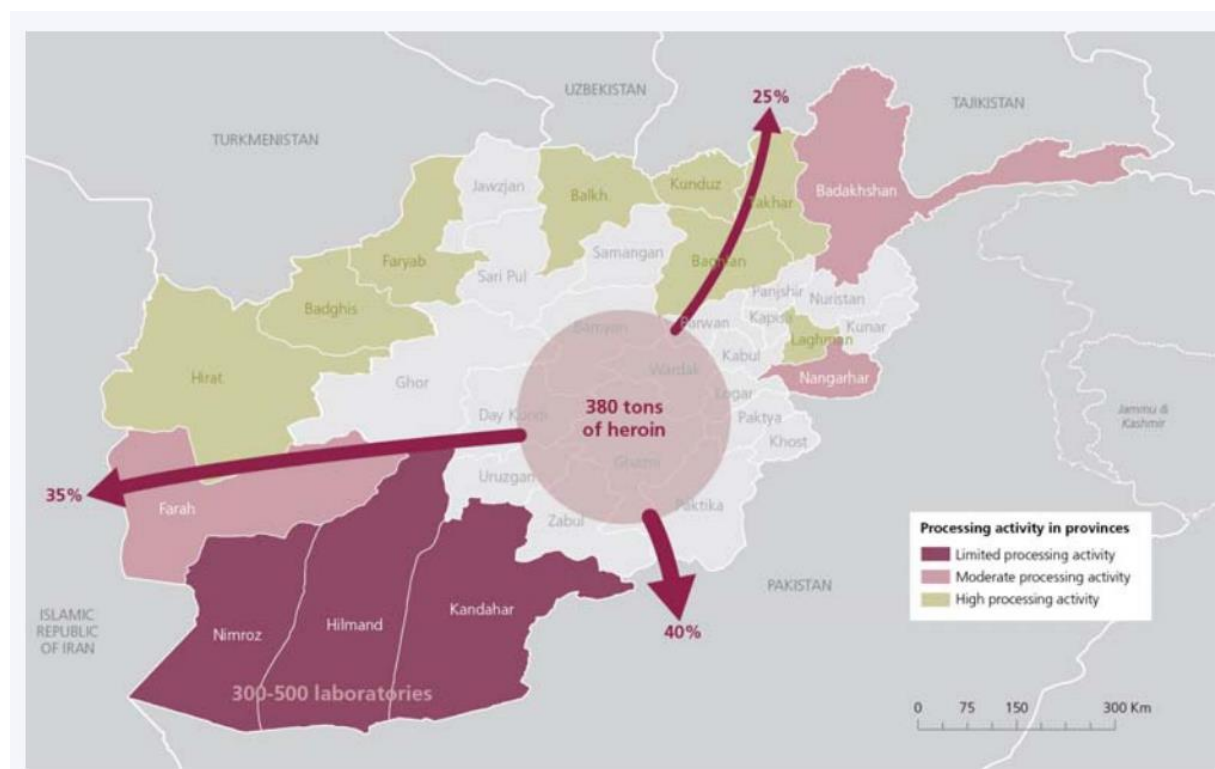


Figure 6 Map of laboratories in Afghanistan in 2010.¹²⁸

The first step in the refining process is to extract morphine from opium. To do this, water is boiled with the raw extracted opium in the drum, which dissolves the opium, but leaves insoluble material, like leaves or straw, at the bottom. Brown liquid opium remains. Once the mixture cools down, calcium hydroxide/carbonate is added. The now resultant concoction is filtered through a cloth sack. The remaining mixture is heated up again, without boiling it, before adding ammonium chloride, then letting the mixture cool down. Once again, the cloth filters are used, leaving lumps of solid morphine base on the cloth, and then drying them out in the sun, which creates a light brown powder. This can be further refined by dissolving it in hydrochloride acid, and adding activated charcoal, then reheating and filtering until the wanted quality emerges.¹²⁹

This, already refined product, can either be sold onwards as it is, or it may be further refined to heroin. This is a process that happens almost exclusively in laboratories. Up until the past decades, heroin was quite uncommon. While opium was consumed within Afghanistan, this was not the case for heroin.

¹²⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Opiate Flows through Northern Afghanistan and Central Asia - a Threat Assessment* (Vienna), p. 9 <2012>.

¹²⁹ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 100.

The process of creating heroin is more complex than the refining of opium. 6-10 kg of opium can be refined to roughly 1 kg heroin. This is done to different levels of quality: The high quality white heroin tends to be made for export, while lower quality, less refined, brown opium usually remains in circulation within the regional markets. As such the processing of morphine hydrochloride into lower quality heroin is not too complicated. More skill is required to produce exportable higher quality white heroin. In order to produce heroin from the dried morphine base, the powder has to be heated together with acetic anhydride in a pot. This forms a rough form of heroin (diacetylmorphine), which is allowed to cool down. After cooling, water, activated charcoal and sodium carbonate are added, before the entire mixture is filtered and dried. This creates a form of heroin, which is not yet injectable but brown and can be consumed by smoking it. In order to make injectable white heroin chemical solvents, including acetone, chloroform and ethanol, are needed. Sometimes caffeine or chalk powder are also added.¹³⁰ This process is shown in the following diagram:

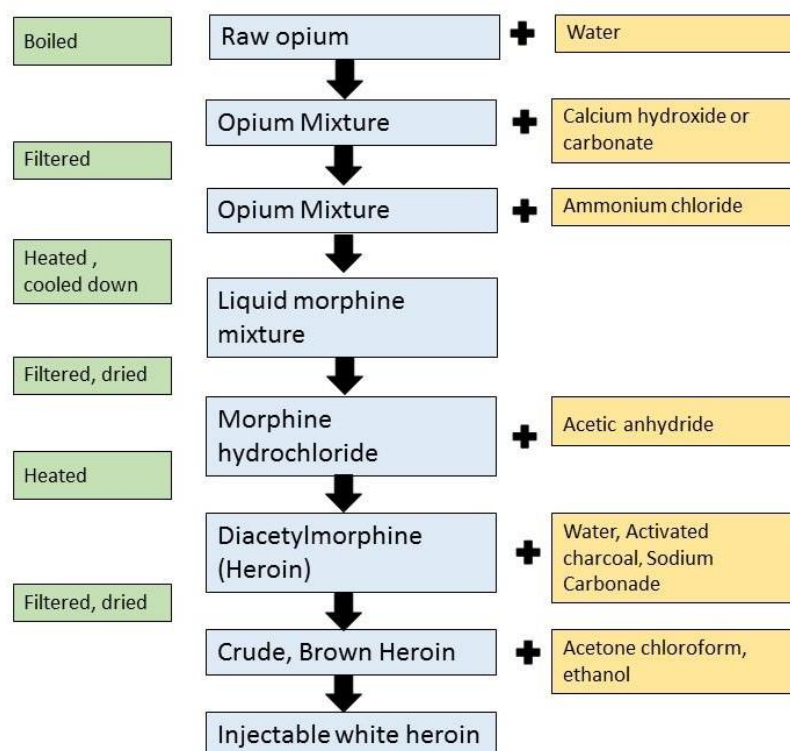


Figure 7 Work steps and chemicals involved in the production of opium and heroin

However, while significantly more chemicals and materials are needed for the production of heroin than for the refining of opium or even morphine these used to be available quite freely: Until the fall of the Taliban and the international invasion of Afghanistan such

¹³⁰ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 100.

materials could be bought on so-called ‘drug bazaars’, which sold both opium and materials needed for the growing and refining processes.¹³¹ Now the smuggling of such chemicals into the country complements the smuggling of already refined heroin out of it. Estimates state that annually 475 tons of precursor chemicals are transported into Afghanistan.¹³²

These laboratories are staffed by a wide array of people, among them children as young as ten. Regardless of age, there are many dangers involved in the production of heroin for the workers. For instance, a continuous inhalation of the fumes in heroin processing factories may lead to a dependence on the drug itself, but they can also catch a variety of deadly illnesses due to the toxic chemicals that are used in the production.¹³³

Profit margins of opium and heroin production are larger than those for cultivation. In the early 2000s the profit mark-up of heroin in laboratories was as high as 100%, but this has reduced significantly as laboratories, now usually located within Afghanistan, have increased in number.¹³⁴

3.3 Trafficking

After the drug has been refined it is ready to be sold on. This used to be a legal process, as in the 20th century there was a legal export of opium from Afghanistan to a range of countries, including the US and Germany. Opium continues to be grown legally, as a morphine base, however, only in China, India, Japan and South Korea.¹³⁵ Since the production and consumption became illegal however, the industry has had to rely on traffickers. Within Afghanistan, opium is smuggled in its raw state, refined or even already as heroin. The latter is easiest to smuggle, as it has a much lesser volume for a much higher resale price.¹³⁶ Here, too, we can see the change that the economy has undergone: In the past opium was the most trafficked good, overtaken by heroin only since the 1990s.¹³⁷ Smugglers out of Afghanistan have been forced to get increasingly creative with their methods, using camel trains but partially also hiding the drugs in the stomachs of goats or sheep, as well as within almond shells or even using pigeons.¹³⁸

¹³¹ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, pp. 99–101.

¹³² Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report - 2015* (Washington DC, 2015), p. 96.

¹³³ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 99.

¹³⁴ (UNODC) United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *The Opium Economy of Afghanistan. An International Problem* (New York, 2003), p. 13.

¹³⁵ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 194.

¹³⁶ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, pp. 103–6.

¹³⁷ Filippo De Danieli, ‘Beyond the Drug-Terror Nexus: Drug Trafficking and State-Crime Relations in Central Asia’, *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 25.6 (2014), 1235–40 (p. 1235).

¹³⁸ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, pp. 103–6.

Drug economies generally do not tend to be confined within the borders of a country. As such, Afghanistan is only one part of a larger commodity chain. It forms, with Pakistan and Iran, the so-called ‘Golden Crescent’, within which it currently stands as the leading exporter of opium and heroin. Drug trafficking is not confined to the country alone, but affects and traverses the neighbouring countries.¹³⁹ The countries of the ‘Golden Crescent’ have become more important as the value of the, southeast-Asian, so-called ‘Golden Triangle’ decreased.¹⁴⁰

Traffickers use a great variety of routes to smuggle their goods to the preferred destination. Interestingly, when opium production began to increase once more, old trading routes were also revived. These were already being used as long as 2500 years ago, and most traversed Asia and Europe. As the more modern infrastructure surrounding and inside Afghanistan broke down as a result of the conflicts in the country, these routes began to be used again, both for legal and illegal goods.¹⁴¹ These traditional routes still tend to be preferred, with only 20% of the products going via the ‘Northern Route’, bound for Russia with its rising consumption of heroin. Most of the drugs are shipped along the Balkan routes. Previously, especially under the Taliban, a lot of the smuggled goods went via Karachi, or alternatively via the ‘Northern Route’ or the Caspian Sea.¹⁴² The term ‘route’ may in this case be an exaggeration, as they themselves constantly change and adapt, while only the general direction remains the same. The changes occur due to market pressures, as well as law enforcement and other local conditions. Other routes include Pakistani and Iranian ports, from where air or naval travel is used.¹⁴³ The main border traversed by the illegal good is the Tajik-Afghan one, which is marked by rivers in some crossing areas. In the 1990s and the early 2000s it was mainly crossed by smaller boats, which avoided the official border crossings.¹⁴⁴ The routes are shown on the following map (**Figure 8**).

¹³⁹ Kreutzmann, ‘Afghanistan and the Opium World Market’, p. 605.

¹⁴⁰ Anthony Hyman, *Afghanistan under Soviet Domination, 1964–91* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1992), p. 36.

¹⁴¹ Danieli, ‘Beyond the Drug-Terror Nexus’, p. 1235.

¹⁴² Ewans, *Afghanistan*, p. 203.

¹⁴³ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, pp. 103–6.

¹⁴⁴ Danieli, ‘Beyond the Drug-Terror Nexus’, p. 1237.



Figure 8 Main trafficking routes out of Afghanistan.

Due to the necessity of crossing multiple borders and countries, criminal groups have also become involved in the trafficking process. These groups may be in any number of countries through which trafficking routes run - the PKK, the Azeri Grey Wolves, the KLA or the IMU are just a few of the militant or crime groups benefiting from the trade.¹⁴⁵ Despite this, most traffickers operate as part of smaller groups out of Afghanistan, not as part of the mentioned organised crime groups.¹⁴⁶

One important change is to be observed in the early 2000s. Before 2003 the shadow market in Afghanistan had been relatively fragmented, whereas afterwards we can observe an increased consolidation. In this new era, there are a smaller number of people organising the international drug trade.¹⁴⁷

There are many people working in the trafficking industry, each fulfilling different positions. This includes individuals at the higher levels of the central state. While the Mujahedeen and the Taliban were involved in the later years, state officials also increasingly began to profit from the industry, demonstrating the growing issues with corruption in Afghanistan. It was only the increased production, from the 1980s onwards that enabled and

¹⁴⁵ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, pp. 86–87.

¹⁴⁶ Danieli, 'Beyond the Drug-Terror Nexus', p. 1237.

¹⁴⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and World Bank, *Afghanistan's Drug Industry: Structure, Functioning, Dynamics & Implications for Counter-Narcotics Policy* (Vienna: DIANE Publishing, 2006), p. 195.

necessitated these roles to be filled. Of course, these officials or ‘warlords’¹⁴⁸ are unlikely to actually participate in the trafficking. Rather, these jobs are left to those smugglers with less authority and power.¹⁴⁹ Until the late 1990s, most smugglers were “small time couriers”¹⁵⁰ – it was only later that those with the necessary resources to bribe control officers became involved in the trade. This came alongside increased controls in and out of Afghanistan, an important factor considering the international involvement we can observe today.

The profit margin is highest for traders, and exceptionally more so amongst those who traverse international borders on their trafficking route. For instance, a gram of heroin of 20% purity might be bought for \$70 dollars in Europe, but a gram of 60% purity would cost only \$2-\$3 dollars when bought in Afghanistan. Opium thus increases in value and decreases in purity as it crosses borders. Cross-border trafficking could bring a trader a mark-up of around 100% profit.¹⁵¹

3.4 Consumption

The drugs are trafficked into a number of different countries, depending (of course) on the demand in said countries. This may well be the section of the commodity chain that has seen the most amount of change. While production, for instance, has increased the general conditions of production have not changed. The consumption meanwhile, has changed enormously, from the locations where it is consumed to the methods: Afghan opium was once consumed as a legal pain killer, whereas now it is usually refined into heroin and taken illegally in Europe and America.

Since opium has been exported both legally and illegally out of Afghanistan, the change in consumption patterns can also be observed for Afghan opium. Opium has had a place in human cultures for a long time. Religious practices have often gone hand-in hand with this consumption. But drugs were soon moved out of this original context and thus became global issues, causing also increasing regulation. Opium first became a consumable, marketable and profitable good when it began to be smoked, for instance across the Asian continent. By the end of the 19th century opium was thoroughly ingrained in societies across Asian states. It was

¹⁴⁸ Working definition of warlord: Someone operating in a collapsed/collapsing state, motivated by self-interest, access to armed forces, contempt for international law and human rights, undemocratic – definition from: Major T. P. Robinson, ‘Twenty-First Century Warlords: Diagnosis and Treatment?’, *Defence Studies*, 1.1 (2001), 121–45 (p. 127).

¹⁴⁹ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, pp. 95–97.

¹⁵⁰ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 107.

¹⁵¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *The Opium Economy of Afghanistan. An International Problem*, p. 13.

imported, exported and used in almost all these states.¹⁵² Heroin smoking was a much more recent development. It is said to have developed in Shanghai in the 1920s, and then spread across the globe.¹⁵³ The injection of heroin, as is common today, is a development from the 19th century technological developments concerning drugs: Morphine and heroine were isolated from opium, while hypodermic injection was perfected and increasingly used.¹⁵⁴ In order to combat these developments, as well as the consumption of other, potentially harmful drugs, drug control legislation emerged in the late 19th/early 20th century.¹⁵⁵ Today most opiate problem drug users are found not in ‘the West’ (i.e. Europe and the US) but rather in Southwest and Southeast Asia, with Afghanistan being one of the countries with the highest addiction rates.¹⁵⁶ As an example, we can consider the following numbers which show the amount of people having used opiates at least once in the past year.

Table 1 Number of people who used drugs at least once in the past year¹⁵⁷

	Lower estimate	Higher estimate	Percentage of overall population
Americas	2,290,000	2,440,000	0.22-0.24%
Europe	3,290,000	3,820,000	0.44-0.51%
Asia	6,460,000	12,540,000	0.14-0.28%
Central Asia:	340,000	340,000	0.5%

For a long time, the problem of drug addiction was seen by Afghans as a purely European, not to say, Western, issue – it only concerned the *kafir*. While it has been clear for some time that there has been an issue with the consumption of hashish in Afghanistan, heroin was seen purely in terms of production, as the consumption did not really concern Afghans. This is currently changing. In the past decade there has been a “growing awareness that an increase in opium cultivation and heroin production has led to an increase in their availability

¹⁵² Trocki, *Opium, Empire and the Global Political Economy*, pp. xi–xiv.

¹⁵³ John Strang, Paul Griffiths, and Michael Gossop, ‘Heroin Smoking by “chasing the Dragon”: Origins and History’, *Addiction*, 92.6 (1997), 673–83 (p. 673).

¹⁵⁴ Ethan A. Nadelmann, ‘Global Prohibition Regimes: The Evolution of Norms in International Society’, *International Organization*, 44.4 (1990), 479–526 (p. 504).

¹⁵⁵ Nadelmann, ‘Global Prohibition Regimes’, p. 504.

¹⁵⁶ Peter H. Reuter and Victoria Greenfield, ‘Measuring Global Drug Markets: How Good Are the Numbers and Why Should We Care About Them?’, 2002, p. 161 <<https://www.rand.org/pubs/reprints/RP999.html>> [accessed 18 May 2017].

¹⁵⁷ UNODC, World Drug Report 2010, p.153

and use among the country's many vulnerable groups".¹⁵⁸ Since the 1980s the number of vulnerable people in Afghanistan increased, due to conflict and poverty. The issue has been exacerbated by the fact that few Afghan doctors and nurses are willing to work in Afghanistan, and even less wish to work in the countryside – as a side effect of the 'brain drain'. This meant that for a long time, Afghanistan remained heavily dependent on foreign medical aid to support the needs of its population. For many people of the rural areas opium smoking was often the only pain relief available.¹⁵⁹ It is difficult to state exactly how big of a problem drug addiction is in Afghanistan, as the last decades have provided very few reliable sources. For instance, one estimate was produced by the Taliban's DCCU in 2001, who estimated that 25,000 citizens of Afghanistan were in early stages of drug addiction, while an additional 6,000 people were said to be in urgent need of rehabilitation.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁹ Hyman, *Afghanistan under Soviet Domination, 1964–91*, p. 14.

¹⁶⁰ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 19.

4. The influence of hegemonic powers on the production of opium

4.1 Legal production of opium from the 19th to the mid 20th century: British support of a legal economy (1809-1945)

The first period under examination in this paper begins with the onset of British influence. In 1809 a British delegation sought an audience with the reigning Afghan king, Shah Shuja, marking the first occurrence of formal British interest in Afghanistan. This is an interesting event, as it not only serves as the starting point to centuries of British involvement in the Central Asian country, but is also telling of the British motivation in Afghanistan: The embassy of the East India company, led by Mountstuart Elphinstone, was sent to Afghanistan to warn Afghans against the encroaching French, and thus to secure the country against French aggression in the context of Napoleon's successes against the British.¹⁶¹ This pattern continued even when Napoleon no longer represented a threat to the British, as they now considered Russia as a threat to Central Asian states. Thus, the British commenced a fight over Afghanistan and Central Asia, nicknamed the Great Game, which was to last well into the 20th century.¹⁶² In this period of British influence on Afghanistan the British fought three Anglo-Afghan wars, each in defence of British interests.

This chapter will consider the time period ranging from 1809, the first year of British active interests in the country, until 1945, when opium was formally outlawed in the country. It is thus the only period under consideration where there was a legal production. Throughout the almost 150 years covered in this chapter there was a small-scale opium production in shifting regions of the country.¹⁶³ This production was also influenced by the government, who issued an opium monopoly to the Bank-i-Millie.

By the time British influence began in Afghanistan, opium was already a well-known commodity, having been used for centuries, but not seen as a problem until the 16th century. This is showcased by the fact that Middle Eastern authorities warned against the substance from the mid-16th century.¹⁶⁴

In this period, there was not yet a culture of prohibition. Opium was being produced legally, and thus benefitted the states where production was taking place, including

¹⁶¹ William Dalrymple, *Return of a King: The Battle for Afghanistan* (Bloomsbury UK, 2014), pp. 4–8.

¹⁶² Dalrymple, *Return of a King*, p. 50.

¹⁶³ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 103.

¹⁶⁴ Hans Derks, *History of the Opium Problem: The Assault on the East, Ca. 1600 - 1950* (BRILL, 2012), pp. 26–36.

Afghanistan. We know that throughout the 18th and 19th centuries there was a low-level export of opium from Afghanistan to the south, towards India. It was not a large industry, but the *powindas* exporting horses, wool and meat would also trade in the drug.¹⁶⁵

Before the 20th century the opium economy was fairly small. It is difficult to state exactly how much opium was being produced, there are however different ways to estimate the size of the production. The following chapter will explore some of these methods of estimating, starting with official documentation by the British and then considering import and export figures stating amounts of opium. Finally, we can also consider reports produced by the League of Nations, which consider the latter years under examination in this chapter.

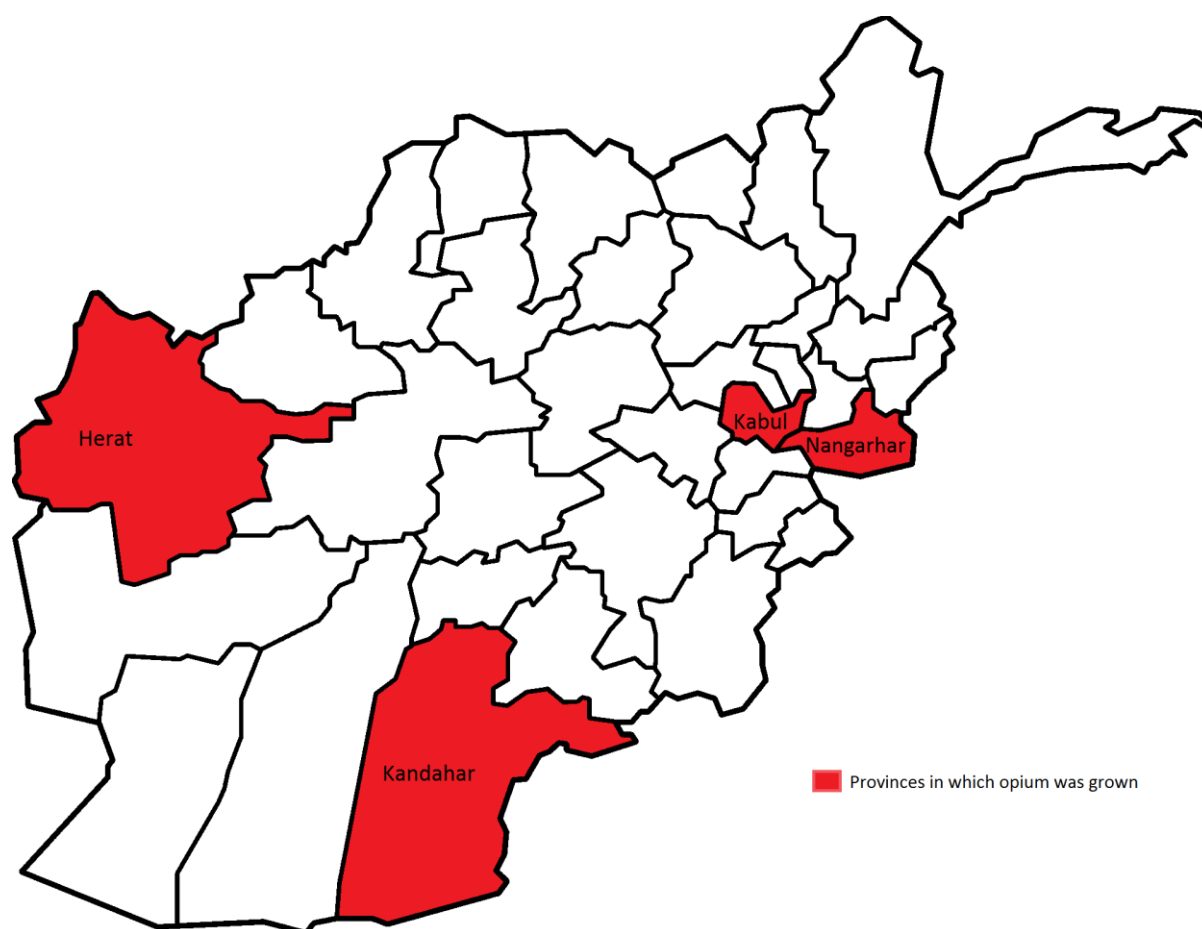


Figure 9 Provinces of opium production around 1908

The British produced a number of reports that included information about the Afghan opium production. Firstly, we can consider an estimate from 1870 which states that opium was only being grown on 1,130 hectares, and by 1901 the British believed production to have ceased in the borderlands. They had not lobbied to make opium consumption illegal, and small amounts of opium were still being brought into the areas from the Jalalabad valley. However,

¹⁶⁵ Shah Hanifi, *Connecting Histories in Afghanistan: Market Relations and State Formation on a Colonial Frontier* (Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 7.

the opium production was only very small and a British source from 1908 stated that the drug was being produced only in Herat valley, Kandahar, Kabul and Jalalabad, as seen on **Figure 9**.¹⁶⁶ For the later years, it is also difficult to find estimates of production. We do, however, know that there was a legal export of opium during the second World War. British government documents on foreign affairs can give us a clue to its extent. In these papers the situation in Afghanistan is discussed at length, particularly regarding Soviet influence in the country.¹⁶⁷

The most interesting fact to be found in these documents is the documentation of the ongoing trade of opium. Unfortunately, there are no exact numbers or statistics of the amounts produced, but it is of note that enough of the drug seems to have been produced and exported for it to be documented. As such it is mentioned in an “Unofficial Quarterly Letter from His Majesty’s Minister, Kabul” – (Received February 9 1940)”

In 1936-37 The Afghan Government entered into an agreement with Germany whereby she obtained credits over a term of seven years for the purchase of arms and machinery, these credits to be met by export of raw material, such as cotton, wool, opium &c., for which the Germans were prepared to pay high prices, and by payments in cash¹⁶⁸

It is also mentioned in a further letter by W.K. Fraser Tytler:

This brief survey shows the main lines on which Afghan economic development is moving. In describing it, I have not touched on the minor industries of the country, such as the export of hides and skins, or of opium, the manufacture of carpets, or the development in a trade in lapis-lazuli and other semi-precious stones¹⁶⁹

There are some, isolated figures, from countries reporting their opium imports from Afghanistan:

Table 2 Opium import figures from 1934-1945, in metric tons¹⁷⁰

	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
USSR	18	18	18	18	50,4							
Germany		1,5	1,5									
United States					4,25					22		2,4
France						2,4						

While these figures do not give much information to go by, we can assume some reasonable stability in production of opium in this period. For 1938 we have only two figures of legal imports, but these amount to almost 55 metric tons. The production was likely to have been higher, and the fact that in subsequent years it is then not as much is likely an indicator

¹⁶⁶ Haq, ‘Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective’, pp. 947–48.

¹⁶⁷ *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print. Part 3, from 1940 to 1945: Series B, Near and Middle East: Vol. 3. Persia and Afghanistan, January 1940-December 1941*, ed. by Malcolm Yapp (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1997), p. 558.

¹⁶⁸ Yapp, p. 572.

¹⁶⁹ “No 40. Unofficial Quarterly Letter from His Majesty’s Minister, Kabul – (Received June 3)” cited in: Yapp, p. 597.

¹⁷⁰ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, pp. 53–54.

of a lack of reliable statistics during the war years, rather than an indication of a decrease in production, especially due to the fact that there is no longer data on the USSR's imports.¹⁷¹ Additionally, Afghanistan also exported to Japan, but no export figures are available.¹⁷²

We can also consider data produced by the Afghans themselves. Bradford cites Afghan state department figures that estimate the following exports:

Table 3 Export estimates by the Afghan government, 1937-1941¹⁷³

	Metric tons exported
March 1937- February 1938	25,67
March 1938- February 1939	33,59
March 1939- February 1940	24,23
March 1940- February 1941	22,79

The numbers supplied by the Afghan government, then, are much lower than those of other countries stating the import of Afghan opium. We can see here the difficulty of estimating the opium production in Afghanistan before the UNODC began producing reports. However, it is interesting that both the import and export figures report a heightened production in 1938. This may be due to the war preparations, which, as the remaining war, increased Afghan production as the supply of other countries went down. Afghanistan had started formally exporting opium, and in order to do so, a monopoly was established. The creation of a Government Opium Company, the monopoly being controlled by the national bank, the Bank-i-Millie, allowed the export of opium. Farmers in Afghanistan were licensed to produce opium, and government agents would then purchase the crops. Independent farmers wanting to plant opium could submit applications through local supervisors to the National Department of Agriculture. These local supervisors essentially controlled who would grow opium poppies.¹⁷⁴ Incidentally the Bank was also granted many other monopolies. It had been founded in 1932, and was the first modern corporation in Afghanistan.¹⁷⁵

Finally, there are additional figures, differing from the above once more in the global estimates of opium production. In the beginning 20th century, world-wide supply of opium was not large. In 1934 it is stated that, aside from China, around 1,770 tons were produced annually,

¹⁷¹ Bulletin on Narcotics, i, pp. 6–38.

¹⁷² Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, pp. 53–54.

¹⁷³ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, p. 55.

¹⁷⁴ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, pp. 53–54.

¹⁷⁵ Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 203.

while the Chinese production was estimated in 1930 to be around 12,000 tons.¹⁷⁶ Other sources indicate that between 1934 and 1937 the annual global supply was at 18,504 tons on average. Of this Afghanistan was said to produce 1.5%, which would put the Afghan production of opium at 277 tons. Once more we can observe the difficulty of collecting coherent data, as this production is much higher than the Afghan export figures shown earlier on.¹⁷⁷ However, this figure should be treated cautiously, as it is significantly higher than all other estimates available. In reality, opium production in Afghanistan was probably somewhere in the middle of the two estimates.

Decisive factors influencing the opium economy in Afghanistan

Generally, in the analysis of factors affecting drug production, the role of the state is important due to its efforts to control shadow economies. However, even though the state did not wish to limit the opium economy at this stage, the question of the strength of the central state still plays a role in this context. Before the 19th century, Afghanistan was not governed as a central state. It was a patrimonial state, where one tribe would formally rule, and bargains would constantly be struck between clans, tribes, regional peoples and solidarity groups to maintain this rulership. When Britain began exercising influence over Afghanistan she did not find a working government system, but a loose confederation of chieftaincies.¹⁷⁸ Britain's indirect influence over the country faced many of the same issues other invading states, such as the Soviet Union would face later on. In these early years, there seemed to have already been issues with central control. The Anglo-Afghan wars would also show the problems of controlling the state. The occupation and continuous presence of the British in the country was expensive, and, with ongoing revolts, it was also untenable throughout the 19th century.¹⁷⁹

1747 is generally accepted as the founding year of Afghanistan, when Ahmad Shah Durrani rose to power, who was later to implement organisational structures of the military and state that would remain relevant throughout the country's further development.¹⁸⁰ The following decades, under different rulership, saw first an integration of new territories, and then a decrease in both size and stability of the country. The first intervention by the British

¹⁷⁶ Harumi Goto-Shibata, 'The League of Nations, Washington and Internationalism in East Asia', in *The International History of East Asia* (Oxon / New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 57–68 (p. 63).

¹⁷⁷ J. Collins, *Regulations and Prohibitions: Anglo-American Relations and International Drug Control, 1939-1964*, PhD Thesis (London: London School of Economics, 2015), p. 103.

¹⁷⁸ Amin Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan: A History of Struggle and Survival* (London / New York: I. B. Tauris, 2012), pp. 4–17.

¹⁷⁹ Dalrymple, *Return of a King*, p. 266,300.

¹⁸⁰ Erwin Grötzbach, *Afghanistan - Eine Geographische Landeskunde* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1990), p. 9.

would also lead to wars in the country. The first Anglo-Afghan war (1839-1842) was caused by British interference and the wish to implant a ruler they supported – Shah Shuja, who had previously been ousted, and who would not remain in power for long.¹⁸¹ Dupree summarises:

The realistic results of the first Anglo-Afghan War can be stated simply: After four years of disaster, both in honor, material and personnel, the British left Afghanistan as they had found it, in tribal chaos and with Dost Mohammed Khan returned to the throne¹⁸²

The second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-1879) was caused by the arrival of a Russian mission in Afghanistan.¹⁸³ This second Anglo-Afghan war is worth particular consideration due to its outcome: The treaty of Gandamak, signed in 1879, saw all future Afghan foreign affairs being controlled by Britain.¹⁸⁴ These first two Anglo-Afghan wars were important to the country's internal history as well: The wars would usually see a radical decline of the ruling establishment's influence. In its place, alternative sources of power, namely "tribal aristocracy and the religious establishment" took over, leading the rebellions against the invaders. This meant that the defeat of British armies also led to a weakening in central power in Afghanistan.¹⁸⁵ Despite these invasions and international influences 19th century Afghanistan remained fairly isolated, both culturally and politically.¹⁸⁶

Throughout the period of British influence there were various attempts to control the Afghan opium trade. While the British never ruled the country in a formal colonial sense, they did exert some power over the Afghan country. In the 19th century the British government used this influence to try to introduce taxation reforms. During these reforms an active interest in opium was taken, as opium was to be taxed when it moved through Kabul.¹⁸⁷

Additionally, this period saw, with the aid of British influence, the drawing-up of Afghanistan's borders. This could be seen as successful state-building, but there were other motives behind it. Internationally Afghanistan held an important role: Both the British and Russians wished to develop it into a sort of buffer state between them. This meant both states

¹⁸¹ For an overview of Afghanistan's rulers, see the appendix.

¹⁸² Dupree, *Afghanistan*, p. 399.

¹⁸³ Ludwig W. Adamec, *Afghanistan, 1900-1923: A Diplomatic History* (University of California Press, 1967), p. 1.

¹⁸⁴ The treaty also had other outcomes. It placed all British-born citizens in Kabul and other areas under Afghan protection, saw the regions of Kurram, Pishin and Sibi ceded to the British. The treaty also stated that the Amir would receive £60,000 a year, but had no definite right to assistance in the case of military aggression against Afghanistan.

Dupree, *Afghanistan*, p. 409.

¹⁸⁵ Ashraf Ghani, 'Islam and State-building in a tribal society Afghanistan: 1880-1901', *Modern Asian Studies*, 12 (1978), p. 270.

¹⁸⁶ Vartan Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization*, Revised. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2018), p. 3.

¹⁸⁷ Hanifi, *Connecting Histories in Afghanistan*, p. 209.

needed to have some influence in the country, despite neither wishing to colonise it.¹⁸⁸ The demarcation of borders was influenced vastly by this policy. Part of this was the demarcation of the Durand line in 1893, a 1,200-mile border splitting the Pashtun ethnicity in two parts, as the British were worried that the Pashtun tribal feuds may support Russian influence. The Durand line could be controlled and monitored by the British, as it followed mountain ranges and thus, by blocking key mountain passes, the British were able to control the border.¹⁸⁹

As the establishment of the Durand line shows, Britain faced difficulties stemming from the Afghan borderlands - by which is mean the Pashtun dominated regions on the border of, then, India and Afghanistan. As the British also feared the potentially destabilising potential of opium they did not encourage the production to a great extent, rather choosing to minimise the taxes formerly introduced, but without any active encouragement of the opium industry.¹⁹⁰

It was not just the British that took an active interest in the opium trade: In the late 19th and early 20th century Afghanistan underwent a number of significant social changes, partially supported by European powers.¹⁹¹ This affected opium in a few ways, firstly, at the end of the 19th century “British authorities issued trading licenses for opium and *charas* (hashish) traders who commuted between Badakhshan, in north-eastern Afghanistan, and the silk road oases of Central Asia [...] in a holistic perspective, Afghanistan’s contribution at the time was negligible”¹⁹² A few years later Afghanistan became a centralised state under Amir Abdur Rahman, who ruled from 1880-1901. Rahman pursued a policy of violence and internal imperialism, which succeeded in breaking the Afghan tribes and unifying the country. The reforms carried out in these years were necessary to assert the strength of Afghan rulers. The dynasty needed military and economic self-sufficiency in order to preserve an authority that was being threatened from inside and outside. But the reforms were not as successful as necessary, and thus Afghanistan remained dependent on the international community.¹⁹³ The new ruler also chose to monopolise the Afghan trade of opium sometime after 1892. Afghanistan did make use of foreign aid, first by the British and later by the Russians. In this period the state did not interact much with its citizens, nor was it able to exert power and authority in areas further removed from the capital – all issues that would come to define Afghanistan’s history.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁸ Saikal, *Modern Afghanistan*, p. 27.

¹⁸⁹ Goodhand, ‘Frontiers and Wars’, p. 195.

¹⁹⁰ Haq, ‘Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective’, pp. 947–48

¹⁹¹ Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan*, p. 1.

¹⁹² Kreutzmann, ‘Afghanistan and the Opium World Market’, p. 607.

¹⁹³ Gregorian, *The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan*, p. 6.

¹⁹⁴ Goodhand, ‘Frontiers and Wars’, p. 196.

The situation of the state in this time period can also give us some clues regarding the later situation in Afghanistan. For instance, in foreign documents on Afghanistan we can see that the Afghan borderlands were causing issues to the British:

The Afghan Government are aware that for the last sixty years or so we have been struggling with the question of how to control the frontier tribes. We have spent thousands of lives and millions of money in these efforts, and in some places we have made progress. But this progress has not been commensurate with the expenditure involved [...].¹⁹⁵

Despite these issues, the formerly mentioned system of government continued to work reasonably well, at least internally. Amanullah carried out reforms¹⁹⁶ in the following years, which did see some successes, even though many of the policies failed to take hold in the more traditional state.¹⁹⁷ The third Anglo-Afghan war (1919) was caused by an Afghan invasion of British India and ended in a stalemate.¹⁹⁸ Peace negotiations of the same year allowed Afghanistan to retake control of its own affairs.¹⁹⁹

In the beginning 20th century, as the Afghan state was in a period of reform, opium played an important role. It was a major source of revenue, as, while not much was being produced, it was a lucrative business and thus provided financial means for the government, which it used, in part, to re-import western narcotics to support the development of a healthcare system.²⁰⁰

Another issue affecting the opium production was the question of demand. Here we have to differentiate between the international and local markets. In Afghanistan's highlands, as well as in the area which later became to be known as the Golden Crescent, opium had a long history, even if it had only been cultivated in very small quantities. Opium grown there was bound for cities in Iran and India. At this stage, Afghanistan was not yet linked to global markets; rather, the products were only sold on locally.²⁰¹ Internationally, there was a demand for opium in this period, as is easily proven when considering the burgeoning trade in this time. However, this demand was being filled by suppliers other than Afghanistan. Until the late pre-

¹⁹⁵ Yapp, p. 570.

¹⁹⁶ Reforms included a framework for legal, judicial and administrative matters in Afghanistan. Some of the reforms were less well received, as they were considered to have been carried out too quickly and too radically. These included women's rights, an expansion of the press, the abolishment of slavery, social welfare reforms, educational reforms. As Amanullah was deposed soon after suggesting many of these reforms,, most never made it past a draft stage, although he did formulate a constitution and established foreign relations.

¹⁹⁷ Leon B. Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan 1919-1929; King Amanullah's Failure to modernize a Tribal Society* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 69.

¹⁹⁸ Percy Molesworth Sykes, *A history of Afghanistan* (Kegan Paul, 2007) p. 270.

¹⁹⁹ Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan*, p. 47.

²⁰⁰ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, pp. 36–37.

²⁰¹ Haq, 'Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective', p. 945.

modern period Turkey and Persia had been the main exporters, as well as producers, of opium.²⁰²

The bases of the Afghan economy and trading systems

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Afghanistan had been a poor country, but economically self-sufficient, with no debts and without a need for foreign trade.²⁰³ Most of the traders, so-called *powindas*, were individual merchants or pastoral nomads, and they made a significant contribution to the Afghan trade. Afghanistan was in this period also famous for its horse breeders.²⁰⁴ Afghans used the traditional trade links they had to Iran and India to their advantage and had a far greater trade than Iran at this time.²⁰⁵ There had been trade links between India and Central Asia for centuries, but these links deepened in the 16th century. Lahore, Multan, Kabul and Qandahar were major cities on the land trade routes which connected central Asia and India. These routes were being used to trade a number of items, including spices, sugar, indigo, precious stones and animals – and also opium. This trade became more pronounced in the 16th century.²⁰⁶ The trade along these routes helped stabilise the opium trade throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, keeping it at a low, but more or less consistent level. A large part of the trade in the region relied on the silk road, which connected Mediterranean and Chinese markets.²⁰⁷ With Kabul as one of the major trading posts on the silk road, Afghanistan stood to profit from the trade enormously. Opium was traded along the silk road, however, quantities are unknown.²⁰⁸

Production of opium increased in the later period, and Afghanistan emerged from the Second World War as one of the opium producing countries. There are two major reasons why this was possible. Firstly, Afghanistan had been dependent on other countries' subsidies in previous decades. The war meant that aid was no longer being granted, and thus the country needed to find new sources of revenue. Secondly, other countries' inability to produce opium enabled the country to fill this gap in production. As Afghanistan remained neutral during the

²⁰² Trocki, *Opium, Empire and the Global Political Economy*, pp. 21–22.

²⁰³ Adamec, *Afghanistan, 1900-1923*, p. 6.

²⁰⁴ Jos J. L. Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire c.1710-1780* (Leiden: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 16–21.

²⁰⁵ Gommans, *The Rise of the Indo-Afghan Empire*, p. 25,34.

²⁰⁶ Muzaffar Alam, 'Trade, State Policy and Regional Change: Aspects of Mughal-Uzbek Commercial Relations, C. 1550-1750', in *India and Central Asia, Commerce and Culture, 1500-1800*, ed. by Scott C. Levi (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 64–92 (pp. 202–7).

²⁰⁷ Hanifi, *Connecting Histories in Afghanistan*, p. 4.

²⁰⁸ Derks, *History of the Opium Problem*, p. 141.

war years, it was also less involved with the conflict,²⁰⁹ and thus free to continue and increase their exports of opium.²¹⁰ Although Afghanistan did not export as much as other countries in the post-war period, the war established it as a supplier, and the systems put in place during these years would support the heightened production in later years.

In the 1930s and 1940s opium was being produced under government licensing, which was a source of revenue for the then government (Musahiban).²¹¹ Exports between 1935-1945 were important. 40% of these exports were agricultural products, such as cotton, fruits, grain and opium.²¹²

The most pressing social issue in Afghanistan throughout this period, and particularly in the later years, was a desperate need for modern medication, which required more sophisticated methods of production, which were not available in Afghanistan. While the country did produce raw opium, the basis for some medication, it was not technologically advanced enough to refine the opium grown on Afghan land into such medication. However, opium still helped overcome this issue, as the export of opium allowed the re-import of western medication.²¹³

There were foreign subsidies, for instance by the British government, but these were mainly used for arms and arms manufacturing, and some modernising projects.²¹⁴ It was only in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that dependence on international funding increased in Afghanistan.

Throughout this chapter, we have occasionally mentioned estimates of production, but due to the insufficient data, it is difficult to estimate by how much production grew. We do know that the number of provinces producing opium rose, that the demand in the surrounding regions grew, and that Afghanistan slowly became connected to the world opium market. Therefore, we can state that the production experienced a growth, with the highest estimate seeing 277 tons for 1934-37, while in 1932 only 74.5 tons were said to have been produced.²¹⁵

By the beginning of the 20th century many countries were already taking steps towards decreasing their opium usage and production and increasing their control over narcotics. The

²⁰⁹ Both Britain and Russia were afraid of a war on Afghan soil during a period of danger in Europe, and thus during the first world war both countries largely left Afghanistan to its own devices. There were attempts by Turkey to align Afghanistan with the central powers
Adamec, *Afghanistan, 1900-1923*, p. 83.

²¹⁰ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, p. 57.

²¹¹ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 103.

²¹² Barfield, *Afghanistan*, p. 203.

²¹³ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, p. 55.

²¹⁴ Adamec, *Afghanistan, 1900-1923*, p. 6.

²¹⁵ Bulletin on Narcotics, i, pp. 6–38.

US had been one of the primary purchasers of licit opium, but in the 1940s they began expressing increased concern, as the illicit production accompanying the legal one, grew. In an effort to curb this production they attempted to make the export of opiates, and the import of medications in and out of Afghanistan more difficult.²¹⁶ In response to this, as well as other factors which will be analysed in the following chapter, Afghanistan introduced a first ban on opium production in 1945.

4.2 A turning point: The outlawing of opium, the Great Game and their influences on the Afghan opium economy (1945-1978)

This chapter will consider the early to mid 20th century, when countries began outlawing opium. While there was initially some resistance to this movement, as many countries continued to depend on narcotics as a source of government income, drug legislation was soon drawn up and was to control the import and export of these goods. The international stance on narcotics affected Afghanistan's opium industry in several ways, as the country was pressured to put in place its own drug control legislation, which was only successful to a limited extent. These changes were especially relevant as the country underwent a number of significant changes in these years. After World War II, as India and Pakistan became independent countries, Britain withdrew from most of Asia. But this did not mean the end to Afghanistan's position as a buffer state – the US began subsidising the country, despite not believing in its strategic relevance. Rather the US aim was to assist the country in maintaining independence, and developing the national economy. Independence was preferable to the alternative: An alignment of Afghanistan with the communist countries in its vicinity. Thus, once more, Afghanistan was in the interest of a power that did not want to directly control it, but to exercise enough control over it to remain a buffer state. In the 1950s, nonetheless, Afghanistan began moving closer to the Soviet Union, partially due to disputes with Pakistan. In 1950 both countries signed their first mutual trade agreement, while the US continued sending military assistance to Pakistan.

The opium economy underwent a number of changes in this period. The move to illegality may be the primary change to be observed. It is difficult to state whether the opium economy grew, and if so, by how much, as estimates tend to be vague. However, we can make some assumptions about the change in the opium industry. After opium was outlawed, it is likely to have experienced a significant restructuring and the size of the production would have

²¹⁶ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 103.

subsequently decreased. However, after this the amount of opium increased slowly, reaching a temporary highpoint in the late 1970s.

By 1945 estimates of production vary between under 50 tons to over 250. However, this was during a period of licit production, and we can assume that production in Afghanistan decreased when measures to outlaw it took over, especially in the late 1950s. In the 1960s and early 1970s annual production is estimated at 100-150 tons,²¹⁷ which, according to Bradford, rose to 200-250 tons by 1976.²¹⁸ Once more it is important to emphasise the stark difference between official government figures and estimates of the actual production. In 1956, for instance, the government estimated a production of only 12 metric tons.²¹⁹

We also know that the efforts to apprehend smugglers and thus combat the growing opium economy increased in the later years of this period. We can find some indicators, such as the number of arrests of smugglers to substantiate this argument. However, once more we must tread carefully in using these numbers, as they could indicate either an increase in smuggling activity, or an increase in government activity to apprehend cross-border drug trafficking. Regardless, we can see, in the following table, a decisive increase in arrests of smugglers:

Table 4 Apprehension of Afghan smugglers, 1971-1973²²⁰

1971	72
1972	221
1973	584

We can conclude that there was a growth in the illicit opium economy in the early to mid-1970s. The most important factor for this seems to have been the changes in the market. The weakening of the state as well as economic factors may have favoured an increased cultivation. Importantly, however, there was a decrease in the amount of opium supplied by other states, for instance due to the Iranian Revolution and the Hadd ordinance in the late 1970s, both of which served to increase the Afghan opium production.²²¹

Economic factors favouring an increased production

Many of the factors favouring a growing opium economy are of an economic nature. Throughout the period examined in this chapter opium was produced at a level which was

²¹⁷ Nawa, *Opium Nation*, chap. 2.

²¹⁸ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, p. 254.

²¹⁹ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 60.

²²⁰ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, p. 194.

²²¹ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 103.

initially consistent, and then quickly increased. Opium had been formally outlawed, as shown for instance by the fact that the commodity was included on a list of banned substances in a document of foreign exchange regulations in Afghanistan, published in 1951.²²² However, this did not hinder the industry. Rather, other factors encouraged it.

One of these factors was a trade agreement, the ATTA, which was signed by Pakistan and Afghanistan in 1965. It granted Afghanistan the right to import products duty free from Pakistan's ports. The ATTA did not directly mention opium trade, of course, but indirectly influenced the industry nonetheless, as it enabled a smuggling economy to emerge. This came as the border trade was controlled by Pashtun tribes on the Afghan-Pakistani border. This, alongside road construction and the introduction of new heavy trucks (bought in part through West German credit) facilitated this trade.²²³

Next to official agreements favouring opium production, there was also the fact that the national economy suffered, especially during the 1960s and 1970s. As we have established, a national economy decreasing in stability encourages shadow economies to emerge, due to their profitability. Afghanistan's economy suffered during the attempts to install a communist government. The civil war preceding the Soviet invasion, as well as reforms implemented, in particular land reforms, led to a shortage in grain in a country that had previously been economically fairly self-sufficient, at least in terms of its food production. In July 1978 yet another reform was introduced, this one aiming at reducing the debts of the rural farmers- a positive attempt in theory. But the reform had fateful consequences, as interest had been outlawed: Farmers had previously been forced to borrow to pay for grain, tools and other necessities. Now that interest had been outlawed lenders lost their incentive, and farmers were unable to plant crops, leading to a drastic fall in agricultural production. The government had promised a credit system but did not manage to install it in time.²²⁴

Production and consumption

In the mid-20th century Afghanistan's opium production was focused, primarily, on the surrounding markets. While licit exports were usually destined for international export, the illegal demand stemmed from the surrounding regions, at least in the beginning era of illegal

²²² Maxwell J. Fry, *The Afghan Economy: Money, Finance, and the Critical Constraints to Economic Development* (BRILL, 1974), p. 262.

²²³ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 197.

²²⁴ Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan*, p. 71.

production. This means that we can observe a connection to the Pakistani and Iranian markets, which served to increase production.²²⁵

Demand within Afghanistan was initially low. In the 1970s opium was mainly grown and consumed in the north-east of the country, primarily in Badakhshan and Nangarhar.²²⁶ From a report on narcotics in 1949 we can assume that the provinces shown on the following map were most likely producing opium.

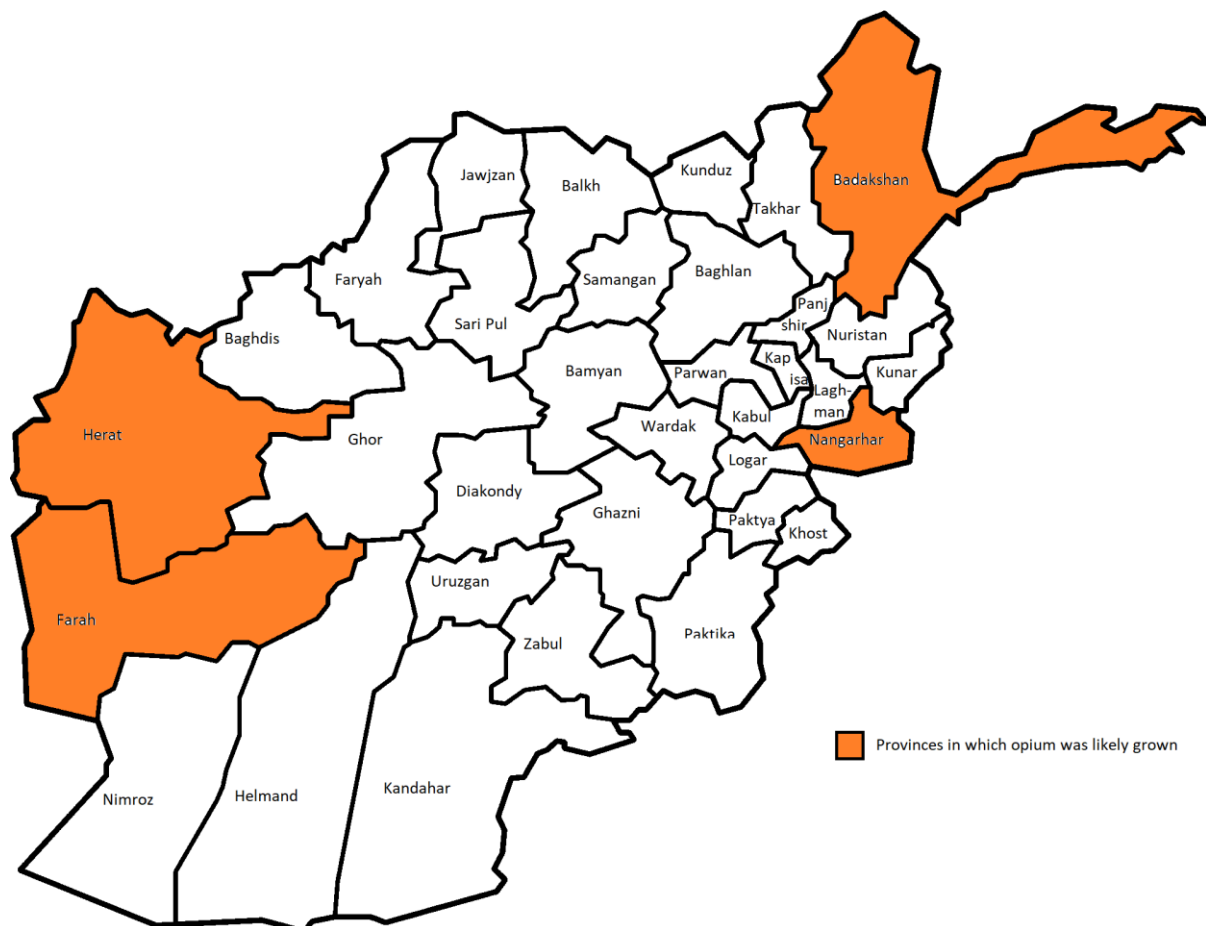


Figure 10 Provinces of opium production in 1949²²⁷

It was also, in this period, not habitually used, except by older men “who have passed their biological and economic usefulness as mature adults and no longer enjoy political power”²²⁸. It was uncommon, before the Afghan civil war, to consume pure opium, while it was much more common to consume *mufarah*, a mixture of *teryak* (opium) essence, *charas*

²²⁵ Alfred McCoy, ‘Heroinhandel Und Internationale Politik - Ein Vergleich Zwischen Südostasien Und Südwestasien’, in *Der Planet Der Drogen: Analyse Einer Kriminellen Weltmacht*, by Alain Labrousse (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996), pp. 251–63 (p. 260).

²²⁶ McLaughlin, ‘The Poppy Is Not an Ordinary Flower’, p. 719.

²²⁷ Bulletin on Narcotics, i, pp. 6–39.

²²⁸ Dupree, *Afghanistan*, p. 236.

(marihuana) and spices.²²⁹ However, drug addiction inside Afghanistan was not widely spread, and thus opium was primarily produced for the surrounding regions.

Within the Golden Crescent, Iran played a particular role in the years in discussion. Addiction rates there had seen a continual growth throughout the 20th century, with an estimate of over a million addicts in 1950.²³⁰ By 1955 there were an estimated 2.8 million addicts. At this stage the illicit economy of opium in Iran was valued at \$64 million, triple the legal opium economy.²³¹ This led to the Iranian government first outlawing opium production in 1955. Afghanistan took over as a supplier in this period and increased production. In 1969, partially as a response to the Afghan smuggling industry,²³² the Iranian government doubled back on its policy, and permitted a small amount of opium to be grown on Iranian land, with government-accredited addicts being given coupons to purchase the legal opium. Despite this move, Afghan opium production continued to grow, and Iran was, in the 1970s, a major market for Afghan opium.²³³ In 1960 45% of all opium in Iran was coming from Afghanistan – by 1972 this percentage increased to 90%. An annual 100-170 tons of opium were estimated to be smuggled into Iran from Afghanistan every year. In the 1960s there tended to be small-scale smugglers in Afghanistan, who were usually related to hashish and hippie tourism. By 1972 these were replaced by more advanced, and usually more professional drug smugglers. The decade had seen a complete change of the Afghan opium economy, with Afghanistan emerging as a player on the global drug market.²³⁴

The Afghan opium economy expanded further with eradication measures taken in Turkey in 1970s.²³⁵ The demand for narcotics grew in the 1960s, as social and cultural changes in Europe and America were accompanied by increased recreational drug use: “The number of heroin addicts in the country [the US] was estimated to have risen from about 50,000 in 1960 to roughly half a million by 1970”.²³⁶ US President Richard Nixon’s war on drugs targeted heroin in particular. Despite increased efforts against it, drug use continued to rise in the late

²²⁹ Dupree, *Afghanistan*, pp. 236–37.

²³⁰ Haq, ‘Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective’, p. 948.

²³¹ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, p. 102.

²³² McLaughlin, ‘The Poppy is Not an Ordinary Flower’, p. 738.

²³³ Haq, ‘Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective’, p. 948.

²³⁴ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, pp. 152–59.

²³⁵ Haq, ‘Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective’, p. 948.

²³⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, ‘A Century of International Drug Control’, p. 88.

1970s.²³⁷ However, the war on drugs also affected another of Afghanistan's illicit economies: The limitation of hashish production came in part through US pressure.²³⁸

The sudden growth in production that Afghanistan experienced in the late 1970s can be attributed to a growing demand. Before this period, Afghanistan had been producing mainly for the local markets, exporting only very little opium beyond the Golden Crescent. Southeast Asia supplied most of the heroin for the European and American markets in this stage. When these supplier countries ceased production, or at least decreased the amounts, mostly due to the role of the central state as well as a drought, the supply-side shifted to Pakistan and Afghanistan.²³⁹

One issue with outlawing the supply of drugs, is that this does not usually cause the demand to go down, but rather encourages alternative locations of productions. This is especially true on a small scale, where provinces producing opium within Afghanistan changed, but also from a more global perspective. Prior to the Soviet invasion, Turkey had been one of the major sources of illicit opium in the world, which was a great cause of concern for the United States administration, as over half of the heroin in the US originated from Turkey.²⁴⁰ The Nixon administration, through agreements with Turkey, eventually achieved what they had wanted: Opium production was outlawed in the country in 1972. An official ban from the government was aided by a form of compensated eradication. Here, as in Afghanistan, the US exerted pressure through threats of sanctions and by threatening to withdraw aid, which was also substantial. Predictably, this did not lead to a decreasing demand. Rather, the production shifted, and this move contributed to the rising importance of the 'Golden Crescent' on a global level.²⁴¹ For Turkey as well, the ban would prove to be short-lived, as the opposition felt it had not been the right step, and a licensing system was introduced instead.²⁴²

A new stance on drugs

Up until the early 20th century opium had been traded as a legal good. In Afghanistan, the commodity had been traded on a small-scale before this point, and, as far as can be

²³⁷ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'A Century of International Drug Control', p. 94.

²³⁸ Fariba Nawa, 'Women and the Drug Trade in Afghanistan', in *Modern Lives in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Borderlands: Under the Drones*, by Shahzad Bashir and Robert D. Crews (Cambridge / London: Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 236–56 (p. 238).

²³⁹ Haq, 'Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective', p. 949.

²⁴⁰ Jorrit Kamminga, 'The Political History of Turkey's Opium Licensing System for the Production of Medicines: Lessons for Afghanistan', *The Senlis Council*, p. 5 <http://www.jorritkamminga.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/A36_JK_Turkey_0.pdf> [accessed 30 April 2017].

²⁴¹ Dormandy, p. 254.

²⁴² Kamminga, 'The Political History of Turkey's Opium Licensing System', p. 9.

observed, without moral qualms. It was only the international developments that made opium illegal in Afghanistan, and thus inadvertently created a profitable economy in the country that would be the subject to many decades of attempts to control it.

The substance was already considered unhealthy by the early 20th century, when there were increasing international calls to declare it illegal. Despite these initial moves towards a controlling of the trade, many countries continued to profit from opium in the interwar period.²⁴³

Generally, the starting point to international drug control is considered to be the Shanghai Conference of the International Opium Commission. In the beginning 20th century many countries still relied on the export of drugs for their state finances, and alongside this, consumption was usually tolerated. Thus, the Shanghai conference represents a true cut in history.²⁴⁴ During this first conference the production in Afghanistan was considered to be quite low, and the country was not investigated by the commission. At this stage, Badakhshan was considered the only district in which opium was produced.²⁴⁵ The Shanghai commission led to The Hague Convention of 1912, where the first international drug control treaty was agreed upon. Opium, Morphine, Heroin and Cocaine were to be controlled after this conference, which saw the introduction of drug control measures in a convention. But since many countries did not want to reduce cultivation, the convention did not set any real and measurable limits. Additionally, the treaty was not ratified by many countries, at least until after the end of the First World War when an addendum to the peace treaties stated that all signatories to these would also accept the convention.²⁴⁶

The peace treaties also formed the League of Nations. The creation of the League of Nations, and later the United Nations, was an important step on the path to the control of narcotics, including opium. When the League was founded it considered it a part of its role, in the spirit of its humanitarian and economic efforts, to control opium. This was achieved through several treaties.

One important institution created by the increasing movements against drugs and the international community's efforts to halt the consumption, production and trafficking of drugs was the OAC, established in 1920. The Committee held meetings in an attempt to control the

²⁴³ Goto-Shibata, 'The League of Nations', pp. 57–58.

²⁴⁴ (UNODC) United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'A Century of International Drug Control', *Bulletin on Narcotics*, LIX.1&2 (2007), pp. 1–2.

²⁴⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'A Century of International Drug Control', p. 37.

²⁴⁶ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'A Century of International Drug Control', pp. 64–68.

trade of drugs.²⁴⁷ The US had a vested interest in opium, despite not being in the League of Nations. As such, they participated in various meetings by the OAC.

While the first treaties concerned themselves with the outlawing of a legal production of opium, a new problem emerged: As legal opium became increasingly rare, an illegal market surfaced, which was to be controlled with the ‘1936 Convention for the suppression of the illicit traffic in dangerous goods’. But once more, war became an issue, and as Germany, Japan, the Soviet Union and Italy left the League of Nations in the 1930s narcotics control became more complicated. However, the structure of the anti-drugs measures allowed non-members to cooperate.²⁴⁸

The United Nations took over the functions of the League of Nations in 1949. The UN then integrated the six already existent treaties on narcotics into one – the single convention on narcotics drugs, which was adopted in 1961 and came into force in 1964. More countries were signatories to this treaty than to any of the previous ones, and it supersedes all but one of the previous treaties²⁴⁹

The US played a vastly important role in the prohibition of opium, especially in the Afghan context, as pressure by the US would lead to the first ban on opium implemented in Afghanistan.²⁵⁰ The set-up of the post-war drug control legislations allowed the US to exert more pressure on states that had previously rejected obligations around opium control, like Iran and Afghanistan.²⁵¹

The international policies affected Afghanistan as they increased the need for each country to introduce restrictions in order to gain international recognition. This was increasingly important in Afghanistan, which depended on international aid more and more in the latter half of the 20th century. Afghanistan upheld relations with both the Soviet Union and the US throughout the period examined here.

We know that the state of Afghanistan was unable or unwilling to efficiently control the opium production in the country. By the 1960s and 1970s the Afghan government was faulted by the INCB for its inability to control opium production. Despite this official reprimand, Afghanistan’s production was not large in this period: Opium was only being produced in a few provinces, chiefly Badakhshan.²⁵²

²⁴⁷ Goto-Shibata, ‘The League of Nations’, p. 60.

²⁴⁸ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, ‘A Century of International Drug Control’, pp. 69–79.

²⁴⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, ‘A Century of International Drug Control’, p. 84.

²⁵⁰ Derks, *History of the Opium Problem*, p. 637.

²⁵¹ Collins, *Regulations and Prohibitions*, p. 39.

²⁵² Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 103.

The weak hold of the state over the country also becomes clear through the implementation of other policies by the central government: The attempts to install communism were met with resistance from the population of Afghanistan. Revolts started in Nuristan and Badakhshan in the summer of 1978 but quickly spread throughout the country. With the support of the Soviet Union the central government tried to halt the uprisings through airstrikes, bombing villages they believed harboured the rebellion – much the same tactics that would be used by the Soviet government just a few years later. But they were not successful, and the Soviet Union continued to increase its presence, with as many as 4,500 advisors being in the country in November 1979, shortly before their invasion, which will be examined in the next chapter.²⁵³

A dependent economy – the influence of international interests on opium production

It was a fateful US decision that would lead Afghanistan to edge even closer to the Soviet Union's policies. In 1954 the Afghan government appealed for US aid for military expenditures. While the American government refused, the Soviet Union obliged with a \$100 million credit for economic and military development, and in the following years thousands of Afghan soldiers were sent to the USSR for training. Despite this, the US continued to grant economic aid.²⁵⁴

In 1964 King Mohammad Zahir introduced reforms under his 'New democracy programme', including a constitution, the introduction of a parliament, elections, freedom of the press and the formation of political parties. This in turn led to the 1965 formation of the PDPA. The PDPA did face some troubles, and just two years after its foundation split into different fractions, notably Khalq and Parcham. The Soviet Union remained in contact with both, but did not apparently take this communist movement entirely seriously, as they did not invite either to international communist conferences.²⁵⁵

Afghanistan became a communist republic before the infamous Soviet invasion in the 1980s. The Soviet invasion was preceded by chaotic, and for many of the rulers in the period, fatal attempts to install communism in the Central Asian state. On 3rd July 1973 Mohammed Daoud ousted King Zahir in a coup, proclaiming himself the first president of the Republic of Afghanistan. Five years later Daoud himself became the victim of a bloody coup, when he was replaced by Nur Mohammad Taraki, who had previously been the secretary general of the

²⁵³ Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan*, pp. 74–75.

²⁵⁴ Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan*, pp. 23–26.

²⁵⁵ Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan*, pp. 29–33.

PDPA.²⁵⁶ Taraki in turn was replaced and executed by Hafizullah Amin, just 16 months into his rule. Hafizullah Amin then was killed during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when he was replaced with Babrak Kamal.²⁵⁷

Afghanistan had been involved in some capacity with the drug control of the League since 1934, when they joined it. This allowed the Afghan economy to expand, with exports largely based around fruit and karakul sheep, the latter making up 40-50% of Afghan exports between 1936-1946.²⁵⁸ One of the first motivations for Afghanistan to involve itself in an international drug control regime was a healthcare crisis in the late 1930s. In order to import western medicine, they needed to participate in the international regulatory system of Narcotics. Even though the country became a signatory to the 1931 Convention for Limiting the Manufacture and Regulating the Distribution of Narcotic Drugs, they did not fulfil the requirements necessary; for instance, estimates of the consumption of licit narcotics were not submitted annually, as was a requirement.²⁵⁹

Afghanistan announced its first ban on opium in 1944, to become active in 1945. The reasoning for this ban was largely to improve US-Afghan relations and thus increase the amount of aid flowing into the country, which had stagnated after World War II. In this period the US was trying to purposefully eliminate the production of opium, and thus the continuing production would have posed a risk to international relations. Afghanistan had been more or less dependent on foreign aid since the British presence, and thus the lack of such aid was having adverse effects. The potential income from opium was simply much lower than the potential granted aid. However, this ban was unsuccessful. Even the Government Opium Company, while they did start exporting other commodities, continued to purchase opium. The export of raw opium continued even to the US.²⁶⁰ An annual report produced by the Indian government in 1946 mentioned continued smuggling from Afghanistan.²⁶¹

In the mid-1950s the Afghan government started increased lobbying to become a legal exporter of opium, and, in order to prove that they would be able to implement this ban, created the Central Office for Narcotic Drugs and launched the Opium Act of 1956.²⁶² However, it became clear within a few years that this bid would be unsuccessful, and the Afghan government issued a renewed ban for opium, which was to be enforced from 1958. Once more

²⁵⁶ Afghanistan's communist party

²⁵⁷ Hammond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan*, p. 3.

²⁵⁸ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, pp. 47–48.

²⁵⁹ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, pp. 50–53.

²⁶⁰ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, pp. 84–97.

²⁶¹ Bulletin on Narcotics, i, pp. 6–38.

²⁶² Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, pp. 103–6.

a motivator may have been to continue the stream of foreign aid, which was substantial: In 1955-1956 Afghanistan was granted \$552 million by the Soviet Union and \$350 million by the US.²⁶³ We can see here already that the elimination of opium cultivation was not caused by fears for the health of the citizens or by moral qualms, rather it was, and would continue to be, reasoned through the international position on the issue. This could cause problems in the implementation of the ban, as it was foreign, rather than internal interests that played the biggest role.

The 1958 ban targeted Badakhshan province in particular, the area with historically the highest production of opium. 3,300 government licensed farmers, as well as unlicensed ones, were now made redundant. These farmers were now in desperate need of increased foreign support. Despite promises of development aid, foreign subsidies never arrived in the region, which then soon began producing opium again.²⁶⁴ Just like decades later, the attempts to halt opium production could not be successful due to political dynamics in the country. The 1960s saw increased political conflict, leading to a widening disconnect between the government and citizens, as modernising attempts were not received well. Additionally, the Afghan economy stagnated. The attempts by the Afghan government to launch the so-called Decade of Democracy²⁶⁵ were met with anger.²⁶⁶

Increased efforts to stop drug production in 1960s and 1970s in Afghanistan were being implemented in an effort to gain international recognition and aid. This was disadvantageous: As the reasoning for the ban was substantiated by foreign arguments, they largely went against economic and cultural norms in Afghanistan, which meant that they were not altogether well received.²⁶⁷ From this overview we can already reach some conclusions. Firstly, drug control was implemented, strengthened and renewed in Afghanistan not due to reasons of health or to encourage legitimate production, but largely to gain foreign support. In most cases this meant that not enough was re-invested into the economy to increase Afghanistan's self-sufficiency, rather the country was becoming ever more dependent on foreign aid. It also meant that many of the rural population felt a widening disconnect towards their government vis-à-vis narcotics control.

We can also see that the period discussed in this chapter saw a drug production that was increasingly subject to restrictions, and a restructuring of the opium market – worldwide as

²⁶³ Khalizad, 'The Politics of Ethnicity in Southwest Asia', p. 668.

²⁶⁴ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, pp. 112–21.

²⁶⁵ The "Decade of Democracy" was said to have been between 1963-1973

²⁶⁶ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, pp. 130–31.

²⁶⁷ Bradford, *Opium in a Time of Uncertainty*, p. 12.

well as in Afghanistan. This enabled profits to rise for all involved in the drug trade. In a country with weak central control, such as Afghanistan, where drug production and trafficking was outlawed, but not effectively controlled, the narcotics industry became an easy and profitable business to involve oneself in. We can assume that opium production was not controlled too strictly. For instance, in the account of journalist Fariba Nawa, who grew up in Afghanistan, she writes that prior to the Soviet invasion, traffickers were punished with only a few days in prison.²⁶⁸

Other factors favouring an illicit production

There were various factors that encouraged an illicit economy. Firstly, and inadvertently, international funding was to be detrimental for counter-narcotic strategies in later years, notably, an international aid project implemented in the 1950s. In the 1950s the Helmand Valley authority was established. Helmand is now synonymous with opium production but this was not always the case.²⁶⁹ In part the increased cultivation is due to the establishment of the HVA. It was modelled after an American system and was meant to oversee economic development in the area. During the programme, population groups, including Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Baluch and Sikh groups were resettled to Helmand, where the majority is Pashtun. The HVA also sponsored an irrigation and dam building project, funded by the US, a project which aimed to legitimise state power. The US saw it as an opportunity to strengthen Afghanistan's position as a buffer state to the Soviet Union – once more Afghanistan was used in the context of a rivalry between two other states.²⁷⁰ In the same context of Cold War rivalry the Soviet Union funded a very similar project in Nangarhar. Both projects were founded to enable increased, and licit, cultivation in the country's more arid regions.

In retrospect both irrigation schemes failed due to the fact, that inappropriate technologies were applied, agro-social structures and disparities remained little understood, mismanagement took control, and market needs were not met.²⁷¹

While the project's original aims failed, it did lead to increased cultivation of the opium poppy in the regions. The irrigation schemes enabled this. Both regions later became leaders in opium production.²⁷²

²⁶⁸ Nawa, *Opium Nation*, chap. 1.

²⁶⁹ Paul Fishstein and Andrew Wilder, 'Winning Hearts and Minds? Examining the Relationship between Aid and Security in Afghanistan', *Tufts – Feinstein International Center*, 2012, pp. 20–21
<<http://fic.tufts.edu/publication-item/winning-hearts-and-minds-examing-the-relationship-between-aid-and-security-in-afghanistan/>> [accessed 29 May 2017].

²⁷⁰ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 196.

²⁷¹ Kreutzmann, 'Afghanistan and the Opium World Market', p. 611.

²⁷² Kreutzmann, 'Afghanistan and the Opium World Market', p. 611.

Secondly, increased trade of illicit drugs with the Western world was encouraged as trade routes were initially established for hashish. In the 1970s many westerners came to Afghanistan in a sort of Hashish-tourism, as the drug could be consumed cheaply within the country. Estimates state that, before 1973, 5,000-6,000 ‘hippies’²⁷³ were living in Kabul. This caused drug links to spring into existence between Afghanistan and Europe, which would later help in the growing opium industry. A coup in 1973 restricted visa and drug policies, so that many of these westerners left, and this form of ‘tourism’ died down.²⁷⁴

Finally, the 1970s in particular saw a change and improvement of agricultural techniques. Farmers in Helmand, to name one example, were becoming more productive, especially as they were starting to take advantage of cash crops and as they were using techniques such as double-cropping. Opium was one of the major cash crops in this period.²⁷⁵

We can see that the years under examination in this chapter had significant impact on the opium production in Afghanistan. The move to illegality saw opium becoming a shadow economy, after two attempts to eradicate the economy through opium bans had been unsuccessful and the crop continued to be produced, now at heightened profits. Throughout the period the Iranian market was an important outlet for Afghan opium, and in the last decade under examination we can observe increasing production, as well as an increased export to the world market, rather than just the surrounding areas.

4.3 The Soviet invasion – How misinformed Soviet tactics led to a previously unthought-of expansion of the opium production in Afghanistan (1979-1989)

I stood watching as the mule handlers carried sacks of flour out of the caves and hooked them onto the backs of the mules, before carefully covering them with tarpaulins to waterproof them[...] Then the old light bulb went off again: of course, this isn't flour; it's [...] opium! There weren't any mules because they were all jam-packed with drugs. Suddenly, the big firefight on our last day on the trail fell into place: an attempted opium hijack. I knew it couldn't have been the army because they didn't bring the gunships in, but a big robbery made sense: no wonder Blue didn't want to tell me.²⁷⁶

The above quote is taken from a book written by Tom Carew, a former SAS officer, who was part of operation FARADAY and as such witnessed the opium consumption and production by the Mujahedeen as they fought the Soviet Union. It can already give some indication that while the Mujahedeen were waging a war, they were also increasingly relying

²⁷³ Hippies is to be understood here as westerners who adhered to the so-called ‘hippie’ lifestyle, and in the Afghan context arrived, at least in part, to consume hashish.

²⁷⁴ Haq, ‘Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective’, p. 948.

²⁷⁵ Fry, *The Afghan Economy*, p. 204.

²⁷⁶ Tom Carew, *Jihad!: The Secret War in Afghanistan*, New Ed edition (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2001), p. 177.

on opium production. This, among other factors, meant that during the time of the Soviet invasion the Afghan production of opium increased six-fold.²⁷⁷ Opium production increased exponentially in the ten years of Soviet occupation, with the annual value of the opium trade in the later years of the Soviet occupation estimated at \$25 million.²⁷⁸

Drugs were being grown in Afghanistan before the Soviet Union invaded.²⁷⁹ However, it was only after the Soviet Invasion that Afghanistan's drug production truly became relevant on a global scale. We must ask, then, why it was that drug trafficking and opium cultivation were able to grow so much during these years.

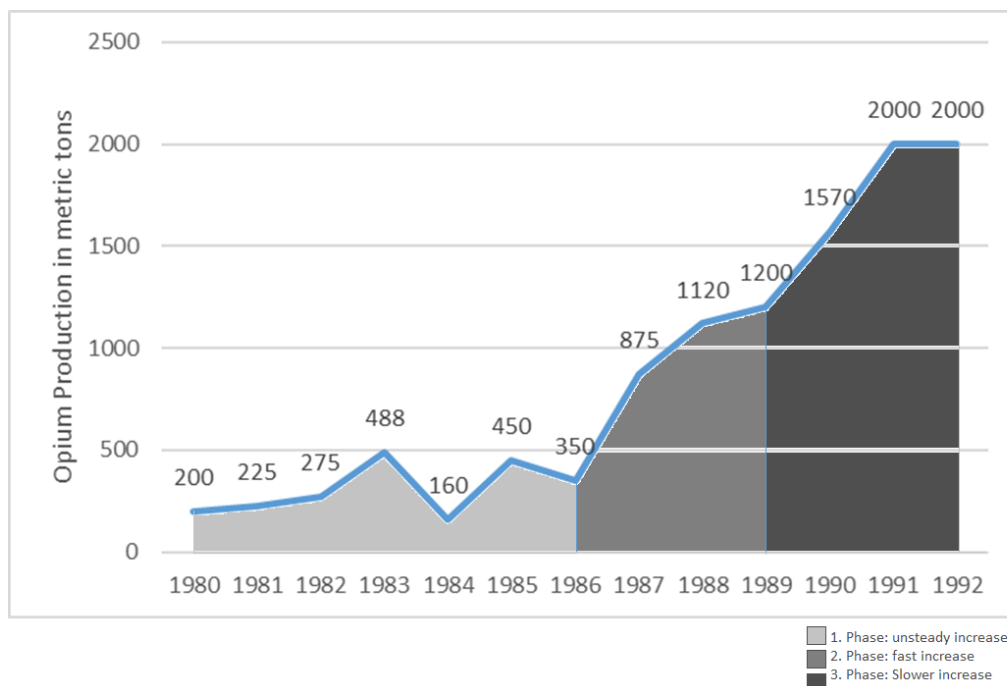


Figure 11 Opium Production under Soviet Occupation in Afghanistan.

We can see from **Figure 11** that there was a steady increase in opium production, especially in the latter half of the 1980s. We can also differentiate three different phases of the growth of the opium production. While between 1980 and 1986 some growth is visible, it is very unsteady. Compared to the size of opium production in the 20th century, production more than doubled, but due to the unreliability of estimates we cannot be sure of this. In the second phase, we can see that the opium production went from 350 metric tons in 1986 to 1,200 in 1989 – therefore increasing by a factor of three over only 3 years. In the last phase, the production of opium continued to increase at a lesser speed, by less than 50%. We can align

²⁷⁷ Kreutzmann, p. 612.

²⁷⁸ Hyman, *Afghanistan under Soviet Domination, 1964–91*, p. 36.

²⁷⁹ Dormandy, *Opium*, p. 283.

these developments in the opium industry with developments in the Afghan political and social landscape: In the first war years, the need for opium by the farmers who had the potential to grow it was less than in the years that followed. In this period, while a war was being fought, most Mujahedeen were receiving foreign funding and did not need the potential income from the opium industry, while the farmers themselves were still able, in most cases, to continue with their crops as before the war years. The change that occurred in the second half of the 1980s is due to the campaign of destruction the Soviet Union embarked upon in the latter years of their war to alienate the rural population from the Mujahedeen. The final phase, after the end of the Soviet Invasion, was also a period of increased displacement, which meant that many of those who may have started growing opium were not in a position to do so.²⁸⁰

Explanations of why the illegal drug economy in Afghanistan could expand so significantly during the Soviet period are usually put down to some simple factors, such as warlordism, or simply poverty. In reality, however, we can see that the factors encouraging an illegal production must have been much more complex: After all, Afghanistan is not the only country still producing drugs, other producing countries may be less poor, and do not tend to be ruled in the same way. It is thus a combination of factors that led to an increase.

Production and consumption

An opium economy could not have emerged in Afghanistan had there not been sufficient demand for heroin, opium and/or morphine. We can find definitive proof that there was demand for illicit substances in the 1980s,²⁸¹ but this also holds true for previous decades. There are some indications that heroin use increased significantly in the 1980s. The UN, basing their estimates on overdose deaths, sees the number of problem drug users globally almost double in the latter half of this decade.²⁸² There are also indicators of a growing demand within the region: Both within Afghanistan and in the surrounding countries more people were taking opium, making it an easy drug to grow and transport to markets.²⁸³ These changes in consumption patterns were caused by social and political factors: A lack of availability of other medication, as well as the psychological strain of war caused an increased dependence. As injuries, caused by the war, increased in numbers, Afghans needed more pain medication. In the countryside, however, there was a limited availability both of doctors and of suitable

²⁸⁰ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, pp. 198–99.

²⁸¹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'A Century of International Drug Control', pp. 95–96.

²⁸² (UNODC) United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *World Drug Report 2012* (New York), p. 77.

This number includes not only heroin but other problem drug users as well

²⁸³ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 105.

medication, so more people turned to opium.²⁸⁴ Drug use may also have risen due to the Soviet presence: Sources vary, but estimate that anywhere between 20% to 80% of the Soviet Union's soldiers were also using drugs while they were fighting in Afghanistan.²⁸⁵ In light of this we can determine that demand from Afghan natives and invading forces, as well as the opium-hungry international market, each factored into increased production.²⁸⁶ However, another change was to connect Afghanistan to the international markets, whereas they had previously been exporting the opium only to neighbouring countries. As the route to Iran was blocked in the early years and months of Soviet occupation, the surplus of opium had to be exported elsewhere. This then, is how Afghanistan inadvertently conquered the European and American drug markets.²⁸⁷

Additionally, other states in the region ceased to supply this growing demand, partially due to law enforcement reasons. This led to the production shifting to other countries. Both the Iranian revolution and the Pakistani Hadd ordinance of 1978 played a role in the growing economy. The Hadd ordinance outlawed the production of opium, opening the path for a shift in production centres to Afghanistan. The ordinance, encompassing all of Pakistan, did not make possible an immediate ceasing of opium production in Pakistan, especially as there continued to be a demand for opium and its related products. Production could, however, be decreased, especially as there were rural development programmes in Pakistan in this period, funded by UN and US, to enforce the ban and to enable development, turning farmers away from drug production.²⁸⁸ Arrests, eradication and close monitoring of areas known to produce drugs were all used to enforce the ordinance. The enforcement of the ban was aided by the fact that in the year preceding the ban Pakistan had experienced a big spike in production. This meant the prices of opium had fallen radically, which supported the ban. Only around 7 years later did opium production truly resurface in Pakistan.²⁸⁹

Iran had, for a long time, been the largest market for the illegally produced opium in the region. In 1979, with the Iranian Revolution, opium production was outlawed in the country. The Iranian revolution imposed a theocracy, which had been voted for in a democratic process. The theocracy was based on Shari'a law, and its legislation was imposed through a

²⁸⁴ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, pp. 39–40.

²⁸⁵ Mark Galeotti, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Union's Last War* (Taylor & Francis, 1995), pp. 51–52.

²⁸⁶ Katja Mielke, 'Opium Als Wirtschaftsmotor: Drogenökonomie Ohne Alternativen?', in *Afghanistan, Wegweiser Zur Geschichte* (München/Wien/Zürich: Schöningh Paderborn/BRO, 2009), pp. 231–41 (p. 232).

²⁸⁷ Haq, 'Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective', pp. 949–50.

²⁸⁸ Simon Gillett, 'Tribesmen, Politics, Opium and Development in Dir, Pakistan', *Asian Affairs*, 32.3 (2001), 268–78 (p. 275).

²⁸⁹ James Windle, 'Insights for Contemporary Drug Policy: A Historical Account of Opium Control in India and Pakistan', *Asian Journal of Criminology*, 7.1 (2012), 55–74 (p. 66).

strict and despotic rule, with little room for disagreements.²⁹⁰ As a consequence, the supply of opium within Iran was limited. While the outlawing of opium is firmly in line with Shari'a and could thus be argued well, the new regime did not manage to curb the consumption by Iranians. One could argue that, in part, the failure to limit drug consumption is due to the extreme criminalisation of drugs after the Islamic revolution, which saw treatment centres being replaced with incarceration of problem drug users.²⁹¹ Thus, the increasing production of Afghanistan managed to supply the continuous demand for opium and the products gathered from it by Iranian problem drug users.²⁹² This event in Afghanistan's neighbouring countries had seen a more or less constant demand, but had also created a lacuna in the supply-side of the market that Afghanistan was able to fill.²⁹³

The Soviet Invasion as a decisive factor in the rising production of opium

Afghanistan had already had a close relationship with the Soviet Union before the invasion in 1979. The Soviet Union had been involved in the policies of the country for several decades, a country which was already deeply divided, on religious issues as well as geographically: There was an ever-growing divide between the modernising capital and the more traditional rural villages and areas. In September 1979 Hafizullah Amin, with wavering support from his Soviet Allies, took over the government of Afghanistan in a Soviet coup. The Soviet Union saw itself forced to supply both advice and military support in view of a country with increasing insurgencies and a growth of radical Islam. In the context of the Cold War, and especially as the new government had only a very tentative grip on the country, the Soviet Union saw it necessary to increase its presence. They feared that, if the PDPA collapsed, the US may attempt to seize control of Afghanistan.²⁹⁴ In this context then, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, and Amin was replaced by Babrak Karmal soon after.²⁹⁵ However, the initial success, including the seizure of Kabul, was short lived, as insurgencies soon followed. There were an increasing number of opposing and rebellious groups, who wished to expel the Soviet Union from their country – the Mujahedeen. These groups were, in part, funded by international actors. The Mujahedeen are very difficult to

²⁹⁰ Brendan Daly, 'Regime Change in Iran?', *Middle East Quarterly*, 2012, p. 81
<<http://www.meforum.org/3225/iran-regime-change>> [accessed 30 June 2017].

²⁹¹ Janne Bjerre Christensen, *Drugs, Deviancy and Democracy in Iran: The Interaction of State and Civil Society (International Library of Iranian Studies)*: 32 (London : New York: I.B.Tauris, 2011), p. 119.

²⁹² Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 29.

²⁹³ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 103.

²⁹⁴ Barfield, *Afghanistan: A cultural and political history*, 237-238

²⁹⁵ Ansary, *Games Without Rules*, 185-192

define: There was a vast number of groups, of differing sizes, operating under this name, most of whom were fighting under the banner of Islam, although some groups had nationalistic tendencies, and a small amount were left-leaning politically. The Mujahedeen were not however, organised according to their political or religious ideologies, rather they would group around certain leaders, fractionalising the resistance. This could be seen as a weakness, as it meant organised resistance was not possible on a grander scheme, but is easily explainable considering the Afghan history and culture, where allegiance and leadership was always based on personal connections and alliances.²⁹⁶ As the possibility of the guerrillas winning the war seemed to become more feasible, and as the Soviet Union weakened from a global perspective, the Soviet forces decided to withdraw. Mohammed Najibullah replaced Babrak Karmal as the head of government, and in February 1989 the last Soviet soldier left Afghanistan, a move that went almost unnoticed internationally amongst the wave of revolutions sweeping across Europe, leading to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. This did not yet mean the end of communism for Afghanistan, as Najibullah remained in power until 1992, when the Mujahedeen finally filtered into Kabul.²⁹⁷

Afghanistan was ideally suited to supply opium to the world economy at the time for several reasons. Firstly, the damage inflicted on the Afghan landscape by the war extended to irrigation systems. Opium is the ideal crop in such circumstances as it does not need much water to grow. Despite the destruction of many roads and trade routes²⁹⁸, the high value of opium even in low volumes meant it was still an exportable good unlike many of Afghanistan's other crops, such as wheat, which has a much lower farm-gate value for the same volume, so does not make for a valuable and exportable good.²⁹⁹

Domestic factors contributing to a growing production

Afghanistan was able to cultivate opium poppies on such a large scale, at least in part because of the desperate situation the country found itself in in the 1980s. But even disregarding this, Afghanistan already had strategic advantages over other countries in the production of opium. At a low level, opium had been produced within Afghanistan for centuries. This meant that the expertise many Afghans had in this field was a great advantage. Not everyone in Afghanistan had the skills necessary to cultivate and harvest opium. However, the drug had been home in the region for centuries, so the skills needed were easily acquired from those who

²⁹⁶ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, pp. 203–5.

²⁹⁷ Ansary, *Games Without Rules*, 224

²⁹⁸ Rubin, 'The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan', pp. 1792–93.

²⁹⁹ See: Chapter 3: Specifics of the opium production for a comparison in farm-gate prices

did have this knowledge. Not many materials are needed to make opium, and these materials were freely available within the country during the time of the Soviet occupation.³⁰⁰

For a country to transform into a world player in the export of opium it needs more than just experienced farmers to cultivate the opium poppies, however. Above all else, the years of war Afghans had already experienced by the time it became a major opium producing country had equipped its workers for the needs of a drug economy. It had experienced gunfighters, necessary to protect crops and laboratories.³⁰¹ Moreover, smuggling was an ‘old skill’ in the country, which had seen gold-smuggling from the Middle East to China. During the Anglo-Afghan wars, and more specifically in the early 20th century, Afghan rebellious groups had been supplied with arms through smuggling routes. In the more recent history of the country Afghanistan had also become a keen exporter of hashish to European markets, providing international drug links.³⁰²

Additionally, the borders to its neighbouring countries were not as secure as they tend to be in more stable states. This meant that opium could easily be transported to Afghanistan’s neighbouring countries due to its “porous borders”³⁰³. And despite the poor condition most of the country’s infrastructure was in, roads inside, and leading out of Afghanistan improved as early as 1987, which facilitated an easier trade of drugs.³⁰⁴ However, while the added safety of the improved roads did benefit the illegal economy, it was not an important factor, as opium is high-value for low volume. It is also mostly transported on foot or by using animals. Thus improved roads only play a small role.

The issue of a weak state

We have already identified Afghanistan as a borderland according to Goodhand. The resistance of Afghans to foreign invasion, which in the history of Afghanistan has occurred in multiple forms, is one of the reasons for its being defined as a borderland non-state space. However, other international actors also were to identify it as a fragile, or even failed state. This eventual identification of Afghanistan as a weak state is due in part to the unsuccessful Soviet occupation of the country. What factors caused Afghanistan to be defined as a weak state, then? We can say with some certainty that Afghanistan in the 1980s was a dangerous country, visible through the severe bombing and violent war. There was rivalry over the

³⁰⁰ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 104.

³⁰¹ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 300.

³⁰² Haq, ‘Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective’, pp. 947–48.

³⁰³ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 104.

³⁰⁴ Rubin, ‘The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan’, pp. 1792–93.

country, in this case rivalry between a central government and opposing troops, and there was constant civil unrest. All of these factors already allow us to define the country in this period as a so-called 'failed state'.³⁰⁵ The failure of a state as such indicates a weak central state.

The Soviet Union contributed to the weakening of the Afghan state, not just due to its presence, which on its own was enough to start a movement against the central state. Rather, the Soviet invasion brought with it a number of issues. Firstly, there was the lack of international support for the action. Both Western and Islamic countries interpreted it as an invasion of a sovereign state and as such as a "serious breach of international norms"³⁰⁶. However, the Soviet Union had its own reasons for the war: It needed to protect its own interests and influence within Afghanistan, and had limited faith in the PDPA's ability to control the country, and wanted to prevent an Islamic resurgence. This, then, is why an invasion by a secular regime was seen as the solution at the time.³⁰⁷

From what we can gather, the opinion of the Soviet leadership before the invasion was that this was to be a winnable, if not easy, war, to involve their army in. This proved to be incorrect. The Afghanistan conflict hammered home the fact that military superiority alone is not enough to win a conflict in a country like Afghanistan. The Soviet Union lacked the skills the Mujahedeen did have: They did not know the layout of the land well enough, they did not understand the motivations of the rebels opposing them, and they were unprepared for the guerrilla tactics of their enemies. The conflict did not bring about peace and communism in Afghanistan, rather it led to increased fragmentation and destruction of the country, all but laying out the path for the growth of the illicit production of opium that was to follow.³⁰⁸

During the Soviet occupation, and in the following years, Afghanistan had a weak central state. In this period the relevance of the borderland regions in Afghanistan grew, as these aided in the illicit smuggling economy. This is due to the inability to control shadow economies, which is inherent in weak states. The Soviet Union, working with the Communist Afghan government, was fighting what was to be a losing battle. This meant they were unable, and in some cases unwilling, to provide the basic functions of a state. The Afghan state then was unable to provide assistance and aid to help farmers increase the cultivation of legitimate

³⁰⁵ Robert I. Rotberg, 'The New Nature of Nation-state Failure', *The Washington Quarterly*, 25.3 (2002), 83–96 (pp. 85–86).

³⁰⁶ Riaz Khan, *Untying the Afghan Knot: Negotiating Soviet Withdrawal* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2005), p. 12.

³⁰⁷ Khan, *Untying the Afghan Knot*, p. 9.

³⁰⁸ Bernhard Chiari, "'Der Sowjetische Einmarsch in Afghanistan Und Die Besatzung von 1979 Bis 1989', in *Afghanistan, Wegweiser Zur Geschichte* (München/Wien/Zürich: Schöningh Paderborn/BRO, 2009), pp. 61–79 (p. 73).

agricultural crops. At the same time the state was also too weak to effectively outlaw, or undertake any serious attempts to curb the cultivation and production of illicit drugs.³⁰⁹ The Soviet Union did carry out efforts to control the cultivation of opium, however, these efforts were largely inefficient. There were two major issues with drug control measures during the Soviet occupation. First, there was very limited territorial control by commanders. The second issue was that estimates of drug cultivation in the 1980s were barely existent, and where they did exist they did not tend to be correct. This, then, is why drug control efforts in this period tended to have only limited and short-term effects on the drug production. Mansfield observes that these efforts were carried out largely to secure international support.³¹⁰

Not only was the state unable to control opium production, there was also the fact that an alternative to the state was offered in the form of the Mujahedeen, which many Afghans saw as a viable and preferable alternative to the foreign domination of the Soviet Union.³¹¹ In the regions controlled by the Mujahedeen they even established some local administration, including security, logistics and social services where possible. This was enabled by drug production, and the funding the Mujahedeen gained through it.³¹² Their policies stood in stark contrast to those of the Soviet Union. For farmers, the Soviet Union and the state they were supporting, seemed foreign and, after the many bombing campaigns against the rural landscape, locals did not feel any close bond to 'their state'. Meanwhile the Mujahedeen were not only acting in the interests of the rural population, they were also supporting the only alternative livelihood that remained for many people living away from cities. As such, the Mujahedeen's active encouragement of the opium industry is to be taken into account. Profits made by the Mujahedeen through their illegal activities were usually reinvested into the same economies, thus furthering the opium economy.³¹³

Opium was by no means the only source of income for the Mujahedeen. Most funding came in the form of foreign aid. This was supplied by Great Britain, the US, China, as well as Muslim countries, including Pakistan, Saudi-Arabia, Iran, Egypt and Jordan. Pakistan and the US were involved primarily through the aid granted to resistance fighters, but they also provided training for them. The aid given by the US was under the name "Operation Cyclone"

³⁰⁹ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 104.

³¹⁰ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 106.

³¹¹ Pinar Akcali, 'Islam as a "common Bond" in Central Asia: Islamic Renaissance Party and the Afghan Mujahidin', *Central Asian Survey*, 17.2 (1998), 267–84 (pp. 275–76).

³¹² Haq, 'Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective', p. 951.

³¹³ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 198.

and the money was funnelled through the ISI.³¹⁴ The ISI bore a special role during this war. During the war of the Mujahedeen against the Soviet Union most aid was passed through it, including a billion dollars a year given by the US. This financial support could be freely distributed by the ISI, giving them the power to support certain groups of the resistance.³¹⁵ However, aid was also passed on through different channels: Iran sent money, usually to Shi'a groups, while Saudi Arabia also set up direct channels to other resistance groups, as did Egypt and India.³¹⁶ The international aid sent to Afghans did not always reach its intended targets, which were usually the impoverished citizens, rather most of the aid was used to further fuel the war, and some funds at least were given out with political motivation.

Despite this stream of international financial support, the resistance fighters were also increasingly relying on the opium economy. This is a little disputed fact in the contemporary literature and can be proven when considering, for instance, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar³¹⁷. The leader of Hisb-e-Islami was open about his active encouragement of the opium economy. For the Mujahedeen opium production was quite simply a steady source of income.³¹⁸ The funds claimed through opium production were partially used to further the cause, but it also seems safe to assume that some of the income was put towards personal gain.³¹⁹ Towards the end of the Soviet invasion the Mujahedeen had begun fighting each other. One of the central reasons for this was the fight for control of regions producing the opium poppy. And by this time Hekmatyar, one of the main recipients of US funds through the Pakistani ISI, was controlling most of the country's opium-rich regions.³²⁰ To give a figure on the extent of Mujahedeen involvement in the opium economy: By 1989 800 metric tons were produced under the responsibility of the seven biggest Mujahedeen groups.³²¹

A more difficult question to answer is how aware the international community was of this support of the opium production, especially considering their funds being used for the control of opium poppy fields. Many accounts confirm the involvement of Pakistan, or at least, sections or individuals of the Pakistani state or military.³²² Other international actors are often said to have been complicit. This is said of the United States. What we do know, is that the US-

³¹⁴ Meredith L. Runion, *The History of Afghanistan*, The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations, (Greenwood 2007) p. 105.

³¹⁵ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, p. 204,215.

³¹⁶ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, p. 205.

³¹⁷ Hekmatyar, *Gulbuddin*. *1940. Leader of hizb-I Islami, one of the primary recipients of aid through the ISI in the 1980s. Intermittent minister during the 1990s in Afghanistan.

³¹⁸ Mielke, 'Opium als Wirtschaftsmotor', p. 232.

³¹⁹ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 91.

³²⁰ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 88.

³²¹ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 198.

³²² Carew, *Jihad!*, p. 198.

Pakistani cooperation in the ISI at least indirectly supported the opium economy, as they funded Mujahideen, who were in turn able to fund the drugs economy, the profits from which they could invest either into the same economy, or into the arms trade, for instance.³²³ The question of how much the US knew is much more difficult to answer. Many accounts seem to support the thesis that at least the US was, in some ways, aware of the growing opium industry.³²⁴ One such indicator can be found in Carew's account:

About three in the afternoon, we reached a point I recognized just outside the village of Mangel Post, where a group of men were waiting for us, including the five mujahideen who'd left earlier. These, it turned out, were Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) officers, sent to escort us into the Mujahideen base at Parachinar and ensure that we didn't have any problems with the Frontier Police. We continued a little further and then stopped to wait for darkness, after which the Pakistanis took us straight into the camp. The opium mules were taken into a special wired-off compound, complete with guards, while the rest of us went to the Hezb-i-Islami section of the base. It was clear to me then that the Pakistanis were involved at a high level with the opium smuggling³²⁵

Macdonald also expands on this point, explaining that the US government was certainly warned about the Mujahideen involvement in the opium economy. He cites a New York Times opinion piece, written by two members of the White House's strategic council on drug abuse. The article was written in 1980. Here they state:

We worry about the growing of opium in Afghanistan or Pakistan by rebel tribesmen who apparently are the chief adversaries of the Soviet troops in Afghanistan. Are we erring in befriending these tribes as we did in Laos when Air America [...] helped transport crude opium from certain tribal areas?³²⁶

This quote refers to the CIA's involvement in Laos. Here the CIA supported an army of Hmong tribesmen, who were fighting against the Communists. The Hmong were financing their fight through opium, and the CIA (using Air America) allowed this traffic to continue, even aiding in shipments.³²⁷

Without making presumptions then, we can assume that the US were aware of the opium production, at least to some extent, and that they, during this period prioritised the fight against the Soviet Union, within a Cold War context, to the 'War on Drugs'. Many authors contribute the growth of the opium economy, at least in part, to the, inadvertent support of the US.³²⁸ This also seems to fit into the general policy of the US, concerning the prioritising of

³²³ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 198.

³²⁴ David R. Bewley-Taylor, *United States and International Drug Control, 1909-1997* (A&C Black, 2002), p. 128.

³²⁵ Carew, *Jihad!*, pp. 178-79.

³²⁶ Cited in: Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St Clair, *Whiteout: The CIA, Drugs, and the Press* (Verso, 1998), p. 260.

³²⁷ Cornelius Friesendorf, *US Foreign Policy and the War on Drugs: Displacing the Cocaine and Heroin Industry* (Routledge, 2007), p. 50.

³²⁸ Haq, 'Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective', p. 945.

anti-communism over anti-drug measures. We can compare the case of Afghanistan to the case of Lao PDR.

To summarise, we can see that the fact that the Afghan state was weakened so significantly certainly contributed to the rise of opium as a primary commodity in the country. With little alternative sources of income, and a state unable to provide safety or security many farmers turned to opium as a means of ensuring their livelihood. The additional encouragement of the opium economy by the Mujahedeen also contributed to the growing production.

Economic factors favouring illegal production

Now that we have examined the policies which benefitted drug production in Afghanistan, set out by Afghanistan and other states, the question of economic factors remains. The answer requires some historical context. The Soviet Union embarked on initial efforts to support and increase Afghanistan's licit economy. We can consider the export figures as proof of this: In 1969/1970 Afghanistan's total exports were worth \$81,43 million. By 1975 this had increased to \$270 million. By 1977/78 37.5% of all Afghan exports were sent to the Soviet Union. A lot of the export was natural gas.³²⁹ While an increasing export has to be seen as a positive development tool, it caused issues for Afghanistan, as the Soviet Union did not attempt to lessen the dependence of Afghans on them. Rather, the exports benefited mostly the Soviet leadership. In fact, Rubin identifies the rapid increase, followed by rapid breakdown of natural gas exports as one of the biggest 'shocks' to the Afghan economy. The value of the export peaked in 1984, then remained constant before dropping by two thirds by 1988, until the gas wells were completely shut down in 1989, at the end of Soviet withdrawal. The reason given for this by most Afghans is that the Soviet experts, needed to run the gas fields, left alongside the troops.³³⁰ Soviet exports had also led to a deforestation of the Afghan countryside, as timber was exported or used for fuel during the war years.³³¹ These short-sighted exports and the economic tactics of the Soviet Union had not increased Afghan prosperity in the long run, rather they had caused damage to the national economy, as the policies had increased Afghan reliance on the Soviet Union.

The greatest damage inflicted by the Soviet Union on the Afghan economy, however, came because of the Soviet war tactics. When the Soviet Union invaded the country there was a resistance movement almost immediately. While Afghans have a long history of uprisings

³²⁹ Hyman, *Afghanistan under Soviet Domination, 1964–91*, p. 35.

³³⁰ Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, pp. 163–64.

³³¹ Dormandy, *Opium*, p. 285.

and revolts, these tended to be spontaneous and unorganised. This form of resistance underwent a change with the Soviet occupation. It would be incorrect to say that the new resistance was thoroughly organised, but certainly more so than before. The new protest, under the guise of jihad, was more structured than it had been.³³²

The first step for the Soviet army after the invasion was to wipe out this resistance, and at first they thought they had succeeded. The Mujahedeen were quickly scattered around the countryside, but renewed and almost nation-wide protests started soon after, and the scattering of the resistance movement around the country caused issues for the Soviet army, as they now had to defeat small groups of Mujahedeen on an unknown and difficult terrain. The Mujahedeen were not organised in any conventional sense of the word – but they did not need to be. Many actions carried out were spontaneous, by small groups of people and without being part of any larger plan. However, this meant that the Soviet army had an ever-changing group of enemies to defeat.³³³ Ansary estimates that there were at least several hundred resistance groups operating in Afghanistan, and an additional 80 operating out of Peshawar.³³⁴ Moreover, it was difficult for the Soviet forces to actually recognise the Mujahedeen. For the resistance groups the ‘enemy’ was easily recognisable, clearly visible as foreigners and kafirs, especially as they were even visiting villages to ‘educate the villagers’, making for extremely easy targets.³³⁵ As we have already seen in **Figure 11**, opium production rose even more in the second half of the 1980s. This coincides with the Soviet Union’s change in war tactics, as it was decided that the only way to win the war would be to depopulate the countryside, as this was where the Mujahedeen were hidden. The plan was to make sure villagers would no longer be able to help the revolutionaries. This was to be achieved in a cruel way:

They bombed countless villages. Flying over the farmlands, they scattered land mines, which still litter Afghan soil and have made much of the land difficult if not impossible to cultivate. They strafed livestock from the air, cutting them to pieces so that the rural population would no longer be able to feed the guerrillas – or (incidentally) themselves, which would force them to move, either to the nearest big city, which the Soviets could control with their armoured vehicles and artillery, or to the nearest safe country of refuge, which for most meant Pakistan or Iran. The bloodiest year of the war was 1985. By the end of that year, some one million Afghans had been killed and some six million were living in Pakistan or Iran as refugees³³⁶

The Soviet army invaded and destroyed villages all over the Afghan countryside, leaving behind landmines to kill Mujahedeen should they return to their old hideouts.³³⁷ These

³³² Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 96.

³³³ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, pp. 193–95.

³³⁴ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, p. 203.

³³⁵ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, p. 198.

³³⁶ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, pp. 198–99.

³³⁷ Runion, *The History of Afghanistan*, p. 114.

war tactics, combined with other fateful decisions, such as the massive exploitation of natural gas to the Soviet Union, shrunk and almost destroyed the official, licit economy of Afghanistan. Before the Soviet invasion, Afghanistan, though not a rich country, did have a flourishing economy. It was well renowned for the production of citrus fruits, pistachios, dates and figs. However, the substantial damage done to the country in the nearly ten years of Soviet invasion, in a combination of droughts and war, had destroyed the economic infrastructure necessary to keep up this production. Skins, wool, as well as meat and dairy products had previously been another staple of the economy, supplying not only food for Afghans, but also making up an export product.³³⁸

By the end of the war Afghanistan found itself in an entirely different situation. The licit economy no longer existed to any significant extent. Rather the country was living on foreign subsidies, especially in the latter war years. The Soviet Union was heavily subsidising Afghan cities, while the countryside, through the Mujahedeen, survived mainly on aid granted by Western and Arab countries.³³⁹ NGOs were working in refugee camps as well as in the country, they usually worked with the UNHCR, the US or the Pakistani government to supply the aid.³⁴⁰

This damage would not prove easy to repair. Soviet forces had used not only traditional weapons, but also chemical ones, inflicting permanent damage on ecosystems and the environment.³⁴¹ And it had not just been the Soviet Union that caused such harm to the Afghan landscape and economy. While the Kabul regime had killed to protect the state and the communist regime it had hoped to establish permanently, Mujahedeen had murdered and destroyed much of the country in order to protect what they saw as their honour and Islam.³⁴² This decade of war, with both sides causing significant damage, meant that the Afghan landscape was thoroughly destroyed. Crops and irrigation systems were systematically targeted by the Soviet regime, which was done with the aim of destroying farmers' livelihood and to render them incapable of harbouring Mujahedeen. Chemical weapons, bombs, and the use of landmines had all done their part to achieve this.³⁴³ The bombing campaign had increased food

³³⁸ Dormandy, *Opium*, p. 285.

³³⁹ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, pp. 204–5.

³⁴⁰ Helga Baitenmann, 'NGOs and the Afghan War: The Politicisation of Humanitarian Aid', *Third World Quarterly*, 12.1 (1990), 62–85 (p. 65).

³⁴¹ Runion, *The History of Afghanistan*, p. 5.

³⁴² Kakar, *Afghanistan*, p. 199.

³⁴³ Kakar, *Afghanistan*. pp. 215–16.

insecurity in Afghanistan. During the Soviet invasion two thirds of all Afghan villages were bombed, which led to 30% of all farms being abandoned.³⁴⁴

This destruction indirectly favoured opium production. The advantage inherent in opium production is that one needs to cultivate much less land to gain the same profit – the average price of farm-gate opium per hectare is more than 85 times that of wheat per hectare³⁴⁵. For farmers, this meant that less land would have to be cleared from land mines in order to make the same amount of money. This was an important factor in post-Soviet Afghanistan, where land mines still lay scattered across the rural landscape.³⁴⁶ Additionally, opium grows much faster than other crops traditionally grown in the country, so returns can be expected more quickly³⁴⁷.

There were several factors, along with the destructive policies that enabled the Afghan opium economy to grow at the rate it did. Firstly there was the issue of inflation. The Afghani fell compared to the dollar, meaning that less could now be bought, and more money was needed. By 1991 the Afghani was trading at 20 times the official rate compared to the USD. As food prices rose by factors of five or ten, an influx of cash was more important than ever.³⁴⁸ Opium offered such an influx of cash, as long as one could afford the initial costs, which could be acquired through the *salaam* system.

A disputed question is what direct influence the Soviet Union had had on the drug economy of Afghanistan during the invasion. We do know that Soviet aircrafts seem to have destroyed poppy fields, supposedly in an attempt to hinder the opposition's source of income. However, other sources tell of a more direct and less lateral approach taken. For instance, one French medical volunteer reported that the Soviet Union controlled the prices of opium on the market by buying entire crops and then leaving farmers with very little disposable income. However, since there are few official sources to support this we must tread extremely carefully with such assertions. One, rather more official indicator, despite its singular nature, reports of an occurrence where 220 kg of heroin, at a street value at the time upwards of \$13 million were

³⁴⁴ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 53.

³⁴⁵ This calculation is based on the available data today. This means that today opium makes 85 times as much per hectare compared to wheat. The difference may have been slightly different in the 1980s, but we can assume similar proportions, and there is little data available to provide alternative calculations.

³⁴⁶ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, p. 299.

³⁴⁷ To name one example: In Afghanistan wheat is planted in autumn and harvested in summer, meaning the crop takes roughly 6-9 months to grow, while opium is ready for harvesting within 4 months of planting the seeds. However, we can see once more why saffron is often considered a viable alternative to opium: Saffron can be harvested only 8 weeks after planting.

³⁴⁸ Rubin, 'The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan', pp. 1792–93.

found on board of a Soviet freighter, the Kapitan Tonson.³⁴⁹ It is difficult to state how far some of the Soviet soldiers may have gone to individually or collectively attempt to profit from the burgeoning trade, but they certainly encouraged the production of opium, if not intentionally, then through their policies and the widespread destruction caused by the war years, leaving few options for farmers and local people needing to ensure their own livelihood.

If it was not so much the direct involvement of the Soviet Union encouraging the production of opium, what factors did cause it? From the research summarised above we can assume that to a large part the individual decisions by potential opium farmers caused the increase, as well as the encouragement of the opium economy by warlords. The Afghan economy was able to support this sudden growth in an illicit economy as all the networks were already in existence: Even though Opium production had been conducted on a much smaller scale in the previous years and decades, farmers and traders had the knowledge, materials and networks needed to provide the world markets with drugs so quickly. Even though warlords did encourage the economy, it would certainly not be correct to state that the entire economy was created by them. This is clear when considering that opium was being grown in a number of different areas by the end of the decade, and as we have examined earlier the Mujahedeen were not a coherent resistance group, and thus would have had varying policies regarding opium. We can conclude that it was more of a bottom-up movement that caused the increase.

Soviet withdrawal was, from the beginning, essentially a recipe for disaster. While the Geneva accords did offer a face-saving way for Gorbachev to leave Afghanistan, Afghan resistance groups, considered illegitimate, had been excluded from the talks, and as such the accords were not able to bring about peace, especially as they had failed to take internal issues into account.³⁵⁰

4.4 Foreign and internal forces: The role of the civil war and the Taliban occupation of Afghanistan within the Afghan opium production (1989-2000)

After Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the systems of government put in place by them did not immediately collapse, although it did not last long either. Najibullah, elected in 1986, remained in power until 1992, when the Mujahedeen took Kabul and the communist state finally collapsed.³⁵¹ A Mujahedeen coalition government was put into place. However, the tentative alliance between resistance fighters that had continued throughout the war did not

³⁴⁹ Rosanne Klass, *Afghanistan: The Great Game Revisited*, Rev Sub edition (New York : Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), pp. 20–21.

³⁵⁰ Khan, *Untying the Afghan Knot*, pp. 1–2.

³⁵¹ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs*, pp. 113–21.

last, and fighting quickly resumed between Mujahedeen groups. In the years that followed, Afghanistan faced two major issues: First, the Mujahedeen had been united in the face of a common enemy for the past decade. But now that they had driven out the Soviet forces it quickly became clear how fractionalised the country and the Mujahedeen truly were.

Second, with the end of the Cold War, and the end of the Soviet Invasion, Afghanistan had lost its strategic relevance. Funding from the USSR continued until 1991,³⁵² while international support and aid dried up between 1989-1992. Meanwhile the Afghan trade and agriculture was revived, however, this revival focused mainly on opium production. Mujahedeen, drug syndicates and Pakistani military officers all played their part in the industry's growth.³⁵³ The Mujahedeen thus were no longer receiving the same amount of foreign aid, and had to turn to alternative sources of funding – to a large extent they now relied on illegal industries. The taxation of opium was used by the majority of groups to support their fight.³⁵⁴

In this period of fragmentation, Afghanistan as a whole reverted once more to the status of a borderland. A civil war was defining the daily lives of its citizens. This time the Mujahedeen were fighting each other and not a foreign force. There was no functioning legal economy, and moreover there was no functional government after Najibullah was defeated. Goodhand states Afghanistan had become “a vast non-state space, signified for example by the cultivation of poppy in prime, easily accessible agricultural land”³⁵⁵. After Najibullah had been ousted the only regime that came close to governing Afghanistan was the Taliban. There was no incentive for the various rulers to try to limit opium production, except to gain international legitimacy or funding.

This period also marked a timeframe in which international involvement in Afghanistan was less present than it had been in previous periods. Many countries had lost interest in the central Asian conflict, including the US, who were involved in the country's' internal policies only to a remarkably little extent, despite having a vested interest through two of America's key policies: Counterterrorism and Counternarcotics. The war on terror, launched in 2001, would change this radically, as will be examined in the next chapter.³⁵⁶ However, the eleven years under consideration in this chapter can still be defined as a transnational conflict.

³⁵² Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 182.

³⁵³ Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 183.

³⁵⁴ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs*, pp. 113–21.

³⁵⁵ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 198.

³⁵⁶ William Maley, 'The Foreign Policy of the Taliban', *Council on Foreign Relations*, 2000, p. VI <<http://www.cfr.org/Afghanistan/foreign-policy-taliban/p8609>> [accessed 28 March 2017].

Afghanistan's neighbours interfered, and allowed the Taliban to invade, with Pakistan's active support playing a major role in their successes.³⁵⁷ While Afghanistan no longer held its key position within the Cold War, interests of several central Asian states continued to play a role. Pakistan had long since supported a government under Hekmatyar, before switching allegiance to the Taliban. The Rabbani government was supported by India, Russia and Saudi-Arabia (in part to contradict Pakistan's power); Uzbekistan and the Iraq supported those parties excluded from government building, who were ethnically often Uzbek. Iran supported the Hisb-e Whadat. All parties held close economic relationships with their neighbours – often closer than to those in other parts of Afghanistan.³⁵⁸ The US continued its involvement. Even though they no longer funded the Mujahedeen, and ensured no money would reach them, funds kept flowing towards Pakistan, meaning of course that the Taliban would benefit from these funds.³⁵⁹

The eleven years under examination in this chapter saw the opium production double, as is shown in the following graph.

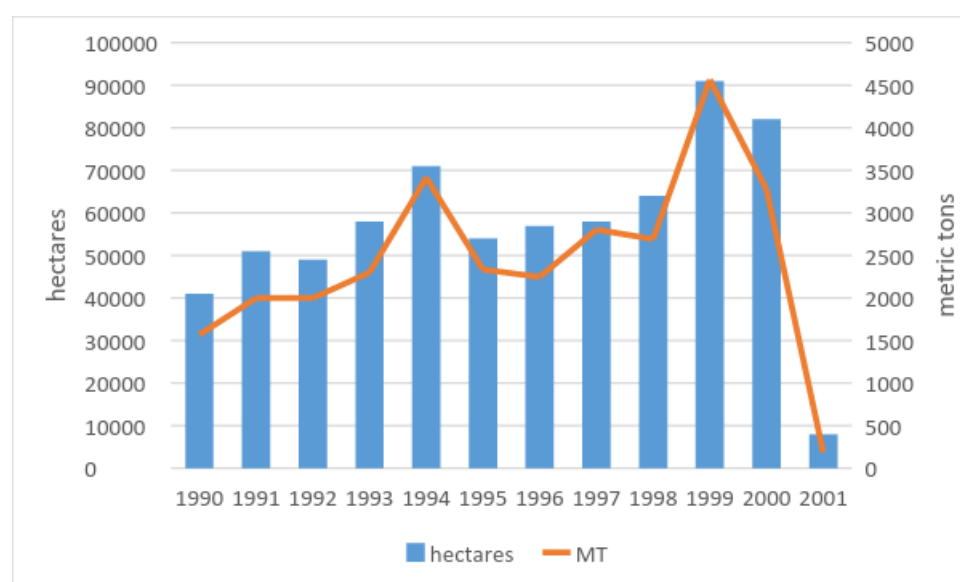


Figure 12 Opium production from 1990-2001³⁶⁰

The first thing we can conclude from the above graph is that the opium production in this period did not see a steady rise. Rather we can observe a series of highs and lows. Since the UNODC conducted its first annual opium survey in 1994, we can assume relatively reliable statistics for this time period.

³⁵⁷ William Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, 2nd ed. 2009 edition (Basingstoke, UK; New York: Palgrave, 2009), pp. 1–2.

³⁵⁸ Conrad Schetter, 'Der Afghanische Bürgerkrieg: Die Taliban Und Die Neuordnung Afghanistans', in *Afghanistan: Wegweiser Zur Geschichte*, by Bernhard Chiari, 3rd edn (Paderborn: Schöningh Paderborn/BRO, 2009), pp. 83–100 (pp. 76–78).

³⁵⁹ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, p. 242.

³⁶⁰ UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey*, 2002

Generally, we can differentiate between three major phases: A steady increase from 1990-1994 presents the first phase. The second phase is marked by a decrease in production at first, followed by another increase, which however, is not significantly higher than the previous high point in 1994. This second phase lasts from 1995-1999. The third phase, 1999-2001 sees a radical drop in production numbers. The first, expanding phase, came during a time when opium production was encouraged by Mujahedeen as an alternative source of income.

The second phase is the one seeing the most fluctuations. This can be explained, at least in part, by the fact that bad weather meant that there were years where the opium yield was low. 1995 was the beginning of a major drought. The fact that the yield was low affected the amount of opium produced significantly. We can compare in the above graph the hectares of opium to the metric tons produced. Production decreased by 30%, while the amount of hectares on which opium was being produced decreased only by 24% (from 71,000 to 54,000). It is likely that it was a combination of factors that led to the decreasing production from 1995 onwards: The Taliban were not yet condoning the production of opium. Additionally, a drought reduced yields. 1998 saw a year faced with poor growing conditions, leading to a lesser yield per hectare.³⁶¹ Some of the fluctuations, not just in this period but throughout the 11 years under review, can be explained by the fact that opium is an unregulated commodity. When the weather is disadvantageous to production, supply is reduced and prices rise. This means that in the next season more farmers may grow poppy, leading to falling prices, and farmers turning towards other crops the year after again.³⁶²

The final phase visible on **Figure 12** saw a significant decrease in opium production, starting after 1999. The decrease occurring from 1999 to 2000 may be explained by two factors. First, the Taliban outlined plans for a reduced production of opium, which may have incentivised some farmers to cease production. Moreover, there were bad growing conditions. This is showcased on the graph by the fact that the metric tons of opium produced in 2000 decreased significantly more than the hectares of land on which opium was being grown.³⁶³ Finally, the Taliban outlawed opium production entirely in 2001, leading to a radical drop in production.

³⁶¹ Pain, *Opium Poppy and Informal Credit*, p. 5.

³⁶² Rubin, 'The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan', p. 1796.

³⁶³ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 200.

Production and consumption

Continuous consumption and production of drugs, with drug addiction rates on the rise especially in the former communist states as well as in developing countries marked the 1990s.³⁶⁴ From 1990, other producers of opium had a lessened output, including Laos and Myanmar. Afghanistan filled this supply gap. Aside from this, the demand remained pretty constant, there was potentially a greater number of addicts inside Afghanistan, but the country continued to deliver to the surrounding markets as well as supplying the world market.³⁶⁵

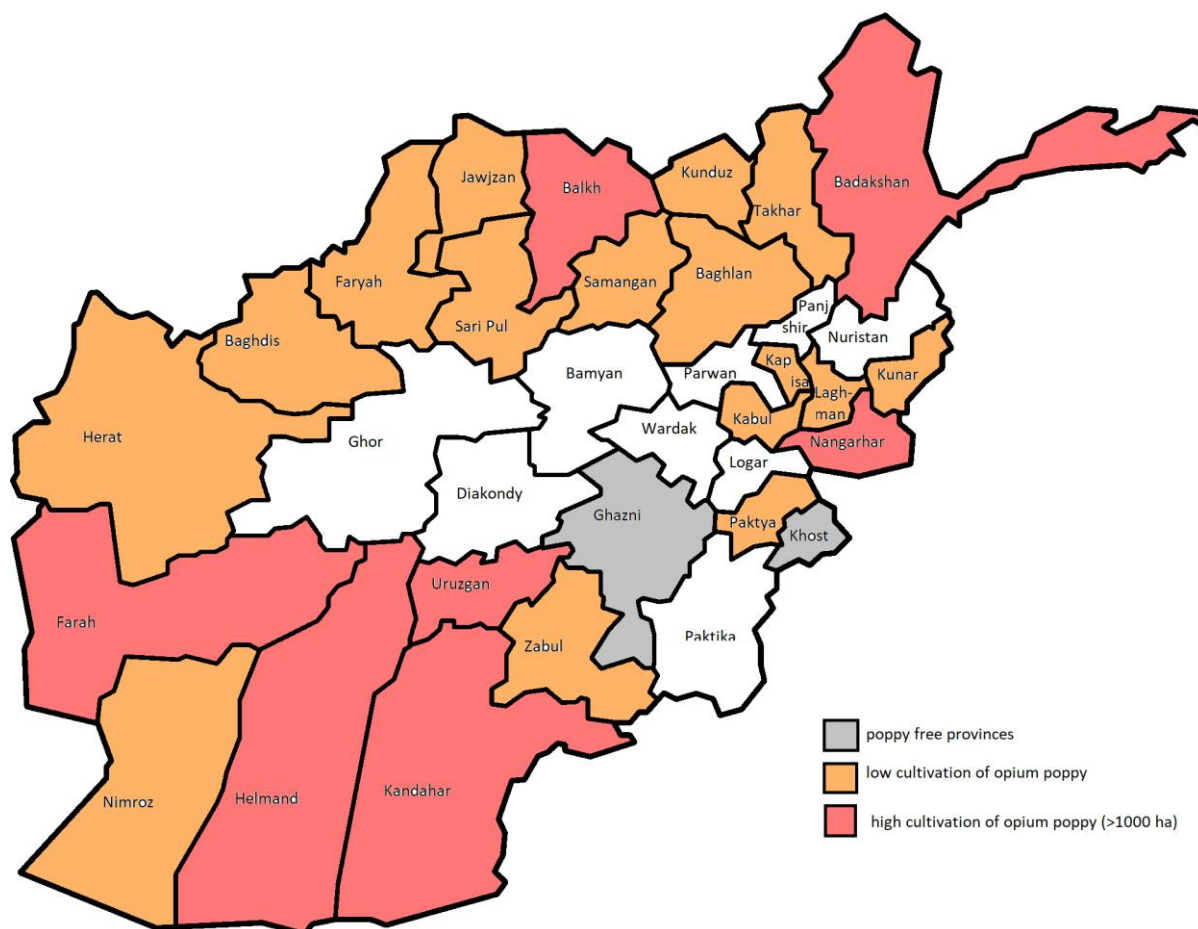


Figure 13 Provinces of opium production in 2000 ³⁶⁶

The Taliban occupation of Afghanistan represents a second wave in the war over Afghanistan that had begun when the Soviet Union invaded the country. The third wave followed after the attack on the World Trade Centre – a mission by the NATO-led security mission in Afghanistan and forces to drive out the Taliban.³⁶⁷ This second phase was marked

³⁶⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 'A Century of International Drug Control', pp. 104–5.

³⁶⁵ Rubin, 'The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan', p. 1795.

³⁶⁶ UNODC, *Afghan Opium Survey 2002*, p. 45-47

Provinces are partially left blank as there was either insufficient data available or as they did not exist as independent provinces during this period

³⁶⁷ Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, pp. 1–2.

by an increasing opium production, where Afghanistan became for the first time the world's leading producer. With the exception of the Taliban ban, opium had been, at least informally, a legal commodity throughout this period, which was not actively discouraged. As such, the opium market functioned much like any other commodity market. At this stage opium was grown in most parts of the country, as shown on the above map (**Figure 13**).

Within Afghanistan, consumption of opium continued to rise in the 1990s, alongside the production thereof. The provinces under production continued to experience changes depending on natural factors, such as droughts, or more generally the weather, as well as law enforcement. When the country came under Taliban rule, most areas continued to grow the crop as they had before. While over 95% of the country's opium trade was under Taliban control, opium continued to be grown in those areas resisting Taliban rule. When a ban on production was introduced, the areas outside Taliban control saw a rapid increase in production to make up for the lack of supply from other areas.³⁶⁸

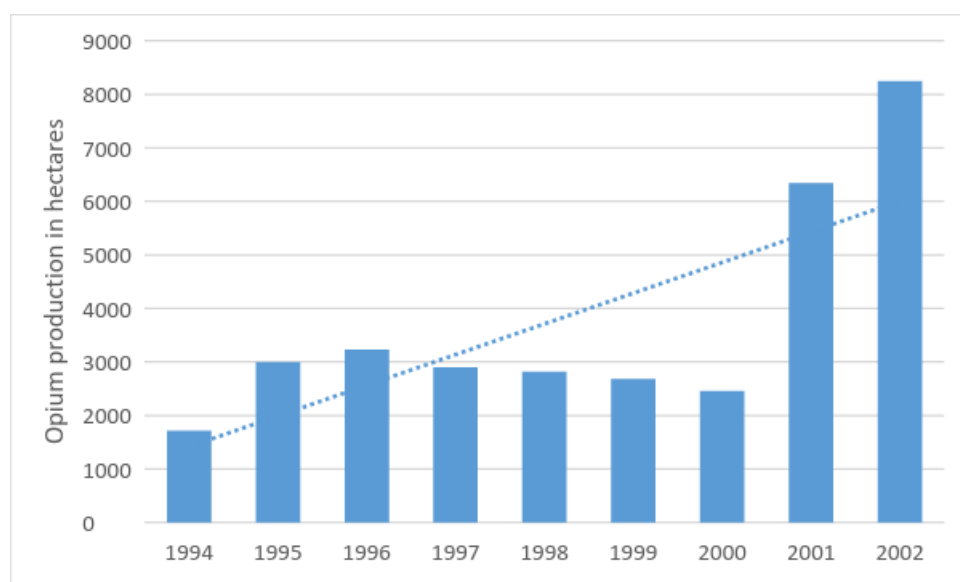


Figure 14 Opium production in Badakhshan province, 1994-2002³⁶⁹

Figure 14 shows opium production in Badakhshan province. This is an interesting case for two reasons: Firstly, Badakhshan is one of the regions in Afghanistan already known as a region of poppy cultivation in the 19th century. Secondly, it lay outside Taliban control during their rule. While we can see an increase throughout the years shown, with a small decrease in 1997-2000, there is a steep increase in production in 2001, supplemented by rising production in the following year. This can be seen in direct correlation to the Taliban ban and the ceasing

³⁶⁸ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 199.

³⁶⁹ UNODC, 2014, p. 18

production in other areas of Afghanistan. In other words: Badakhshan and other northern provinces filled the gap in the supply left by Afghan regions under Taliban control.

The influence of the Mujahedeen on the opium economy

In the period after Najibullah's fall several transitional governments were formed. Additionally, alliances began to form between Mujahedeen groups. This was problematic in some cases, as only few Mujahedeen had managed to create structures resembling those of political organisations or to put in place a bureaucracy. Due to the great number of Mujahedeen, and the diverse groups, only two Mujahedeen leaders will be mentioned throughout this chapter, both of whom bore great relevance, namely Ahmad Shah Massoud³⁷⁰ and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. They are particularly interesting due to their differing stances on narcotics, with Hekmatyar openly supporting the opium cultivation throughout the Soviet war, while Massoud only reluctantly supported the cultivation as of the 1990s.³⁷¹ Additionally, the rivalry between the two Mujahedeen leaders is well documented.

Initially the Mujahedeen, in various fractions, partially supported the opium industry, and levied taxes on it to increase their own funding. Hekmatyar had begun exploiting the opium economy early on, using it as a foundation for his party's structure and army. Apparently, when, in 1988, it became clear foreign support would dry up, Hekmatyar seems to have instructed his people to search for precious stones and to increase poppy cultivation, thus increasing his income.³⁷² Massoud had initially considered opium cultivation un-Islamic, but began encouraging it in the late 1980s, levying tax initially at a rate of 2.5%, which climbed up to 20% by the late 1990s. This tax was collected by commanders. He also relied on precious stones.³⁷³

The two key Mujahedeen actors we have considered within this chapter were perceived very differently internationally. While Hekmatyar was given the nickname of the 'butcher of Kabul', Ahmad Shah Massoud was granted the title 'Hero of the Afghan nation' in 2001, and was internationally seen as a positive example. In 2001 Massoud left Afghanistan, for the first time, to speak in Strasbourg at the European parliament on the dangers of Al-Qaeda. During the speech he argued that Afghanistan continued to be occupied, as he perceived the Taliban as a front for Pakistani interests. However, he did not return to Afghanistan with the

³⁷⁰ Ahmad Shah Massoud. *1953. † 2001. Active within the *Northern Alliance*. Formerly (in the 1990s) defence minister.

³⁷¹ James D. Medler, 'Afghan Heroin: Terrain, Tradition, and Turmoil', *Orbis*, 49.2 (2005), 275–91 (p. 280).

³⁷² Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 257.

³⁷³ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs*, p. 120.

international support against the Taliban and Al Qaeda he had hoped for. On the 9th of November 2001, just days before the 9/11 attacks, Massoud himself was attacked and killed by two Al Qaeda fighters, disguised as journalists.³⁷⁴

The emergence of the Taliban: Confused policies and encouragement of the opium economy

After the Soviet withdrawal one issue became apparent: Many Afghans had fled the country during the war years and were now residing in overfilled refugee camps in Pakistan. Those in the camps often could not return to the country. Those that did return were threatened once more by an absolute lack of a functioning economy and security. Many of the refugees in the camps were children, and for many of the boys, especially in their teenage years, *madrassas* became a way to spend one's time. The schools, which cut off their students from outside information and news, taught combat skills alongside Islamic teachings. After 1994 many of the students of the *madrassas* gathered around Mullah Omar to form the Taliban.³⁷⁵ The Taliban was also subject to state's interests, primarily Pakistan who began training them militarily in the hope they would protect Pakistan's trade routes. The group quickly gathered funds and followers, and took Kandahar in 1994. In 1996 Kabul fell to the Taliban. The rise of the Taliban was not perceived as positive by most Kabul Afghans. The Taliban were made up out of religious extremists, most of whom had never lived outside of refugee camps, and whose families tended to come from the rural countryside. Their doctrine was more radical than that of the Mujahedeen. Pakistan continued to support the group, as, despite not adhering to their religious views, many officials believed Pakistan's interests could be served through them. Foreign interests were dominating Afghanistan's agenda once more, this time through the means of the Taliban.³⁷⁶ It would be wrong to define the Taliban as an inherently Afghan group, as they were a transnational network, based in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.³⁷⁷ The Taliban's funding stemmed from illegal economies, as well as Pakistan and Saudi-Arabia.³⁷⁸

Opium is a potential revenue source for whoever holds power in Afghanistan. For the Taliban, it was a challenge to ensure they would profit from this potential revenue stream without alienating foreign governments. However, their involvement in the drug trade was obvious to most commentators, and was officially acknowledged by Mullah Omar in 1996. A

³⁷⁴ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, p. 260.

³⁷⁵ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, pp. 226–27.

³⁷⁶ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, pp. 237–41.

³⁷⁷ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs*, pp. 113–21.

³⁷⁸ Ewans, *Afghanistan*, p. 186.

survey conducted by the UNODC in 1998 revealed that most of the country's opium (96%) was being produced in provinces held by the Taliban.³⁷⁹

From 1996 the Taliban controlled roughly 90% of Afghanistan, a development closely linked to Pakistani interests, both by state and non-state actors alike. The Taliban brought security to Afghanistan through any means. Their presence allowed the trade between the two countries to resurge. Of course, the stability the Taliban brought came at a heavy price for many Afghans, who had spent the past decade under a communist regime, which at the very least had had many modernising effects. Under the Taliban however, women were not permitted in public, were forced to wear a burqa and were not allowed an education or career. Theatres, cinemas, and music were outlawed, as were non-Islamic celebrations, with all rules being enforced brutally.³⁸⁰

The stability brought by the Taliban was also helpful for the illegal drugs trade, which flourished in this period. In this decade, other radical Islamic groups also established holds in the region, such as Al-Qaida, IMU or Kashmiri separatists. "Although the empirical evidence is limited, during the late 1990s the networks of the Islamic groups, the drugs and trading mafia, and the Taliban, appeared to become increasingly entwined."³⁸¹

The Taliban had a rather ambiguous relationship with drugs. While religious reasons would outlaw the cultivation as well as consumption of narcotics, the need for income in the country, was valued highly. Funds were needed, especially in order to be able to enforce the laws set out by the new regime. For most of the Taliban reign then, opium production was primarily used as a tool: Warlords, for instance, would cooperate with the Taliban, as long as they could collect opium in return.³⁸²

The Taliban had initially outlawed opium as they took Afghanistan. This move came as the Taliban quickly took over many territories and promised to reduce opium cultivation in return for international funds to support alternative development. However, not all the funds requested were made available and thus the Taliban soon went back on this deal.³⁸³ Cultivation was now supported by the Taliban. However, this concerned only the production of opium. The cultivation of *charas* was made illegal, as was the consumption of opium and refining thereof into heroin. Only the production and trade of opium remained firmly within the legal realm. Additionally heroin labs were allowed to continue, despite the formal outlawing of

³⁷⁹ Maley, 'The Foreign Policy of the Taliban', p. IV.

³⁸⁰ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, pp. 237–41.

³⁸¹ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 199.

³⁸² Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 200.

³⁸³ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 49.

them.³⁸⁴ There may have been a reason for this selective outlawing of substances: *Charas* was considered an Afghan vice, while opium and heroin continued to be seen as *kafir* issues, and could theoretically even be used as a weapon to weaken the west – as well as providing a large chunk of the Taliban's income.³⁸⁵ The ban on *charas* was enforced strictly, and led to a decrease in production.³⁸⁶ However, it also had the adverse effect of actually increasing opium consumption, as opium-smoking was less detectable than *charas*.³⁸⁷ However, drug consumption, be it *charas* or opium was criminalised to an extreme extent, and only one treatment centre for drug addiction

existed in the country.³⁸⁸

As all narcotic substances are *haram*, legitimising the outlawing of alcohol and cannabis, but allowing opium to continuously be produced could have been a challenge for Taliban religious leaders. But their condoning of the opium industry was never kept a secret. In an interview in 1996 the Taliban's leader Mullah Omar argued:

When our movement appeared, entire regions of Afghanistan were already devoted to poppy cultivation. There were also many active heroin factories. We took some measures so that some of the land would be used for other plantations, with some success in certain regions. At the same time, we completely destroyed the production units for heroin. In the long term, our goal is to entirely clean up Afghanistan. But we cannot ask all those, whose existence depends entirely on poppy cultivation to change from one day to the next to another crop and to find markets for these new products. One thing is clear in any case: We do not allow opium or heroin to be sold in Afghanistan itself. If non-Muslims want to buy the drug and intoxicate themselves, it is not our responsibility to protect them. It is up to the governments of the importing countries to take care of this. Our goal for us, I will repeat this, is to gradually eliminate the production of the drug in our country to protect our youth. Regarding the question of the levy that we impose on the revenues of the drug, I will answer that our administration applies to all earnings, whatever their origin, the single tax rate of 20%, which follows the prescriptions of Islam.³⁸⁹

As already indicated in this quote, the Taliban not only permitted the opium economy to carry on, but actively profited from it. There are two types of taxes that can be collected from Afghan farmers, and that also apply for opium. *Zakat* is redistributed entirely to the poor, while *ushr*, which is usually paid in tithe, in this case opium, is collected and then split in half: Half is paid to the poor, the other half to rulers and local mullahs. In fact, however, the Taliban would directly collect most of the *zakat*³⁹⁰. We do know that landowners were taxed as well as merchants, as were the value of drug shipments. As the Taliban profited from the production,

³⁸⁴ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs*, pp. 125–26.

³⁸⁵ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 81.

³⁸⁶ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: The power of Militant Islam in Afghanistan and Beyond* (I.B. Tauris, 2010), p. 118.

³⁸⁷ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 82.

³⁸⁸ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 50.

³⁸⁹ Bizhan Torabi, 'Entretien Avec Mollah Mohammad Omar', *Politique Internationale*, 1997 1996, 74 edition, pp. 135–43 (p. 141).- own translation

³⁹⁰ Ewans, *Afghanistan*, p. 203.

there were also steps taken to raise it. These steps included the distribution of fertilizer to farmers,³⁹¹ as well as an active encouragement: For instance, consultants were sent to farmers to aid in growing the crops. So-called ‘enforcers’ were sent out to persuade farmers to switch from licit crops to illicit ones.³⁹² Nonetheless, the Taliban’s income did not entirely depend on the opium trade. The Taliban is said to have earned roughly \$30 million a year from the opium trade, supplemented by an additional \$65 million that was gained from taxing other trades that usually crossed the Pakistani-Afghan border.³⁹³

By 1999, much of Afghanistan’s land was devoted to poppy cultivation, and the prices of opium had subsequently dropped. The Taliban had a stockpile of opium that was increasingly difficult to sell due to the low prices.³⁹⁴ In this context then, the Taliban changed their attitude to opium. Mullah Omar issued a statement in 1999 declaring poppy cultivation would be reduced by a third in that year. The following year did see some counternarcotics measures being taken up by the Taliban, including the destruction of 34 processing labs in Nangarhar in 1999, and 25 in Helmand in the following year.³⁹⁵

In 2000 a complete ban was issued. This ban, as can be seen in **Figure 12**, was to reduce production by 94%, compared to the year before. This decrease cannot be put down to Taliban efforts entirely as the ban coincided with a drought in areas of high production within Afghanistan.³⁹⁶

Formally at least, the ban was introduced for religious reasons. The Taliban may have been convinced to introduce it by religious leaders.³⁹⁷ Meanwhile, two other factors probably contributed significantly behind the scenes: The need for international recognition and an attempted reduction of supplies.³⁹⁸ There is some evidence to support these arguments, as the ban outlawed only the cultivation, not, however, the trade of opium. Taliban stockpiles were estimated to have been up to 2,800 metric tons of opium in 2000, and needed to be reduced.³⁹⁹ Prices had fallen in previous years due to the consistently high demand: Farmgate price had been \$60 in 1998, and fallen to \$20 in 2000.⁴⁰⁰ In this respect, the ban was successful, as the price of opium increased tenfold in the following year. There is also evidence of the Taliban

³⁹¹ Andrew Meier, ‘Afghanistan’s Drug Trade’, *Muslim Politics Report*, 11 (1997), 3–4 (pp. 3–4).

³⁹² Ansary, *Games without Rules*, p. 299.

³⁹³ Goodhand, ‘Frontiers and Wars’, p. 199.

³⁹⁴ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, p. 299.

³⁹⁵ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 80.

³⁹⁶ Ewans, *Afghanistan*, p. 204.

³⁹⁷ Kreutzmann, ‘Afghanistan and the Opium World Market’, pp. 612–13.

³⁹⁸ Kreutzmann, ‘Afghanistan and the Opium World Market’, pp. 612–13.

³⁹⁹ Ewans, *Afghanistan*, p. 204.

⁴⁰⁰ Goodhand, ‘Frontiers and Wars’, p. 200.

wanting international recognition. The Taliban had only been recognised as the government of Afghanistan by Saudi-Arabia, the UAE and Pakistan.⁴⁰¹ Additionally, the US had decided in 1994 to not grant economic aid to Afghanistan, based on the regime's unwillingness "to suppress opium cultivation and heroin refining".⁴⁰² In the same year the Taliban also relaxed the ban on girls attending school. However, these efforts for international recognition were unsuccessful. The UN Security Council issued renewed sanctions in the same year in order to force the Taliban to extradite Bin Laden.⁴⁰³ The argument that the ban was issued primarily for the purposes of international recognition is harmed by the fact that this was not something that seems to have been at the forefront of Taliban policies in previous years, considering the destruction of the Buddhas, a cultural heritage, an action that was condemned worldwide.⁴⁰⁴

Disregarding the reasons for it however, the ban was more successful than any that followed. The Taliban's major enforcers during the ban were the threat of violence and punishment, monitoring and eradicating poppy farming, and publicly punishing those resisting the ban⁴⁰⁵. Farmers discovered to be growing opium in this period were jailed and only released under the condition they destroy their opium fields.⁴⁰⁶ Transgressing the ban meant one had to fear torture, property destruction or death.⁴⁰⁷

The Taliban ban also had effects for the following years. First, the price of opium increased tenfold in the subsequent year. As farmers had been unable to cultivate opium poppies in the previous year, they had been saddled with increased debt. Once the Taliban threats were lifted, it seemed feasible for many to resume their cultivation of opium to decrease these debts with a lucrative cash crop, once more.⁴⁰⁸ It also caused many issues for opium growing families, who, unable to repay their *salaam* had to sell livestock, land or other assets, and who were even internally displaced or became refugees due to the lack of their normal annual income.⁴⁰⁹

Whether or not the Taliban lifted the ban before the ISAF invasion is heavily debated. Macdonald cites some sources that stated that the ban was lifted via the *Voice of Shariat* radio (which was Taliban controlled) on September 2nd 2001, weeks before the start of the poppy

⁴⁰¹ Nawa, *Opium Nation*, chap. 1.

⁴⁰² Haq, 'Pak-Afghan Drug Trade in Historical Perspective', p. 953.

⁴⁰³ Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War*, pp. 84–85.

⁴⁰⁴ Kreutzmann, 'Afghanistan and the Opium World Market', pp. 612–13.

⁴⁰⁵ Farrell and Thorne, *Where have all the flowers gone?*, p. 81.

⁴⁰⁶ Ewans, *Afghanistan*, p. 204.

⁴⁰⁷ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 78.

⁴⁰⁸ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 201.

⁴⁰⁹ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, p. 84.

planting season in many regions. However, due to the international invasion soon after, this is difficult to follow up on.⁴¹⁰

Throughout the ban the Northern Alliance under Massoud continued producing opium, for instance in Badakhshan, as shown on **Figure 14**.⁴¹¹ The Mujahedeen profited from the opium trade much in the same way the Taliban did.⁴¹² Many taxed the opium industry, and even encouraged farmers to start growing it. Massoud, who had been opposed to the illicit economy in previous years, began collecting tax from the opium trade in the 1990s. However, there was a lesser focus on opium production, as the majority of opium was being grown elsewhere: Only 3% of Afghan opium stemmed from regions under Massoud's control. Most of the Northern Alliance's profits came from the gem trade, or from foreign aid received, primarily from Iran.⁴¹³ However, the opium markets of the Northern Alliance and the Taliban were split, and highly competitive.⁴¹⁴

The role of the state: The central state and alternative state-making

This period was defined by the lack of a central state. Soviet withdrawal essentially meant that the central Afghan state had collapsed.⁴¹⁵ Afghanistan did not have a true state-like structure after Najibullah was removed from government, until a transitional government was put into place in 2001. While none of the governments of this period truly became a state, or even state-like, the Taliban rule came closest, as their rule encompassed most of the country and was long-lasting enough to build up the necessary structures.⁴¹⁶

Many of the Mujahedeen had commenced what Rubin describes as “organisation building” during the war against first the Soviet Union and then Najibullah's regime. This mainly holds true with those rebel leaders that were focused on eventually taking state power. Mujahedeen groups, much like traditional states, had to ensure leaders were recruited, as well as organising military and political activities, and financing these activities.⁴¹⁷

We can see examples of this type of preliminary state-building with both Massoud and Hekmatyar. Massoud, in the northeast of Afghanistan, had been very active in organisation-building. He had founded the United Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, later known as the

⁴¹⁰ Macdonald, *Drugs in Afghanistan*, pp. 82–83.

⁴¹¹ Kreutzmann, ‘Afghanistan and the Opium World Market’, pp. 612–13.

⁴¹² Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 53.

⁴¹³ Rubin, ‘The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan’, p. 1797.

⁴¹⁴ Kreutzmann, ‘Afghanistan and the Opium World Market’, p. 615.

⁴¹⁵ Jonathan Goodhand, ‘From Holy War to Opium War? A Case Study of the Opium Economy in North-Eastern Afghanistan’, *Central Asian Survey*, 19.2 (2000), 265–80 (p. 271).

⁴¹⁶ Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 183.

⁴¹⁷ Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 227.

Northern Alliance, a loose alliance of Mujahedeen to combat the Taliban, which aimed to found a multi-ethnic, modern Islamic state.⁴¹⁸ He was the *amir* of the Supervisory Council of the North, which consisted to a large part of the former Mujahedeen government. In Taloqan, which he used as a capital for the Northern alliance, a Mujahedeen bank had been founded in 1991. “In spite of its Islamic ideology, the SCN became a de facto political, economic, and geographical base for northeast – and therefore Tajik – power”⁴¹⁹ This means that the northeast saw the establishment of democratic institutions. Additionally, while the Northern Alliance continued to be Islamic, Massoud even signed the Women’s rights declaration.⁴²⁰ When a Mujahedeen government was formed, Massoud had called the *Loyah Jirga*, in 1994.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar meanwhile was the leader and founder of the religiously fundamentalist and extremist Hizb I-Islami. During the war against the Soviet Union his party had been one of the primary recipients of foreign aid through the ISI. Hekmatyar had also briefly been prime minister in the period of Mujahedeen rule. While the party had been one of the reasons the Mujahedeen government had failed,⁴²¹ and caused much destruction during the civil war, their primary goal was an Islamic revolution. Hizb I-Islami was one of the most organised Mujahedeen parties. The membership was granted according to categories, and it was even the only party to hold elections. After 2001 Hekmatyar became a vocal supporter of the Taliban, but had fought against them before.⁴²²

While they had represented micro-governments during the war years, we cannot say that they Mujahedeen truly fulfilled the role of a state in any meaningful sense in the years before the Taliban, as much of the government’s capacity was occupied by the fighting between the different fractions.

The Taliban also did not represent a true central state, nor were they internationally recognised as such. However, while the Taliban never attempted to realise all roles of which the state usually takes charge, some state-like functions were fulfilled, and used for their own purpose. As such there was a Taliban-controlled radio station, which could propagate all decrees. The economy was based on the one hand on illegal activities, on the other hand there was foreign financial support, paid in most parts from Pakistan. The value of the smuggling trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan in this period is estimated at \$2.5 billion, with the

⁴¹⁸ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, p. 243.

⁴¹⁹ Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, p. 259.

⁴²⁰ Jan Hammer, *Externe Intervention und state-building. State-building in Afghanistan zwischen 1979-1989 und 2001-2012* (Diplomica Verlag, 2016), pp. 34–36.

⁴²¹ M. J. Gohari, *The Taliban: Ascent to Power* (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 18–20.

⁴²² Rubin, *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*, pp. 213–15.

Taliban profit estimated as high as \$75 million. There was an agricultural sector, where many crops were grown in greater numbers than opium: in 1998 for instance, 3.5 million metric tons of cereals were produced, compared to only 2,800 metric tons of opium. However, opium presented a more significant revenue stream. By 1999 the Taliban controlled 97% of all opium produced in the country.⁴²³ The licit economy meanwhile struggled, as is particularly obvious when considering the vastly unstable currency.

It is difficult to say what the role of the state was from 1989-2001, largely because the question of whether or not there was a state is debatable. We can, however, conclude that there were barely any attempts to curb the opium economy. While we cannot describe the Taliban rule as a strong state, it certainly was a strong rule with a demarcation of power over its citizens, as we can see when considering the massive decrease in production after the issuing of their ban.⁴²⁴

A semi-legal economy. Afghan advantages in the opium production under Taliban rule

There were a number of reasons why Afghanistan was able to become the world leader in opium production in this period. Firstly, the infrastructure necessary to achieve this feat was already in place. The smuggling routes were already in place and Afghans knew how to produce the drug. The number of potential producers of opium increased in the later years of this period. The Taliban had prohibited women attending school or holding jobs, with only one exception: Women were allowed to participate in the opium economy. Thus, the entire female workforce had only opium as a potential income, and could devote their time to these tasks.⁴²⁵

The two major reasons why the poppy output could rise so much, however, were technological advancement, combined with the ‘security’ provided by the Taliban, reducing the risk involved in the cultivation of opium.⁴²⁶ As deep-well technology became more affordable, for instance, it became possible to cultivate opium even in the country’s more arid regions.⁴²⁷ The opium grown was not intended for the licit market, which would have lowered the prices and de-incentivised, but a farmer growing opium had to have no fear of repercussion. Thus, the relative safety provided by the Taliban proved to be a big advantage to farmers, and served to increase the country’s opium output.⁴²⁸

⁴²³ Maley, *The Afghanistan Wars*, pp. 234–36.

⁴²⁴ Medler, ‘Afghan Heroin’, p. 280.

⁴²⁵ Nawa, *Opium Nation*, chap. 1.

⁴²⁶ Rubin, ‘The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan’, p. 1795.

⁴²⁷ Mansfield, *A state built on sand*, p.109

⁴²⁸ Rashid, *Taliban*, p. 117.

The economy of Afghanistan during the civil war and the Taliban rule

The Afghan economy had been damaged significantly during the Soviet Invasion. Afghanistan had always relied on its agricultural sector, which an estimated three quarters of the population had worked in. However, the war against the Soviet Union had seen the destruction of much of the Afghan countryside, including the country's irrigation systems. This meant that staples of the agricultural economy could no longer be produced, including wheat, maize, rice and barley.⁴²⁹ The more modern sectors of the economy were adversely affected by the 'brain drain': Many educated Afghans fled the country to avoid the Taliban's policies, including doctors and nurses.⁴³⁰

Thus, by the late 1990s the Afghan economy relied primarily on timber, gems and narcotics. Licit economies had been more or less destroyed.⁴³¹ Aid, which the country had come to depend on in the previous decades, had decreased substantially.⁴³²

The rural countryside was affected the worst in these years. The regions furthest removed from the capital had suffered worse from the effects of poverty, and often had little alternatives to opium. Thus, these became the regions producing the most opium as a source of income.⁴³³ Another economic issue affected the refugees that returned to Afghanistan, in the period of relative stability brought by the Taliban. Many of the refugees did not have enough savings to sustain themselves through the cultivation of licit crops in the beginning, and thus turned to opium to fulfil their immediate needs.⁴³⁴

The opium economy itself continued to flourish in this period, which was an indirect benefit to the wider local economies, allowing businesses such as petrol stations, shops and tea houses, to flourish.⁴³⁵

4.5 The arrival of ISAF – how the presence of international forces in Afghanistan after 9/11 changed the opium economy (from 2001)

By November 2001, with the attacks on the World Trade Centre, global interest in Afghanistan quickly began to increase. The fear of terrorism, coupled with disconcerting trends in opium production, caused an international invasion which aimed to drive out the Taliban

⁴²⁹ Dormandy, *Opium*, p. 285.

⁴³⁰ Dormandy, *Opium*, p. 285.

⁴³¹ Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War*, p. 96.

⁴³² Goodhand, 'From Holy War to Opium War?', p. 271.

⁴³³ Mielke, 'Opium als Wirtschaftsmotor', p. 233.

⁴³⁴ Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War*, p. 102.

⁴³⁵ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 200.

and to restore stability to the country. While the invasion was initially US led, NATO took control of the ISAF forces in 2003. The invasion was under a UN mandate.

Despite the initial optimism, the military intervention did not end all Afghan insurgencies. Thus, in the post-Taliban Afghanistan borders once more became important, as new frontiers emerged, shaped by competing warlords. These new borders were also important in the context of opium, as different regulations existed in each zone.⁴³⁶ In Afghanistan's borderlands, licit and illicit economies overlap. Borderlands are also subject to constant change, in terms of policies, the conflict's geography and the porousness of the borders.⁴³⁷ After the military intervention several issues were considered potentially destabilising, among them the issue of the ongoing opium production. This was particularly difficult, as a number of people could potentially profit from the opium industry, including corrupt members of government, the Taliban as well as various warlords.⁴³⁸

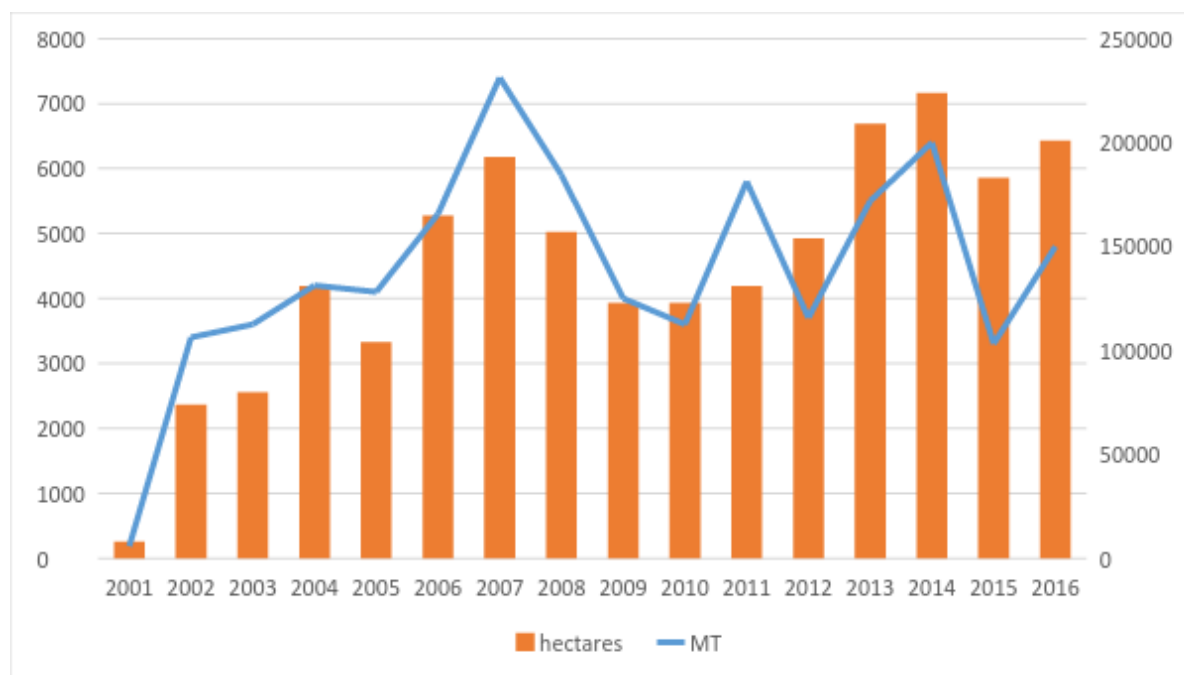


Figure 15 Opium production 2001-2016⁴³⁹

Despite the initial optimism, and the fact that the military intervention followed a historically low production year due to the Taliban ban, that same year opium production rose once more.⁴⁴⁰

As we can see from **Figure 15**, opium production rose significantly after the ban on production in 2001, rising from less than 200 tons to over 3,000, in just one year. This was in

⁴³⁶ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 194.

⁴³⁷ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 210.

⁴³⁸ Runion, *The History of Afghanistan*, p. 6.

⁴³⁹ UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Surveys, 2001-2016*

⁴⁴⁰ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 192.

part as opium production was not initially outlawed by the new government in 2001, and as the profitability of opium had increased so much through the ban on production. The next years were marked by a consistently high production that did, however, vary by over 3,000 metric tons from one year to another. This, in part, was due to bad weather conditions, as we can see by the fact that the amount of opium produced often underwent more changes than the hectares of land on which opium was being produced. Additionally, counternarcotics measures, despite not having any significant long-term effects, could significantly impact the harvest of one year. We can state with some certainty that the counternarcotics measures were not effective in the long-term when considering the above numbers. In 2002, when the first counternarcotics programme was launched, 3,400 metric tons of opium were being produced on 74,000 hectares of land. By 2016 it was 4,800 metric tons on 201,000 hectares – the amount of land has thus almost tripled. The UN estimates that 50% of the country's' GDP is now made up out of the opium industry. Short-term successes mark by the changing landscape of opium production: Around 2005 the provinces producing the most were Helmand, Kandahar, Balkh, Farah and Badakhshan, but this undergoes constant change, as provinces might then become a sight of eradication measures, as a response to which production shifts to another region.⁴⁴¹

Despite the financial costs involved with an anti-opium strategy that has not managed to bring any long-term successes, the prevention of opium production continues to be invested in heavily. This investment can be observed for instance in the following quote, from a UN Security Council resolution, extending the presence of the international forces until 2017:

[The Security Council] remains concerned at the serious harm that opium cultivation, production and trafficking and consumption continue to cause to the stability, security, public health, social and economic development and governance of Afghanistan as well as to the region and internationally, takes note of the UNODC Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015 released in October 2015 and of the decrease in production and cultivation of drugs suggested in it, welcomes the launch in September 2015 of the National Drug Action Plan, calls on the Afghan Government, with the assistance of the international community, to accelerate its implementation as well as that of the National Drug Control Strategy, including through alternative livelihood programmes⁴⁴²

We can see that there continues to be a focus on counternarcotics as well as on attempts of supply reduction. We must, however, ask ourselves why opium consumption is such a focal point of the International forces? Primarily this is as worries about drug production tend to be linked to other factors. As noted in the above-cited resolution, opium is seen to have the potential to destabilise the country, partially due to the links it is seen to have to terrorism, and

⁴⁴¹ UNODC, MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Rapid Assessment survey, February 2006* (Kabul 2006)

⁴⁴² United Nations Security Council, 'Resolution 2274 (2016)', 2016, pp. 16–17
<http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2274.pdf> [accessed 18 August 2016].

as income gained from the illicit substance continues to finance many aspects of the insurgency. Additionally, there are related public health concerns: Afghan opium supplies most Western countries, meaning a reduction of supply is in the interest of many partners of the coalition.⁴⁴³

Continuous instability, insurgency and corruption as factors for the increased production

The attacks on the World Trade Centre would cause the international community to very quickly become reinvested in Afghanistan – by October of the same year US airstrikes were supporting the Northern Alliance in taking back Kabul from the Taliban, who had now lost the support they had previously enjoyed from neighbouring countries. By November the Northern Alliance and their partners were gaining ground, having expelled the Taliban from Kabul, and ensuring their strongholds were weakened. The Taliban, alongside their leader Mullah Omar, fled into Pakistan, and the local population was initially overwhelmingly supportive of the international alliance that seemed to have defeated the Taliban within weeks.⁴⁴⁴ The military intervention allowed for the establishment of a new interim government.⁴⁴⁵

The difference between the invasion as supported by the international community and the previous invasions of the past 200 years was that, this time, there was no state to fight. The international community was faced with the challenge of building up a state, while battling issues such as the continuous narcotics production and insurgencies. The Bonn agreement, of December 2001, outlined some of the actions to be implemented by ISAF. The purpose was to introduce basic state structures. The Bonn agreement modelled the Afghan state, loosely, on the last Afghan monarchy. However, this already showed there were some misunderstandings about Afghanistan's past, as Afghanistan was also not entirely stable before 1980.⁴⁴⁶

When the international forces first arrived in Afghanistan the majority of the country was vastly optimistic about its future, even more so after the Bonn agreement.⁴⁴⁷ With the Taliban seemingly expelled, and international aid once more flooding in, it seemed the country might stabilise. However, a number of factors meant that this optimism soon decreased. Some of the policies put into place by the new government, such as the counternarcotics programmes were not well received by Afghans, while the rapidly decreasing security contributed to a

⁴⁴³ Blanchard, *Afghanistan*, p. 12.

⁴⁴⁴ Barfield, *Afghanistan*, pp. 268–70.

⁴⁴⁵ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 191.

⁴⁴⁶ Qassem, 'Afghanistan'. pp. 247–51.

⁴⁴⁷ Nawa, *Opium Nation*, chap. 3.

climate where Afghans grew to resent the central government. Moreover, the international invasion had not actually meant the end of the Taliban. Mullah Omar had evaded capture, and the Taliban insurgency gained power, especially after 2003.⁴⁴⁸ We can see then that stability was not immediately returned to Afghanistan, and thus the opium economy could continue to flourish in a country which continued to be dependent on it as a source of income. The continued alienation of the rural population towards both the international forces and the central government contributed towards the rising production, as bans on opium production were often not seen as legitimate.

Moreover, corruption has defined the Afghan political scene throughout this entire period. It was furthered through the opium economy, which enables corrupt members of government to profit, from unfairly carrying out counternarcotics measures.⁴⁴⁹

One issue within Afghanistan is that the country has always depended on family units to provide social security. However, the multiple wars spanning over the previous decades meant that the family system has been destroyed, through displacement or other consequences of the war. This leaves little in the way of safety nets.⁴⁵⁰

The role of opium in alternative state-making

While the international forces were fighting off the Taliban they themselves were building up an alternative system of government, designating ‘shadow’ officials, as well as putting in place an alternative legislative system, which they themselves observed and which they ensured Afghans also kept to. This ‘shadow government’ governed on the basis of the Taliban version of Shari’a, which was usually an uneducated one that concerned itself more with traditions than the actual Shari’a law.⁴⁵¹ The Taliban were also continuing to collect taxes, 10% on agriculture, by which we can understand, in this case, opium. At this stage of Afghan history opium no longer just represented money in worth, but it was also being used as commodity money, and day-to-day transactions were carried out with opium. Since it is non-perishable, quantifiable, negotiable and there is a limited supply of it, opium fulfilled all conditions a currency needs.⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁸ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 55.

⁴⁴⁹ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, p. 301.

⁴⁵⁰ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 2.

⁴⁵¹ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, pp. 320–22.

⁴⁵² Ansary, *Games without Rules*, pp. 320–22.

With a system of taxation in place, a network of shadow administration, a rapidly developing (mobile) court system, and (a simulacrum of) a currency of its own, the Taliban could plausibly claim to be functioning as an alternative to the Karzai government, at least in the provinces”⁴⁵³

While this government existed only nominally, and was of course not recognised, it did mean that the central state was being weakened, and the country was once more quickly becoming ungovernable.⁴⁵⁴

The Taliban was not the only issue preventing effective governance of Afghanistan, but it represented one of the major issues. Next to this we also have to consider that the rural population continued to be dependent on poppy cultivation as a source of income, with some farmers continuing to view this economy as legitimate. This in turn de-legitimised the government, as well as the politicians who advocated supply-side counternarcotics measures.⁴⁵⁵ It also strengthened the Taliban, which for instance would offer to protect opium fields.⁴⁵⁶ Without true alternative livelihoods, the rural population either developed an increased dependence on the central government for aid, or turned towards the Taliban to protect their income within the shadow economy. Additionally, eradication led to an increased divide between the people and their central government as well as the rural elites, which have historically played a large role. Farmers no longer trusted even the rural elites proposing anti-drug measures.⁴⁵⁷

Furthermore, the central state was weakened by the fact that, in rural areas, the Taliban’s claim to legitimacy, which is based on Islam, might find more resonance than the central government, which after all was being supported by yet more foreign powers. This applies in particular to areas that are unstable. Areas less affected by the insurgency might be more willing to hear the central government’s promises of development projects.⁴⁵⁸

Counternarcotics strategies since 2001 – strengths and weaknesses

In this period a worldwide culture of prohibition continued. This also continued to be focused on supply reduction, with a primary focus now being placed on Afghanistan, which houses a majority of the world’s illicit opium. Without Afghanistan, in theory, global illicit production of opium would have declined by 70% between 1990 and 2008, mainly due to the supply reduction in the Golden triangle.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵³ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, p. 322.

⁴⁵⁴ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, p. 322.

⁴⁵⁵ Felbab-Brown, ‘Opium Licensing in Afghanistan’, p. 3.

⁴⁵⁶ Felbab-Brown, ‘Opium Licensing in Afghanistan’, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁷ Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence*, p. 164.

⁴⁵⁸ Fishstein and Wilder, ‘Winning Hearts and Minds?’, pp. 67–68.

⁴⁵⁹ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, ‘A Century of International Drug Control’, p. 146.

As insurgency continued to matter in the day-to-day lives of many Afghans, we have to consider two sides of prohibitionist policies: First in which ways insurgent groups treat narcotics, and second in which ways the central government, supported by the international forces, have dealt with them. The Taliban continued to rely on opium as a source of funding. Around 20-50% of the Taliban's income were made up out of the opium trade, which also sustains other anti-ISAF forces. Thus they have not attempted to limit this economy, rather choosing to actively encourage it.⁴⁶⁰ To consider one example, in November of 2005 the Taliban was reported to have sent out *shabnamas* in southern Afghanistan, urging farmers to grow opium, and threatening them with death if they did not oblige.⁴⁶¹

The international community, of course, has taken the opposite approach, having tried in a number of different ways, and with varying successes, to discourage or even eliminate, the narcotics industry. Felbab-Brown distinguishes four major phases of counternarcotics measures. The first one, in the first year of ISAF involvement, saw a laissez-faire approach being taken by the US, as well as other nations. From 2002 onwards there was a more active involvement, especially by the UK, who had been declared the lead nation on counternarcotics. The UK planned to decrease cultivation by 70% over the next five years. Compensated eradication and interdiction were the two major measures taken. Phase three, from 2004 to 2009, saw a renewed effort on counternarcotics, with the primary focus on eradication and increased interdiction, and increased US involvement. The final phase, starting in 2009, saw a bigger focus on alternative livelihoods, as well as interdiction targeting specifically traffickers connected to the Taliban.⁴⁶² The next section will consider these phases in more detail.

The **first phase** was marked by a distinctive disinterest in counternarcotics, as these were, in the first year of the international invasion, not a focus of the government. Rather, counter-terrorism and political consolidation were considered as imperative. The reasoning for this was a fear that an intense focus on counternarcotics may destabilise the fragile coalition united in the 'war on terror'.⁴⁶³ Essentially this meant that, until 2002, the opium industry continued in much the same way it had in the previous decades, and, in the early 2000s actually increased significantly on the previous years, after the Taliban ban on production.

In the **second phase** the counternarcotics measures in 2002 began with the issuing of a renewed ban, this time by Hamid Karzai. The issuing of the ban by President Karzai went

⁴⁶⁰ Felbab-Brown, 'Opium Licensing in Afghanistan', p. 2.

⁴⁶¹ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 77.

⁴⁶² Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs*, p. 133–138; 141; 154.

⁴⁶³ Goodhand, 'Corrupting or Consolidating the Peace?', p. 405.

alongside a published outline of the national counternarcotics strategy, which established institutions to decrease the production. The international contribution at this time came in the form of funding, equipment, and, importantly, forces and training. The UK was declared the lead counternarcotics nation. In the spring of 2002 the UK's various measures began.⁴⁶⁴ The UK already had some interest in Afghan opium production, as this supplied almost all of the heroin purchased on its own streets. Being declared lead nation meant that the country was now in charge of policy formation and supporting the Afghan government. Within this period, the government mainly relied on two counternarcotics measures: Compensated eradication and interdiction.

There were a number of reasons why production in this period did not cease, nor decrease significantly: Firstly, while Karzai had argued his ban on cultivation with religious arguments, the ban was perceived by many Afghans as being part of a 'Western' agenda. Generally, the ban was not well received among Afghans.⁴⁶⁵ Additionally, the ban was issued as a stand-alone measure, whereas, much like eradication, poppy bans need to be supported by alternative livelihood programmes, as they are otherwise economically damaging as well as unsustainable.

The UK's measure of compensated eradication failed for three reasons: Corruption, limited funding and a lack of any real comprehension of the Afghan opium economy. Farmers were offered \$350 per *jerib* of opium they would eradicate. However, rather than handing over the funds local strongmen would collect the money and then keep it for themselves, thus the farmers that did choose to abide by the programme and eradicate their fields often saw no compensation. Corrupt eradicators would take bribes from desperate farmers who were trying to prevent their fields, and thus their livelihood, from being destroyed.⁴⁶⁶ Another way in which the system could be corrupted was that farmers would start growing opium merely to eradicate it and collect the payment.⁴⁶⁷ Additionally, the \$350 the farmers could have potentially collected, at least in those cases in which the money was actually being distributed, was a much lower amount of money than the farmers could have gained from simply selling the harvested opium. To summarise there were a number of potential scenarios in which the system of compensation was being systematically undermined through corruption. Farmers either eradicated without receiving compensation, received compensation without seriously

⁴⁶⁴ Blanchard, *Afghanistan*, p. 24.

⁴⁶⁵ Goodhand, 'Corrupting or Consolidating the Peace?', p. 417.

⁴⁶⁶ Felbab-Brown, *Shooting up: Counterinsurgency and the War on Drugs*, p. 138.

⁴⁶⁷ Felbab-Brown, 'Peacekeepers Among Poppies', pp. 105–6.

eradicating fields, or were never actually contacted by the programme as those in charge could simply keep the money without going to any effort. Finally, the allocated money, a total of \$36.75 million from the UK and \$35 million through international aid ran out.

Another policy implemented by the UK was interdiction, meaning the effort to arrest traffickers. Once more the success of this policy was hindered by corruption. Afghan strongmen used the interdiction policy to eliminate their competition. Rather than targeting large traffickers then, the policy consolidated their power, as it removed small and vulnerable traders from the production chain. The Taliban was able to find another stronghold in Afghanistan through the policy, as they offered protection to traffickers, and thus profited while increasingly re-entering the opium business.⁴⁶⁸

The **third phase** saw the increasing involvement of the US in Afghan drug policy. After three years and an increasing, rather than disappearing drug industry in Afghanistan, the US decided on a more active role in Afghan counternarcotics, even setting up agencies outside of UK control. Next to the US and the UK other nations also participated in drug control programmes, but to a much lesser extent.⁴⁶⁹ Measures in this period relied on eradication, in much more aggressive ways than the UK had carried out.

Here the main issue was that alternative livelihoods were not taken into account to any significant extent. This meant that farmers who had their fields eradicated did not have any true chance of finding alternative means of income, as the national economy, especially in rural areas, was still weakened by a war that had by now lasted for over two decades. Protests broke out in response to the eradication, showing the ever-progressing alienation of the population from the rural government. This also allowed the Taliban to gain in strength, as they continued to offer protection to Afghans relying on the income of opium – this time they protected farmers, not just traders of opium.⁴⁷⁰ Once more, corruption played a major role in the failure of counternarcotics measures that still failed to take into account some of the realities of life in Afghanistan.

The reality is that the crops of landowners and farmers who have power and contacts in the government are spared, while those of people [...] [who are] poor and disconnected from the higher ranks, are destroyed⁴⁷¹

Further proof of the fundamental misunderstanding of the Afghan situation comes when considering the immediate effects of eradication: When supply is reduced in such a radical

⁴⁶⁸ Felbab-Brown, 'Peacekeepers Among Poppies', pp. 106–7.

⁴⁶⁹ Florian P. Kühn, 'Deutschlands (Nicht-)Drogenpolitik in Afghanistan', *Zeitschrift Für Außen-Und Sicherheitspolitik*, 4 (2011), 115–29 (pp. 115–16).

⁴⁷⁰ Felbab-Brown, 'Peacekeepers Among Poppies', pp. 107–8.

⁴⁷¹ Nawa, *Opium Nation*, chap. 9.

way, prices rise, and farmers may have more of an incentive to produce opium in the following year, accounting for some of the rises in production we have seen in the above graph. Eradication also does not see the funding of groups involved in the opium economy decrease, as warlords and insurgents tend to rely on more than just farmgate opium: Other areas of the shadow economy, such as the smuggling of licit and illicit goods continue to substantiate much of their profits.⁴⁷²

We can conclude that the measures of the first eight years were largely inefficient in the long run, aiding insurgents and preventing good governance efforts by alienating big parts of the population.⁴⁷³

The **fourth and final phase**, which continues to this day, sees a mixture of all measures described above continue. Eradication is still supported by a number of international actors, including Russia, who continue to fight a heroin epidemic in their own country. Usually around 2,500-4,000 hectares a year are eradicated by the MCN. Some eradication measures are more harmful than others. We can consider, for instance, the destruction of water pumps in Helmand, which negatively affected the cultivation of licit crops, and meant many farmers had no access to water for household purposes, seeing them turn towards opium as a source of income rather than away from it. However, despite the measures continuing, the focus on eradication decreased under the Obama administration. Eradication tends to now be carried out by Afghan state governors.⁴⁷⁴ New interdiction measures were introduced in 2008. There is now also a larger focus on alternative livelihoods. However, as we have seen, despite these steps opium production continues. US counternarcotics measures also include public awareness campaigns, judiciary reforms, economic and agricultural development, all of which can be more helpful in the long-run, but might not achieve immediate effects. This means that the effects of these policies may not show up in the data collected by the UNODC or USG, but may help to build up a more functioning economy in Afghanistan for the years to come.⁴⁷⁵

Eradication can inflict significant harm on the population, and on efforts to rebuild the state. Nonetheless, many continue to argue for it, citing as a main advantage that the real threat of eradication is necessary so that farmers and landowners cease the cultivation. Counter-arguments state that eradication is inefficient, counterproductive and often targets the poorest farmers, which have no alternative sources of income.⁴⁷⁶ Eradication can only work, when there

⁴⁷² Felbab-Brown, 'Opium Licensing in Afghanistan', p. 4.

⁴⁷³ Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence*, p. 161.

⁴⁷⁴ Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence*, pp. 167–69.

⁴⁷⁵ Blanchard, *Afghanistan*, p. 2.

⁴⁷⁶ Andersson, *Counternarcotics Strategies*, p. 928.

is a functioning legal economy available, which farmers can turn to. If this is not the case farmers will merely replant after eradication, and learn to adapt to the threat of eradication.

One very controversial measure is chemical, or aerial eradication, which has been reported to be very dangerous, as certain chemicals used also cause skin and eye problems.⁴⁷⁷ This measure was considered by the US, but the UK and the Afghan government were strongly opposed. Then-President, Hamid Karzai, considered the risks to health and environment too high. However, there were regions of Nangarhar, where unauthorised fumigation took place. Residents reported health concerns, including diarrhoea, eye and skin infections and various other illnesses as a consequence. While the US denied involvement, suspicions continue that this case was a secret trial for fumigation spraying by a US agency.⁴⁷⁸

Interdiction primarily is targeted at areas known to be closely related to insurgency.⁴⁷⁹ As long as interdiction targets smaller groups it cannot be a useful tool, and this continues to this day.⁴⁸⁰ Attempts to strengthen interdiction measures, and to target them only at larger groups, have not always been effective, due to weak national security and corruption. Interdiction continues to harm low-level farmers, rather than the high-level traffickers it should aim at.⁴⁸¹

Alternative livelihoods are, in theory, the most positive and promising of all the methods. However, in practice, they have been too slow to reach all parts of the population.⁴⁸² Their success is also prevented by insurgency and a distinctive lack of security, necessary, of course, to build up legal economies. Additionally, alternative livelihoods focus merely on building up legal sources of income, and ignore many of the reasons why people turn to opium production – for instance the lack of a legal micro-credit system. There has also been too little done about the insufficient infrastructure and underdevelopment of the Afghan agriculture sector, which is what most Afghans rely on.⁴⁸³ Alternative livelihoods can only function when they encompass the entire country and focus on rebuilding the rural economy. There are also programmes that do much more harm than good – for instance food distribution programmes.⁴⁸⁴ These flood the markets with cheap goods, making it unsustainable. In considering the

⁴⁷⁷ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, pp. 74–75.

⁴⁷⁸ Buxton, *The Political Economy of Narcotics*, pp. 187–88.

⁴⁷⁹ Mercille, 'The U.S. "War on Drugs in Afghanistan"', p. 304.

⁴⁸⁰ Felbab-Brown, 'No Easy Exit', pp. 13–15.

⁴⁸¹ Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence*, p. 161.

⁴⁸² Felbab-Brown, 'Opium Licensing in Afghanistan', p. 6.

⁴⁸³ Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence*, p. 173.

⁴⁸⁴ Felbab-Brown, *Aspiration and Ambivalence*, p. 176.

distribution of wheat we can see that this drove down the prices of wheat, meaning Afghan farmers were far less likely to consider it as an alternative to opium.⁴⁸⁵

In conclusion, there are a number of issues concerning counternarcotics measures, primarily the fact many of them are based on misinformation. For instance, 80-95% of farmers are in debt, and have no access to land or irrigation. Those farmers who are landowners are much less dependent on poppy cultivation, but also have sufficient power to prevent eradication. Eradication is difficult to implement safely, and creates poverty, as well as being permeated by corruption. In Nangarhar province, for instance, farmers had to make “facilitation fees” to commanders, thus ensuring they would even receive compensation, which was usually at a much lower rate than had been agreed upon, with commanders keeping the lion share of the money and the facilitation fees. Helmand farmers bribed government officials to report more land as eradicated than was the case. Meanwhile in Kandahar, extortion, harassment and beatings were reportedly used against farmers. Allegedly, the success of campaigns also dependent on the region and on how much pressure was exerted on local officials by the central government.⁴⁸⁶

Consumption and production of opium in post 9/11 Afghanistan

Despite these supply reduction methods, Afghanistan continues to supply a large share of the world’s opiate demand. The UN estimates stated in 2016 that 5% of adults had used drugs, with that number having remained fairly stable over the previous years.⁴⁸⁷ We can assume a fairly steady demand for opiates. The supply continues to be concentrated largely within Afghanistan, with other countries producing much less. Southeast Asia (mainly Myanmar and Lao PDR), as well as countries in Latin America (Mexico, Colombia and Guatemala) continue to produce opium in significant amounts. However, of these, Afghanistan accounts for two thirds of the total area under opium cultivation.⁴⁸⁸

Thus, in this period, there was little change in terms of supply and demand as compared to the previous decades. There continues to be sufficient demand for opium to be economically viable for Afghan farmers.

⁴⁸⁵ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, pp. 70–71.

⁴⁸⁶ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, pp. 71–75.

⁴⁸⁷ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2016*, p. 1

⁴⁸⁸ UNODC, *World Drug Report 2016*, p. 26

Supply issues do, however, affect the country on an internal basis. Most provinces produce opium, and the production centres constantly shift to respond to supply-reduction measures. There are now not many provinces left that do not produce opium poppies.⁴⁸⁹

The provinces producing opium in 2016 are shown on the following map. It is, however, worth consideration that these underwent change to the previous year, so the term poppy free is not necessarily a permanent definition.

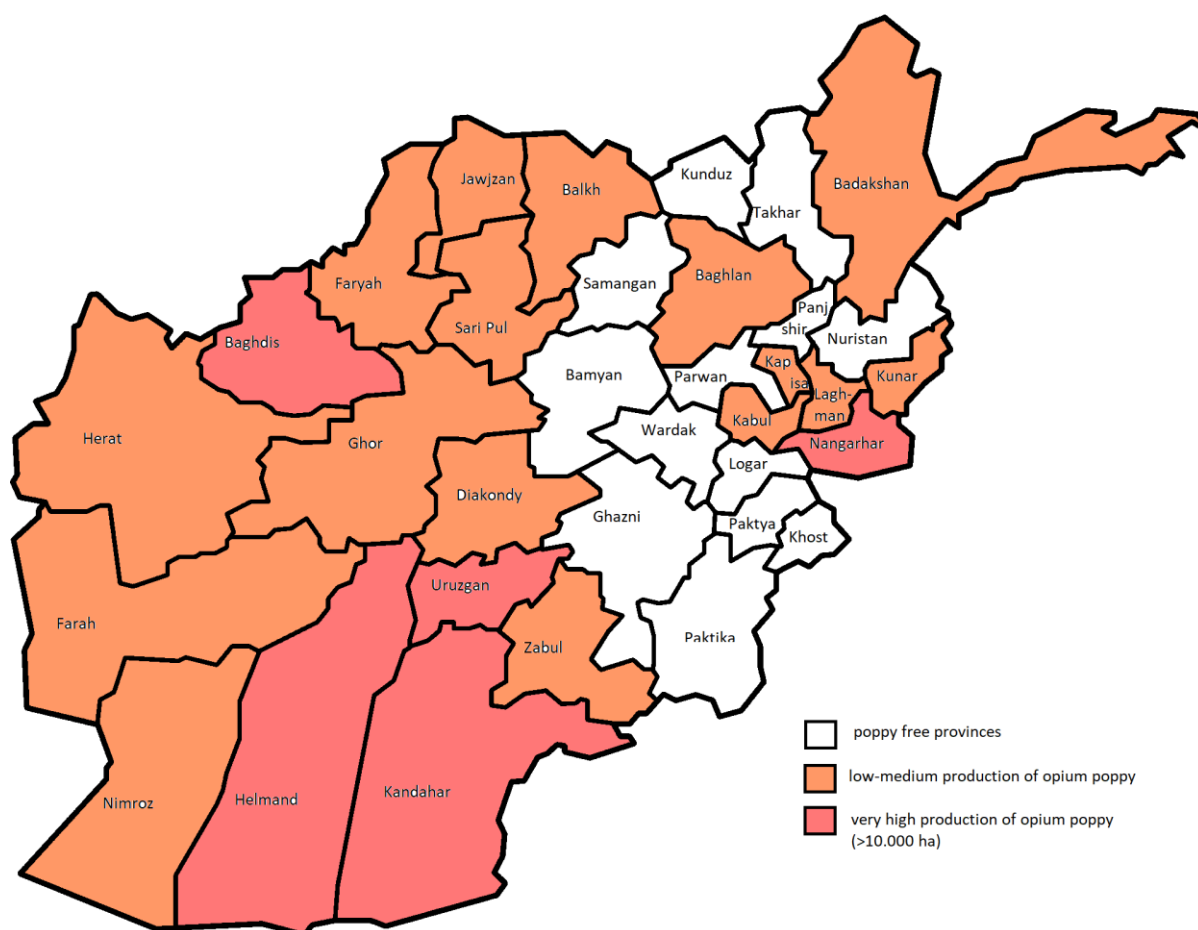


Figure 16 Provinces under opium production in 2016⁴⁹⁰

Once more we can observe that provinces further removed from the capital tend to be more likely to produce opium in bigger quantities. At least in part this can be explained with a centre-periphery theory: The influence of the capital and the international forces as well as the central government is greatest in Kabul and the provinces surrounding it (even though Kabul does continue to produce a small amount of opium each year). In the provinces further removed, the ‘peripheries’, the influence is smaller and thus opium continues to be grown fairly freely.

⁴⁸⁹ Kreutzmann, ‘Afghanistan and the Opium World Market’, pp. 614–15.

⁴⁹⁰ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016* (Vienna, 2016), p. 11.

The effects of a weak economy on the opium production

Afghanistan currently is placed at 168 on the Human Development index, scoring 0.479, judged by the UN as being in the 'low development' range.⁴⁹¹ As indicated by this, there continue to be a wide variety of economic issues that increase the country's poverty, and push Afghans into the production of narcotics. One of these issues is an unemployment rate, estimated at 40%.⁴⁹²

Additionally, the presence of international workers, such as aid workers, has led to inflated prices, meaning for instance locals in Kabul can barely afford to live there or buy food, especially in the safer areas. For instance, in 2005, government employees, such as teachers, were paid only \$50-60 a month, while house prices in some parts of the city could be around \$2,000-10,000 a month.⁴⁹³

Afghanistan also continues to lack advancements in regard to technology. However, there are some instances of modernisation, primarily in Kabul, which have also begun to take hold in the countryside. Incidentally, the Taliban continue to, in a way subconsciously, modernise the country.

When drug exporters tied in with the Taliban come to out-of-the-way villages to buy narcotics that they can smuggle abroad and resell in order to fund their insurgency, they don't necessarily pay with cash. Often they pay with commodities such as cell phones, television sets, motorcycles, SUVs, and even computers. The Taliban are generally (and correctly) seen as a force that is trying to drag Afghanistan back to the seventh century socially, yet they are helping to diffuse technology throughout the country, thereby inadvertently facilitating the flow of information and cultural influences into the Afghan countryside, which may render their core project hopeless: for when villagers gather around their communal TV sets, they can see shows from all over the world, thanks to their satellite dishes.⁴⁹⁴

Some of the agricultural sector had been revived under Taliban rule, but a long-lasting drought from 1998-2004 reversed some of this. Afghanistan continues to be a subsistence economy, in which around 80% of farmers grow their own food.⁴⁹⁵

Much of Afghanistan's economic activities continue to reside firmly within the illegal realm. While the narcotics industry garners the most attention, several other illegal activities define the Afghan economy, including smuggling, illicit trade of wildlife and others.⁴⁹⁶ It is, however, primarily opium poppy cultivation and the subsequent refining and trade which

⁴⁹¹ UNDP, *Human Development Report 2015*, p. 200

For the report the UNDP fully surveyed 188 countries.

⁴⁹² 'About Afghanistan', *UNDP in Afghanistan*

<<http://www.af.undp.org/content/afghanistan/en/home/countryinfo.html>> [accessed 26 June 2017].

⁴⁹³ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, pp. 55-57.

⁴⁹⁴ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, pp. 338-39.

⁴⁹⁵ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, pp. 61-62.

⁴⁹⁶ Felbab-Brown, 'Peacekeepers Among Poppies', p. 100.

supplies the livelihood to big parts of the population. However, this production also has a number of side-effects negatively affecting the wider Afghan economy. For instance it causes inflation, and a rise in exchange rates. Additionally the shadow economy allows for the displacement of legitimate economic activity and “the so-called Dutch disease, where a boom in an isolated sector of the economy causes or is accompanied by stagnation in other core sectors by driving up land and labour costs”⁴⁹⁷

We must ask ourselves how Afghanistan can remain a primary producer of opium, in spite of so many countries fighting the production within it. Of course, all factors analysed in previous chapters continue to play a role, as does the fact that, before 2001, Afghanistan already had a history with opium that spanned several centuries, thus allowing the economy to expand, within the infrastructure already in place. Trading networks and the necessary knowledge significantly facilitated the drug trade out of Afghanistan.

It is a further advantage that Afghanistan is surrounded by nations who have, in the past, and continue to this day, serve as routes for narcotics trafficking. The country’s neighbours do need to be involved, as otherwise the supply chain cannot function, as Afghanistan is landlocked. Iran specifically has always played a vital role, as it is a market for Afghan heroin, as well as offers connections to European markets through its neighbour Turkey.⁴⁹⁸

Furthermore, there exists an ecological advantage: Afghan opium has a very high yield per hectare, much higher than, for instance, Myanmar. In Myanmar, for instance, one hectare of poppy will allow a yield of roughly 10kg of opium, while in Afghanistan the same land would produce an average of 46 kg per hectare. This high yield is achieved as a combination of factors: The type of poppy grown, the climate, and the rate at which land is used.⁴⁹⁹

However, the country’s biggest advantage remains the amount of people willing to grow an illicit crop despite risks of its eradication. Although Afghans have learnt to adapt to this risk, it remains a constant, and it is remarkable that despite this the advantages outweigh the risks. This, in part is due to opium’s profitability. Afghanistan’s cash crops include cotton, fruit, wheat and opium.⁵⁰⁰ While the licit crops used to be profitable enough to sustain families, the systematic destruction of the agricultural economy as well as the increased relative

⁴⁹⁷ Felbab-Brown, ‘Opium Licensing in Afghanistan’, p. 3.

⁴⁹⁸ Peter Reuter, ‘The Mobility of Drug Trafficking’, in *Ending the Drug Wars. Report of the LSE Expert Group on the Economics of Drug Policy* (London: LSE Ideas, 2014), pp. 33–40 (p. 35).

⁴⁹⁹ Buxton, *The Political Economy of Narcotics*, pp. 89–90.

⁵⁰⁰ Ewans, *Afghanistan*, p. 3.

economic superiority of opium have led to opium becoming an unrivalled cash crop.⁵⁰¹ The economic superiority has increased as neighbouring countries ceased supplying opium, as explained in previous chapters, and as prohibitionist policies have driven up the prices.⁵⁰² A final reason for Afghans to continue growing the crop leads us back to the Taliban ban on production. This saw many farmers being plunged into debt, as they were unable to repay their *salaam*⁵⁰³ and as the profitability of opium had increased so significantly, these turned to opium once more.⁵⁰⁴ According to Chouvy, poverty is the main driver of opium cultivation, while corruption is the main reasons it has not been possible to decrease the cultivation.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰¹ Kreutzmann, 'Afghanistan and the Opium World Market', p. 605.

⁵⁰² Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 138.

⁵⁰³ Pain, *Opium Poppy and Informal Credit*, p. 5.

⁵⁰⁴ Pain, *Opium Poppy and Informal Credit*, p. 5.

⁵⁰⁵ Chouvy, 'Drug Trafficking in and out of the Golden Triangle', p. 26.

Conclusion

This paper has treated opium first and foremost as a commodity, and has examined the role of said commodity within a country, and the effects of political and cultural developments in the country on the opium economy. However, it is worth consideration how the opium economy has affected the citizens of Afghanistan as well. One example of this is cited by Fariba Nawa, who names the example of a woman named Basira.

Her husband, Touraj, became involved in the trade unknowing of the dangers. He had previously been a shepherd but due to drought was unable to continue supporting his family in this way. Becoming involved in the drugs trade, where he quickly rose through the ranks, meant he made a fortune, at least in comparison to other Afghans, in a brief amount of time. He used a currency exchanger in order to launder the money. In 1999 the oversupply of opium slowed his business. He was in debt, especially as his drug caravans had been seized multiple times. He had 1,000\$ worth of debt to Helmand smugglers and decided to settle some of his debt by selling his two oldest daughters. He still owed money however, and went into hiding. His debtors took the families' remaining possessions. The story also concerns the second oldest daughter, 12-year-old Darya (12), who is about to be married off. Her mother is cited as stating: "I only live hour by hour," she says, "wondering where the next meal is coming from, when are the smugglers going to take my daughters, is my husband ever going to come home? We have peace now, but what good is this peace when my family may go hungry tomorrow?"⁵⁰⁶

This story can tell us some of the dangers faced by Afghan citizens. Despite the international intervention, day-to-day life has not improved for many Afghans, who still suffer from poverty, a factor likely to push them into becoming involved in the illegal economy. However, this economy may also have adverse effects, as demonstrated above.

Afghanistan has, throughout the timeframe examined in this paper, been located at a geographical crossroads, acting as a buffer state and borderland throughout. Its definition as an unstable, or even as a failed state, is not so much a recent phenomenon, as one that can be tied into the country's long history. Throughout history, Afghanistan's direct neighbours have been involved with the country's fate, as have hegemonic powers that are more removed geographically.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁶ Nawa, *Opium Nation*, chap. 5.

⁵⁰⁷ Goodson, *Afghanistan's Endless War*, p. 4.

The first period under consideration in this paper saw Afghanistan becoming a buffer state between global powers, with the British influencing the country's internal policies, including opium, consciously. While opium was legal globally, it did not play a huge role within Afghanistan, rather making up one of many legal commodities. There was a small culture of consumption within Afghanistan, as well as its neighbours. However, opium only truly became important after it was made illegal. The global culture of prohibition ensured rising profitability, and Afghans increasingly started producing the drug. Additionally, other countries, such as Turkey had a decreased output, and the country's neighbours had increased demand. Even then we can see that it was not easy to contain the drug economy, as two bans on opium were each unsuccessful in eliminating the production of opium. However, Afghanistan was not yet one of the primary producers of opium, at least until the Soviet invasion in the 1970s, where, in the context of war and a failing economy, Afghans started turning to the drug in ever increasing numbers. Some Mujahideen leaders encouraged the production of opium as a form of income, in order to sustain their fighting against the invading country. The civil war, as well as the rule of the Taliban, exacerbated the problem, with Afghans facing a dependency on the drug economically, as well as addiction rates experiencing a rise. Much like in the previous years, opium was not outlawed, but supported, by local leaders as well as the Taliban, at least in most years, who saw it as a form of income. Thus, with farmers having to fear no repercussions, Afghanistan was able to cement its place as an opium producing country. Finally, the last period examined in this paper saw increasing attempts to outlaw the production of opium, however, these had no real effect on the opium output. With differing methods used, from eradication to alternative livelihood programmes, and while different countries have been involved in this, farmers, producers, and traffickers continue to see the benefits of the drug, and thus continue to produce it.

There are a lot of commonalities between the eras considered in this paper, both in terms of the rising drug production, occurring in times of financial instability, and in terms of the country's history. For instance, in those cases where Afghans united in the face of an invading army, it was stronger than expected, primarily due to the armed civilians, rather than a strong and centrally-controlled army.⁵⁰⁸

The Talibanist insurgency thus came to present the same challenge to NATO and the United States as the Mujahideen insurgency had posed for the Soviet Union in the 1980s and as Afghan tribesmen had posed for Britain in the Anglo-Afghan war of a century earlier.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁸ Sykes, *A History of Afghanistan*, p. 272.

⁵⁰⁹ Ansary, *Games without Rules*, p. 322.

We can now consider the initial research questions asked in the beginning of this paper. The primary research question centred on the international and internal factors that led to an increasing opium production in Afghanistan.

In the first period of opium production considered, the British took a very held-back approach in Afghanistan, quite different to the approaches taken in other states under their control, where they advocated very positively in regards to opium, as it was seen as a vastly profitable commodity. In these countries, the British consciously increased production, and thereby consumption of opium. In Afghanistan, the situation was different, with a passive approach being taken in the most part. This was due to the fact that the British did not wish to directly colonialise the country, rather choosing to establish it as a buffer state. This meant that, while some measures were being taken, such as taxation reforms, the production was not actively encouraged, due to fears of opium's destabilising potential, and in spite of the potential for its profitability.

The role taken by the US in the mid-20th century decades later was quite different. Initially, America was a destination for Afghan-export opium, however, attempts, led in part by the US, to illegalise opium also affected Afghanistan. Opium was then made illegal there, in part as a response to the global prohibitionist policies and in order to ensure continuing financial aid. This saw opium being moved into the illegal realm, which in turn drove up the prices of opium significantly, thus increasing the incentive to cultivate it, and finally driving up Afghan opium output. This was part of the long-lasting attempts by the US to decrease opium production. These attempts also included US pressure on Turkey to cease production. However, both within Afghanistan and globally this was not successful. Two primary policies carried out by the US have hindered the success of global suppression of illicit drug production. Firstly, that of prohibition: the war against drugs has led to an increase in production, caused by or at the very least coinciding with increasing profits and prices. Secondly that of protection: The primary zones of opium production were also centre stage in the Cold War. The CIA's secret operations used opium producers, in Burma and Vietnam for instance.⁵¹⁰ Other decisions taken by international actors in this phase would also increase the size of the opium economy significantly. For instance, the ban on production in Pakistan and Iran, and the declining opium output of Southeast Asia all opened up a supply gap for opium which Afghanistan could easily enter. Much in the same way, increasing drug consumption in Afghanistan's neighbouring countries meant the country had an open market it could easily supply.

⁵¹⁰ McCoy, 'Heroinhandel und Internationale Politik', pp. 253–57.

By the time of the Soviet invasion then, there was already an active drug industry within the country. The Soviet Union was disinterested in opium, almost entirely, until their invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Even after the invasion, opium was considered unimportant, despite the fact it now funded the war economy opposing the Afghan state under Soviet leadership. Some eradication measures were taken, but these were largely inefficient.

During the civil war that followed the Soviet Invasion there were no efforts to limit the opium production, with Mujahedeen leaders actively encouraging the economy, to ensure their own financial support. The Taliban take-over saw an initial disapproval of the opium economy, followed by years of active encouragement of the shadow economy. It was only towards the end of their rule that opium was once more made illegal, with devastating outcomes for the population that had come to depend on the economy. This war, both against the invading forces, and later on between the different fractions within the country, was one of the main reasons why Afghanistan was able to become a major producer of drugs.

There clearly exists, therefore, a strong correlation between war economies and drug economies, most notably in Burma and in Afghanistan. Although opium production predated the Burmese and Afghan conflicts, the wars and internecine conflicts that plagued both countries clearly stimulated opium production. In return, opium production helped perpetuate the Burmese and Afghan conflicts by making them economically viable.⁵¹¹

Finally, the international community once more took an active interest in Afghanistan, and as such opium was once more formally made illegal. Several counternarcotics measures were imposed to ensure that little opium was being grown, however, at the same time insurgents continued to support the economy. This did not lead to a reduction in supply, in part due to the misinformation which stood behind the policies.

It was not just the hegemonic powers that increased the Afghan opium output. It would be difficult to state just one reason why the opium economy in Afghanistan could grow as much and as quickly as it did. Rather it was a combination of factors that allowed this economy to grow. Afghanistan had always had the infrastructure and environmental requirements necessary to become a global player on the opium market, and when the state and regular economy failed, the profitability of opium rose through global prohibitionist policies and there was sufficient demand for the product, the factors culminated in Afghanistan becoming the world's largest opium producer.

Throughout Afghanistan's history we can identify three economies of illicit production: Combat, shadow, and coping economy. The combat economy concerns all funds allocated and raised to sustain warfare. The shadow economy sees people truly profit from the trade which

⁵¹¹ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 100.

exists alongside the licit one. The coping economy concerns those households that cope and survive, but not at high levels of comfort.⁵¹² In practice, there is no clear line between combat, shadow and coping economies, as they overlap more often than not. However, in order to understand why the opium economy has continued to grow so much, we have to consider the different motives held by the people who are involved within it. While there are groups, such as the Taliban, who use opium as a method of funding for their war, others such, as landless farmers, see opium as a method of survival, while even others may just view opium as a profitable economy. Licit and illicit economies are also linked, for instance whether or not wheat is available may cause a farmer to consider opium poppy cultivation.⁵¹³

The central state and the wider economy play a significant role in any illicit economy, which is why, within this paper, we have extensively considered the role of both factors. We have already established Afghanistan as a borderland, according to Goodhand's classification. He also suggests that such borderlands are not just non-state areas, but may also be actively anti-state, without any desire to be governed, seeking the state collapse.⁵¹⁴ Afghanistan has had, historically, a weak central state, due to the factors examined in the introduction. To give one example: The earlier history of Afghanistan includes King Amanullah, and his unsuccessful reform proposals. Poullada writes of this:

The first and perhaps the most obvious lesson to be learned from the Amanullah experience is that a tribal society tends to be extraordinarily resistant and indeed hostile to the unifying political discipline required for nation-building.⁵¹⁵

This quote also holds true, to some extent, for the decades that followed Amanullah, in which it was not possible to set up a modern, cohesive, central state. Rather, the state tended to be, before international interventions began, focused around certain rulers, with local *khans* and local structures continuing to play a vast role. The weakening of these local structures however, for instance through the Soviet war, also weakened control over more remote regions, and thus had adverse effects on state-building. Economically we can observe similar issues. While Afghanistan's economy has never been strong, and has long since relied on foreign aid to sustain it, it was only the increased presence and intervention of international forces that saw the licit economy collapse completely. Interestingly, while the central state is an important contributing factor to limit the growth of an illicit economy, in the case of Afghanistan, opium has also been a contributing factor for weakening the state: The production of opium, as it is a

⁵¹² Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 202.

⁵¹³ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 211.

⁵¹⁴ Goodhand, 'Frontiers and Wars', p. 210.

⁵¹⁵ Poullada, *Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan*, p. 267.

lucrative business, limits the dependence on the central state, and, as it provides funding for them, it strengthens insurgents, as visible through the Taliban, or the Mujahedeen during the Soviet Invasion. Apart from being a weak state, Afghanistan has also historically been a fragmented state, both in terms of its history – one must consider only the fragmentation of the Mujahedeen – and through its cultural set-up. This means that different regions, or different tribes, have in the past lived by individually defined rules, once more weakening the dependence of the central state, and contributing to a culture in which the opium economy could flourish.

Finally, we have to consider the inadvertent role of the prohibition of drugs for the Afghan opium economy. Even before 1945, the year of the first ban on production in Afghanistan, opium was being produced in Afghanistan. However, the years after the ban saw a steadily rising production, as prices for opium rose. This was exacerbated when neighbouring countries instituted a crack-down on opium, allowing Afghanistan to enter the illicit market. In a country like Afghanistan, which has experienced war and disarray, it has often been difficult to institute prohibitionist policies. Thus, for two decades, Afghans were able to reap the benefits of an illegal drug – namely the large market and high prices for it – without having to fear repercussion. Prohibitionist policies thus made the problem in Afghanistan worse, as they were being instituted on a global level, not, however, internally. Since 2001 prohibitionist policies have arrived in Afghanistan, through the counternarcotics measures taken by the international coalition. However, these have been not only ineffective, but also counterproductive, as they can be damaging to peace, state-building and economic reconstruction.⁵¹⁶

Having examined and identified the various factors that led to an increasing opium production within Afghanistan, one important policy question remains. As has been stated in this paper, supply-side reduction of illicit drugs has been seen not to work, so how can one curb the drug problem in Afghanistan without relying on the counternarcotics measures that do not seem to have had any long-lasting effects in Afghanistan? There are suggestions being made to introduce alternative cash crops, which may sell for more than opium, and which do also come without the risks associated with drug production. Suggestions for alternative cash crops include saffron or oil roses, with the latter bearing the advantage of, like opium, being labour intensive.⁵¹⁷ This approach is also, however, difficult to implement, as the agricultural infrastructure of Afghanistan has not yet been entirely rebuilt.

⁵¹⁶ Felbab-Brown, 'No Easy Exit', p. 2.

⁵¹⁷ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, pp. 70–71.

There have also been suggestions to introduce licensed opium. This has been seen as a legitimate alternative to counternarcotics, since it would reduce the negative aspects of cultivation. However, for it to work some underlying issues would have to be addressed: The potential of the diversion of legal opium into the illegal trade and the question of sufficient demand for Afghan opium.⁵¹⁸ Senlis council, a drug policy research institution, explored in 2005 whether Afghanistan could be licensed with the INCB to sell opium legally, and fill the shortage for medical purposes. The issue major argument against it is the lack of effective control mechanisms, meaning, in all likelihood, that a lot of opium would still be smuggled illegally, or refined into heroin. Additionally, legal opium sells for much less than legal opium, further de-incentivizing a move to the legal market.⁵¹⁹

However, the licensing of opium may not be necessary. As suggested in the section on the period after 9/11, it is to a large extent not the counternarcotics measures themselves that do not work, rather it is how they are carried out, and the fact that their implementation is often based around misconceptions over Afghanistan. A strengthening of the existent policies may already be a step in the right direction. A decrease in opium production will only be possible if the right measures are taken at the right time. Chouvy states:

Ultimately, it appears that proper sequencing is the key to successful anti-drug policies. No matter how adequately designed and funded counter-narcotics policies may be, if forced eradication is undertaken before or during economic development programmes (whatever their scope and however they are labelled), or if economic development is undertaken before peace-building and state-building are well under way, no decrease in illicit opium production will be possible.⁵²⁰

One of the reasons for this failure in carrying out counternarcotics policies is that quick results are favoured. This results in short-term decreases of poppy cultivation, but in the long-term does little to aid a sustainable Afghan economy that can survive without opium. One of the issues is also how we measure the ‘results’ of counternarcotics measures. When considering UN numbers, especially when successes over opium production in Afghanistan are declared, we have to tread carefully. So far none of the measures have achieved a notable and permanent reduction in opium cultivation, but successes have been declared all too often. We can consider, for instance, Nangarhar province, which was initially considered a poster child for successful eradication, as there was a decrease in cultivation in 2005 and only a slight rebound the following year. However, poppy cultivation had rebounded by 2007. One issue may also be how successes are interpreted, namely by measuring the land on which opium is cultivated. If

⁵¹⁸ Felbab-Brown, ‘Opium Licensing in Afghanistan’, p. 7.

⁵¹⁹ Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, pp. 33–34.

⁵²⁰ Chouvy, *Opium*, p. 201.

a significant amount of poppy cultivating land is eradicated, there is an observable price increase, which tends to shift the profits from farmers to traffickers.⁵²¹ Temporary decreases in production have usually been caused by the saturation of opium markets, short-sighted counternarcotics measures or crop diseases. These decreases are unsustainable.⁵²²

It is also problematic that Afghan opium production is considered separately from the countries' other problems. Instead, we have to consider that illicit economies, especially when related to drugs, exist due to a number of reasons, which are intertwined. As such, countries are never just producer, consumer or transit states, but usually a mixture of the three.⁵²³ By considering the states through just one issue at a time, we ignore the different reasons for which the opium economy comes into being, which have been examined in this thesis.

⁵²¹ Goodhand, 'Corrupting or Consolidating the Peace?', pp. 417–18.

⁵²² Felbab-Brown, 'No Easy Exit', p. 2.

⁵²³ Neumann, 'Einführung' p. 18.

Appendix

Abstract

Afghanistan's present connection with opium is well documented, and well discussed in the public sphere. However, there is so far only little research done on the country's extensive history with opium. In order to understand the opium economy in Afghanistan however, we have to consider its history and ask how the country could rise so quickly from a small producer to the world's largest. This thesis hopes to do this.

The central research question is what internal and international factors allowed the Afghan opium economy grow. In order to answer this question, the thesis considers six key factors, present in illicit economies, and analyses how these have changed, and thus influenced the opium economy since the 19th century. These factors are the national economy, the international economy as well as international policies, the role of the state, inherent advantages of said country for the production, demand and finally a culture of prohibition.

This research shows that Afghanistan's opium economy has experienced an increase through policies implemented directly by its rulers. In this case this includes not only the Afghans directly governing the country, but also the hegemonic powers influencing them. Policies of rulers within Afghanistan, such as the active encouragement of opium cultivation through the Taliban and the Mujahedeen, or the neglect of the economy by the Soviet Union, have allowed it to expand to previously unthought numbers.

Additionally, there has been indirect influence on the economy: A global culture of prohibition, a decade-long war and an instable economy have all contributed to Afghanistan's rise to one of the world's leading producers of opium. A suffering national economy, produced through a civil war and a war against an invading force, have given incentive to the rural population to become involved in the shadow economy. The opium production within Afghanistan has been linked for decades to its neighbours, but in more recent decades has begun expanding and conquering the world market.

In der Produktion illegalen Opiums ist Afghanistan eine Weltmacht, eine Tatsache welche gut dokumentiert ist und in der Öffentlichkeit viel diskutiert wird. Um zu erklären, wie Afghanistan in einem kurzen Zeitraum zu einem der größten Produzenten illegaler Drogen werden konnte, muss auch der historische Zusammenhang Afghanistans mit Opium betrachtet werden. Die vorliegende Arbeit stellt ebendiesen historischen Zusammenhang in den Mittelpunkt, um die internen und internationalen Gründe für das Wachstum der Opiumwirtschaft zu ergründen. Dabei sollen auch die Rolle des Staates, der wirtschaftlichen Situation sowie die Rolle der diversen Hegemonialmächte diskutiert werden, da diese Faktoren ebenfalls wesentlichen Einfluss auf die Drogenproduktion hatten.

Bei der Betrachtung dieser und anderer Faktoren zeigt sich, dass die Politik diverser Machthaber die Opiumproduktion in Afghanistan in ihrem Wachstum begünstigt hat. So wurde diese Wirtschaft durch nationale Herrscher, sowie die internationale Präsenz unterstützt. Sowohl Taliban als auch diverse Mujaheddin Gruppen förderten die Opiumökonomie öffentlich, während, zum Beispiel, die Sowjetunion der Drogenpolitik wenig Beachtung schenkte, wodurch sie weiterhin wachsen konnte. Auch die weitere Geschichte des Landes spielte eine wesentliche Rolle im Wachstum der Drogenwirtschaft. So wurden Anreize geschaffen, sich in der Produktion zu engagieren, indem die Preise Opiums durch die Prohibition anstiegen, während die legale Wirtschaft durch den Krieg Schaden nahm. All diese Faktoren erlaubten einen Aufstieg Afghanistans in der globalen Güterkette der Drogen.

Zudem war Afghanistan, durch klimatische Gründe, sowie der engen Verbindung zu Konsumländern, ideal beschaffen ein opiumproduzierendes Land zu werden. Der Anbau Opiums war schon vor der Sowjetinvasion weit verbreitet, wodurch das notwendige Wissen schon innerhalb des Landes existierte. Zudem wurde Afghanistan durch die verschiedenen Herrscher zunehmend international vernetzt: Während die Drogenökonomie anfangs nur mit ihren Nachbarländern in Verbindung stand, beliefert afghanisches Opium mittlerweile die Drogenmärkte weltweit.

Overview of rulers in Afghanistan⁵²⁴

1747-1772	Ahmad Shah Durrani
1773-1793	Timur Shah Durrani
1793-1800	Zaman Shah Durrani
1801-1803	Mahmoud Shah Durrani
1803-1809	Shuja Shah Durrani
1809- 1818	Mahmoud Shah Durrani
1818-1819	Ali Shah Durrani
1819-1823 ⁵²⁵	Ayub Shah Durrani
1823-1838	Dost Muhammad Khan
1839-1842	Shah Shuja Durrani
1842-1863	Dost Muhammad Khan
1863-1866	Sher Ali Khan
1866- 1867	Muhammad Afzal Khan
1867-1868	Muhammad Azam Khan
1869-1879	Sher Ali Khan
1879-1979	Muhammad Yaqub Khan
1880-1901	Amir Abd al-Rahman
1901-1919	Habibullah Khan
1919-1929	Amanullah Khan
1929-1933	Mohammad Nadir Shah

⁵²⁴ Mike Martin, *A Brief History of Helmand* (Afghan Coin Centre, 2011), pp. 67–68.

⁵²⁵ There is a gap of three years since an Afghan civil war, that had begun in 1816, meant the country had been divided into little fractions. From 1823-26 there is no clear majority ruler

1933-1973	Mohammad Zahir Shah
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Non-royal heads of state

1973-1978	Mohammed Daoud Khan
1978-1979	Noor Mohammad Taraki
1979-1879	Hafizullah Amin
1979-1986	Babrak Karmal
1987-1992	Mohammed Najibullah
1992-1996	Burhanuddin Rabbani
1996-2001	Mullah Mohammad Omar
2001-2014	Hamid Karzai
2014-	Ashraf Ghani

Data used in the thesis

Figures 2 and 3 Production of Opium from 1994-2014, comparison USG and UNODC (chapter 2)⁵²⁶

	Metric tons	UNODC	Hectares	UNODC
	USG		USG	
1994	950	3,416	29,100	71,000
1995	1,250	2,335	38,740	54,000
1996	1,230	2,248	37,950	57,000
1997	1,265	2,804	39,150	58,000
1998	1,350	2,693	41,720	64,000
1999	1,670	4,565	51,500	91,000
2000	3,656	3,276	64,510	82,000
2001	74	185	1,685	8,000
2002	1,278	3,400	30,750	74,000
2003	2,865	3,600	61,000	80,000
2004	4,950	4,200	206,700	131,000
2005	4,475	4,100	107,400	104,000
2006	5,644	5,300	172,600	165,000
2007	8,000	7,400	200,000	193,000
2008	5,500	5,900	160,000	157,000
2009	6,900	4,000	120,000	123,000
2010	3,200	3,600	119,000	123,000
2011	4,400	5,800	115,000	131,000
2012	4,300	3,700	180,000	154,000

⁵²⁶ Data from:

UNODCCP, *Afghanistan Opium Poppy Survey 2002* (2002), p. 4; UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005* (2005), p. 3; UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2008* (Vienna 2008), p. 12-13; UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2014*, (Vienna 2014), p.34, p. 66; US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, (Washington, D.C., 1995), p. 11-12; US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report- Southwest Asia*, (Washington, D.C., 2000), p.7; US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report- Southwest Asia*, (Washington, D.C., 2001), p.1-2; US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report- Southwest Asia*, (Washington, D.C., 2002), p. VII- 7; US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report- Southwest Asia*, (Washington, D.C., 2004), p.4; US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report- Southwest Asia*, (Washington, D.C., 2005), p.1; US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, (Washington, D.C., 2008), p.235; US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, (Washington, D.C., 2010), p.94; US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, (Washington, D.C., 2011), p.99; US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, (Washington, D.C., 2012), p.91; US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, (Washington, D.C., 2013), p.83; US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, (Washington, D.C., 2014), p.90; US Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, (Washington, D.C., 2015), p.93

2013	5,500	5,500	198,000	209,000
2014	6,300	6,400	211,000	224,000

Figure 4, Average farmgate prices of dry Opium at harvest time 2002-2015 – in US\$ per kg (in chapter 3) ⁵²⁷

2002	305
2003	425
2004	142
2005	138
2006	125
2007	122
2008	64
2009	95
2010	169
2011	241
2012	196
2013	172
2014	133
2015	173

Figure 5 Average prices of Wheat and Saffron, collected monthly by the Afghan government: February 2011- September 2015 (US\$ per kg) ⁵²⁸

⁵²⁷ Data from: UNODC, *Afghanistan opium survey* (2002-2015); UNODC; *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003*, (Vienna 2003), p. 49; UNODC; *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005*, (Vienna 2005), p. 1; UNODC; *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007*, (Vienna 2007), p. 7; UNODC; *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2009*, (Vienna 2009), p. 5; UNODC; *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2011*, (Vienna 2011), p. 1; UNODC; *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2013*, (Vienna 2013), p. 12; UNODC; *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015*, (Vienna 2015), p. 36

⁵²⁸ Ministry of Narcotics (MCN), *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, February 2011 (Kabul 2011), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, March 2011 (Kabul 2011), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, April 2011 (Kabul 2011), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, May 2011 (Kabul 2011), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, June 2011 (Kabul 2011), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, July 2011 (Kabul 2011), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, August 2011 (Kabul 2011), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, September 2011 (Kabul 2011), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, October 2011 (Kabul 2011), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, November 2011 (Kabul 2011), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, January 2013 (Kabul 2013), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, February 2013 (Kabul 2013), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, March 2013 (Kabul 2013), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, April 2013 (Kabul 2013), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, May 2013 (Kabul 2013), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, June 2013 (Kabul 2013), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, July 2013 (Kabul 2013), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, August 2013 (Kabul 2013), p.3; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report*, September 2013 (Kabul 2013), p.4; MCN, *Afghanistan Opium Price*

	Wheat	Saffron
Feb-11	0.5	3,101
Mar-11	0.3	3,037
Apr-11	0.4	3,190
May-11	0.4	3,568
Jun-11	0.4	3,461
Jul-11	0.4	3,094
Aug-11	0.43	1,379
Sep-11	0.43	1,659
Oct-11	0.44	1,792
Nov-11	0.4	1,772
Dec-11		,
Jan-12	0.43	1,723
Feb-12	0.4	1,724
Mar-12	0.41	1,614
Apr-12	0.49	1,604
May-12	0.4	1,600
Jun-12	0.36	1,553
Jul-12	0.37	1,456
Aug-12	0.37	1,465
Sep-12	0.38	1,540
Oct-12	0.39	1,511
Nov-12	0.4	1,805
Dec-12	0.41	1,728
Jan-13	0.42	1,746
Feb-13	0.43	1,708
Mar-13	0.43	1,689
Apr-13	0.38	1,643
May-13	0.38	1,641
Jun-13	0.36	1,510
Jul-13	0.35	1,492
Aug-13	0.35	1,500
Sep-13	0.34	1,470
Oct-13	0.35	1,488
Nov-13	0.39	1,388
Dec-13	0.41	1,419
Jan-14	0.406	1,405

Monitoring Monthly Report, October 2013 (Kabul 2013), p.4; MCN, Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report, November 2013 (Kabul 2013), p.4; MCN, Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report, December 2013 (Kabul 2013), p.4; MCN, Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report, October 2014 (Kabul 2014), p.4; MCN, Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report, November 2014 (Kabul 2014), p.4; MCN, Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report, January 2015 (Kabul 2015), p.4; MCN, Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report, February 2015 (Kabul 2015), p.4; MCN, Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report, March 2015 (Kabul 2015), p.4; MCN, Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report, April 2015 (Kabul 2015), p.4; MCN, Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report, May 2015 (Kabul 2015), p.4; MCN, Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report, June 2015 (Kabul 2015), p.4; MCN, Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report, June 2015 (Kabul 2015), p.4; MCN, Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report, July 2015 (Kabul 2015), p.4; MCN, Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report, August 2015 (Kabul 2015), p.4; MCN, Afghanistan Opium Price Monitoring Monthly Report, September 2015 (Kabul 2015), p.4

Feb-14	0.38	1,307
Mar-14	0.4	1,397
Apr-14	0.41	1,404
May-14	0.39	1,564
Jun-14	0.38	1,589
Jul-14	0.38	1,600
Aug-14	0.39	1,581
Sep-14	0.39	1,577
Oct-14	0.5	1,560
Nov-14	0.42	1,381
Dec-14		
Jan-15	0.41	1,572
Feb-15	0.4	1,744
Mar-15	0.4	1,734
Apr-15	0.41	1,731
May-15	0.39	1,731
Jun-15	0.44	1,649
Jul-15	0.38	1,635
Aug-15	0.37	1,543
Sep-15	0.42	1,412

Figure 11 Opium Production under Soviet Occupation in Afghanistan.⁵²⁹ (in chapter 4.3)

	Metric tons
1980	200
1981	225
1982	275
1983	488
1984	160
1985	450
1986	350
1987	875
1988	1,120
1989	1,200
1990	1,570
1991	2,000
1992	2,000

⁵²⁹ Data from: UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005* (Vienna 2005), p. 5

Figure 12 Opium production from 1990-2001.⁵³⁰

	Metric tons	hectares
1990	1,570	41,000
1991	2,000	51,000
1992	2,000	49,000
1993	2,300	58,000
1994	3,416	71,000
1995	2,335	54,000
1996	2,248	57,000
1997	2,804	58,000
1998	2,693	64,000
1999	4,565	91,000
2000	3,276	82,000
2001	185	8,000

Figure 14 Opium production in Badakhshan province in hectares, 1994-2002⁵³¹

1994	1,714
1995	2,996
1996	3,230
1997	2,902
1998	2,817
1999	2,684
2000	2,458
2001	6,342
2002	8,250

Figure 15 Opium production 2001-2016⁵³² (chapter 4.5)

	MT	hectares
2001	185	8,000
2002	3,400	74,000
2003	3,600	80,000
2004	4,200	131,000
2005	4,100	104,000
2006	5,300	165,000
2007	7,400	193,000
2008	5,900	157,000
2009	4,000	123,000
2010	3,600	123,000

⁵³⁰ UNDCCP, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2002* (Vienna 2002), p. 4⁵³¹ UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003* (Vienna 2003), p. 42⁵³² UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016*, (Vienna 2016), p. 14, 36

2011	5,800	131,000
2012	3,700	154,000
2013	5,500	209,000
2014	6,400	224,000
2015	3,300	183,000
2016	4,800	201,000

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