

# Afghanistan's opium crop at an all-time high

By [Jerry Mazza](#)

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The question is why. Under Taliban rule, which began in the late 1990s, Afghanistan just about kicked the growing habit by 2001. After five years the Taliban is slipping back in, but poppy production has grown by leaps and bounds.

According to the [Washington Post](#), "Opium production in Afghanistan, which provides more than 90 percent of the world's heroin, broke all records in 2006, reaching a historic high despite ongoing U.S.-sponsored eradication efforts, the Bush administration reported yesterday.

"In addition to a 26 percent production increase over the past year — for a total of 5,644 metric tons — the amount of land under cultivation in opium poppies grew by 61 percent. Cultivation in the two main production provinces, Helmand in the southwest and Oruzgan in central Afghanistan, was up by 132 percent."

With a flair for understatement, White House drug policy chief John Walters called the news "disappointing." I'd say it was shocking. But curiously, the "resurgent Taliban forces" were cited "as the main impediment to stabilization and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and the U.S. military investment has far exceeded anti-narcotic and development programs."

But Walters went so far as to say "the drug trade as a problem . . . rivals and in some ways exceeds the Taliban, threatening to derail other aspects of U.S. policy." But I thought when those bearded brigands, the Taliban, were there, poppy production was near nil, 94% gone.

Somehow this brings to mind a Michael Ruppert article, "[The Bush-Cheney Drug Empire](#)," published in Nexus Magazine. He wrote, "The Bush family's involvement in drug-running is an open secret, but Dick Cheney's direct link to a global drug pipeline through a US construction company is less well known." Sparring no toes, Mike takes the next step . . .

## **From Medellin To Moscow With Brown & Root**

"Halliburton Corporation's Brown & Root is one of the major components of the Bush-Cheney Drug Empire. The success of Bush Vice-Presidential running mate Richard Cheney at leading Halliburton, Inc. to a five-year, US \$3.8 billion 'pig-out' on federal contracts and taxpayer-insured loans is only a partial indicator of what may happen, now that the Bush ticket has won the US presidential election."

But is Cheney's former company's subsidiary, Brown and Root, involved in Afghanistan as well? Well, [The Center for Public Integrity](#) reports, "KBR was awarded a \$100 million contract in 2002 to build a new U.S. embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, from the State Department." Ah, so. And . . .

“KBR has also been awarded 15 LOGCAP [Logistics Civil Augmentation Program] task orders worth more than \$216 million for work under ‘Operation Enduring Freedom,’ the military name for operations in Afghanistan. These include establishing base camps at Kandahar and Bagram Air Force Base and training foreign troops from the Republic of Georgia.”

But hasn't the CIA traditionally had a hand in Afghanistan's drug business, going back to the 80s, and also with the Iran-Contra scam, providing a continuous drug-revenue stream to what has been called “our shadow government,” sponsor of worldwide dark ops? Again, according to Ruppert, the Afghanistan opium growing began with the CIA around that time.

### **CIA planted the opium currently growing**

Ruppert says, “Before 1980, Afghanistan produced 0% of the world's opium. But then the CIA moved in, and by 1986 they were producing 40% of the world's heroin supply. By 1999, they were churning out 3,200 TONS of heroin a year nearly 80% of the total market supply. But then something unexpected happened. The Taliban rose to power, and by 2000 they had destroyed nearly all of the opium fields. Production dropped from 3,000+ tons to only 185 tons, a 94% reduction! This enormous drop in revenue subsequently hurt not only the CIA's Black Budget projects, but also the free-flow of laundered money in and out of the Controller's banks”

University of Wisconsin History Professor Alfred McCoy, writing for [The World Traveler](#), mostly corroborates Ruppert's views . . .”Within a few years, the currents of global geopolitics then shifted in ways that pushed the CIA into new alliances with drug traffickers. In 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and the Sandinista revolution seized Nicaragua, prompting two CIA covert operations with some revealing similarities.

“During the 1980s, while the Soviets occupied Afghanistan, the CIA, working through Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence, spent some \$2 billion to support the Afghan resistance. When the operation started in 1979, this region grew opium only for regional markets and produced no heroin.

“Within two years, however, the Pakistan-Afghanistan borderlands became the world's top heroin producer, supplying 60 percent of U.S. demand. In Pakistan, the heroin-addict population went from near zero in 1979 to 5,000 in 1981 and to 1.2 million by 1985—a much steeper rise than in any other nation.

“CIA assets again controlled this heroin trade. As the Mujaheddin guerrillas seized territory inside Afghanistan, they ordered peasants to plant opium as a revolutionary tax. Across the border in Pakistan, Afghan leaders and local syndicates under the protection of Pakistan Intelligence operated hundreds of heroin laboratories. During this decade of wide-open drug-dealing, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency in Islamabad failed to instigate major seizures or arrests.

“In May 1990, as the CIA operation was winding down, *The Washington Post* published a front-page expose charging that Gulbudin Hekmatar, the CIA's favored Afghan leader, was a major heroin manufacturer. The Post argued, in a manner similar to the San Jose Mercury News's later report about the contras, that U.S. officials had refused to investigate charges of heroin dealing by its Afghan allies ‘because U.S. narcotics policy in Afghanistan has been subordinated to the war against Soviet influence there.’”

## Bottom line

So, I guess we “inspired” the Afghans to grow heroin, we exported it to finance dark ops, including a full-scale war. Therefore the miracle of the poppies popping back this year must be what, an accident, an ill wind that blows no good, the testy Taliban or those warlock warlords who fought with us once, or conceivably the favorite U.S. contractor, Brown and Root, in the middle of some larger CIA effort?

Returning for an answer to the [Washington Post article](#), its author Karen DeYoung reported that “Gen. James L. Jones, supreme allied NATO commander said in a recent speech at the Council on Foreign Relations, Afghanistan is NATO’s biggest operation with more than 30,000 troops. Drug cartels with their own armies engage in regular combat with NATO forces deployed in Afghanistan. He said, ‘It would be wrong to say that it is just the Taliban. I think I need to set that record straight.’” Well all right. We like straight talk.

DeYoung also reports, CIA Director Michael V. Hayden told Congress last month, “It’s almost the devil’s own problem . . . Right now the issue is stability. . . . Going in there in itself and attacking the drug trade actually feeds the instability that you want to overcome.” You’ll excuse me while I go and think about that one, “the devil’s own problem.” And who would that devil be?

Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, agrees. He said, “Attacking the problem directly in terms of the drug trade . . . would undermine the attempt to gain popular support in the region. There’s a real conflict I think.” I think so, too. The conflict seems to be between the people who seeded and grew the opium business and who are now faced with losing their profits from it completely.

We also have Afghan President Hamid Karzai noting that, “once we thought terrorism was Afghanistan’s biggest enemy . . .” I believe that was a Bush-Cheney proposition, not “we” as in all of America’s citizens. Part of that supposition was that we needed to attack the country because it was “harboring” bin Laden and his baddies. To date, bin Laden eludes his pursuers. The president claims he is no longer important. And to finish President Karzai’s quote, now he says “poppy, its cultivation and drugs are Afghanistan’s major enemy.” Aha.

So let’s go get the purveyors. But DeYoung tells us, “Eradication and alternative development programs have made little discernible headway. Cultivation — measured annually with high-resolution satellite imagery that is then parsed by analysts using specialized computer software — is nearly double its highest pre-Karzai level.”

So what does that expensively mined data really tell us? Perhaps, aside from friends at his former employer, Unocal, the pipeline folks, President Karzai may have more friends at the seemingly befuddled CIA, not to mention Halliburton subsidiary Brown and Root, the ineffable Mr. Cheney’s former firm.

Perhaps that was stated more delicately by Karen DeYoung: “After the overthrow of the Taliban government by U.S. forces in the fall of that year [2001], the Bush administration said that keeping a lid on production among its highest priorities. *But corruption and alliances formed by Washington and the Afghan government with anti-Taliban tribal chieftains, some of whom are believed to be deeply involved in the trade, undercut the effort.*” The italics are mine.

The sin is theirs.

*Jerry Mazza is an associate editor of Online Journal and a freelance writer living in New York. Reach him at [gvmaz@verizon.net](mailto:gvmaz@verizon.net).*

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