

Opium Poppy Production in Afghanistan. Multibillion Drug Trade. Big Money for Opioids

From 9/11 to the Long War

By arcgis.com

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Region: [Asia](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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“Afghanistan is the source of more than 90% of world’s opium supply and more than 95% of the European opium supply since 2001.” (Rubenstein 2019, Pg. 235). Why?

The planned events of September 11, 2001 set in motion a series of United States military occupation of Muslim countries that had nothing to do with exacting justice.

Invading other nations is a planned event. By December 2001, 2,500 United States Armed Forces had invaded Afghanistan, climbing to +100,000 soldiers by 2011. By March 2003, 43 NATO countries (51 countries by 2006) had joined in the occupation of Afghanistan. In March 2003, United States Armed Forces invading Iraq totaled 177,194.

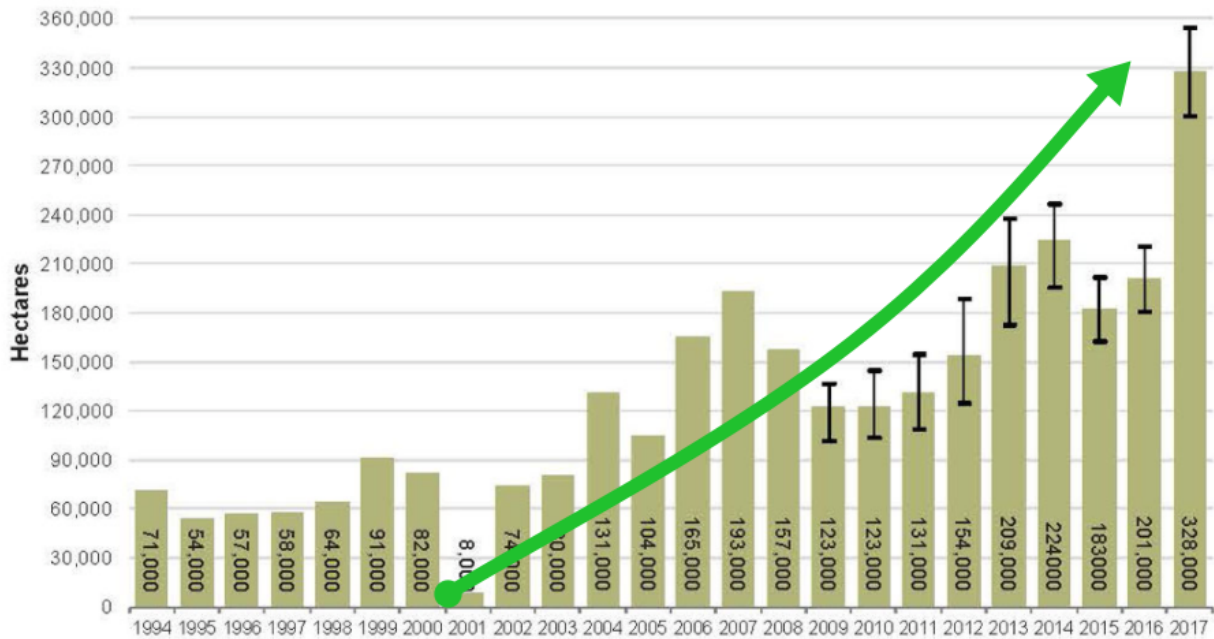
Two separate countries, two different military missions. In Iraq, the United States goal was to immediately collapse the Iraqi government and replace it with one more easily managed. In Afghanistan, the long-term United States goal was to seize the countries areas of opium production and prevent Taliban forces from destroying opium crops.

In 2007, the Pentagon changed the designation “War on Terror” for occupation of Middle East countries identified as hostile, to the “Long War” designation, signaling a restart for a global Cold War.

NATO Occupation and Opium Production

Since United States military occupation of Afghanistan in 2001, followed by NATO occupation in 2003, opium production has increased exponentially. Areas under Taliban control had zero production in 2001 (Global Research, October 17, 2018).

Opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, 1994-2017 (Hectares)



Source: Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017 report

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Afghanistan is divided into six regions comprised of administrative provinces: North-eastern (Kundaz, Takhar, Badakhshan), Eastern (Nuristan, Kunar, Kapisa, Laghman, Nangarhar), Central (Panjshin, Parwan, Wardak, Ghazni, Paktika, Khost, Paktya, Logar, Kabul), Northern (Balkh, Jawzjan, Faryab, Samangan, Sari Pul, Bamyán, Baghlan), Western (Ghor, Hirat, Farah, Nimroz, Badghis), and Southern (Hilmand, Kandahar, Zabul, Uruzgan, Day Kundi). The capital-city, Kabul, is located in the province of Kabul in the Eastern region.

The highest percentage of opium poppy cultivation harvested are located in the Western provinces of Ghor, Hirat, Farah, Nimroz, and Badghis. Also, high opium poppy cultivation occurred in the Southern provinces of Hilmand, Kandahar, Zabul, Uruzgan, and Day Kundi. The increase in production is mainly a result of an increase in area under opium poppy cultivation. These areas under opium poppy cultivation are controlled by United States and NATO military forces.

Afghani provinces with zero production between 2016-2017: North-eastern provinces of Kundaz, Takhar. The Central provinces of Panjshin, Parwan, Wardak, Logar, Paktika, Paktya, and Khost. And the Northern province of Bamyán.

Geographically, Afghanistan is divided between climates, with the best climate for opium poppy production found in the Western and Southern provinces. The Western provinces (Ghor, Hirat, Farah, Nimroz, and Badghis) has Warm Mediterranean climate (Csa), Warm semi-arid climate (BSh), and Warm desert climate (BWh), and the Southern provinces climate (Hilmand, Kandahar, Zabul, Uruzgan, and Day Kundi) is separated between Warm desert climate (BWh), Warm Mediterranean climate (Csa), and Cold desert climate (BWk).

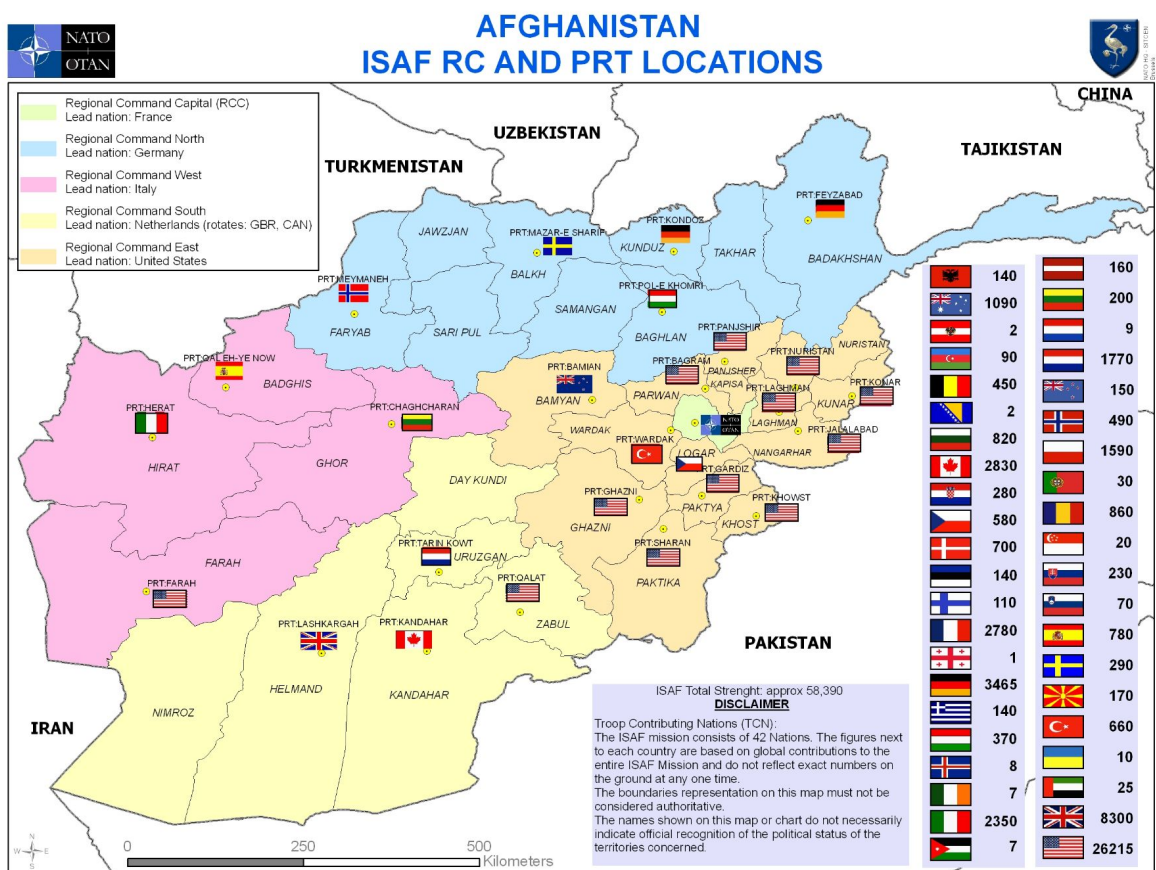
The increase in production is mainly a result of an increase in area under opium poppy cultivation. "In 2002, farmers took advantage of the power vacuum following the U.S. invasion and returned to planting poppy as a cash crop. According to the U.N.'s opium production report from 2002, poppy cultivation was down to approximately 8,000 hectares

in 2001, then surged to roughly 74,000 hectares after the fall of the Taliban” (Rawlings, 2013).

The difference between increased production of opium poppy and zero production of opium poppy between provinces has to do with the presence of NATO forces verses the presence of Taliban forces. Islam prohibits drug use and the Taliban are strict prohibitionists of poppy production, destroying crops where Taliban are located, resulting in zero opium production. NATO forces work to keep the Taliban from destroying opium crops, resulting in high opium crop production:

“The United States invaded Afghanistan largely to restore the heroin industry and it is now making about \$1.5 trillion every year from this business” (Press TV, 2017).

“The heroin business is not “filling the coffers of the Taliban” as claimed by US government and the international community: quite the opposite! The proceeds of this illegal trade are the source of wealth formation, largely reaped by powerful business/criminal interests within the Western countries. ...Decision-making in the US State Department, the CIA and the Pentagon is instrumental in supporting this highly profitable multibillion dollar trade, third in commodity value after oil and the arms trade” (Chossudovsky, 2005).



NATO Base map. Source: [NATO](http://www.nato.int)

NATO forces located in areas of zero opium production do not engage with Taliban forces (Global Research, 2018). Italy, for example, is known to pay Taliban forces to not attack Italian NATO patrols (Ingram, 2009). Also, several NATO countries rotate between provinces, so one year a province may have some opium production under the flag of one NATO country, then the next year opium production falls to zero under the flag of the next NATO

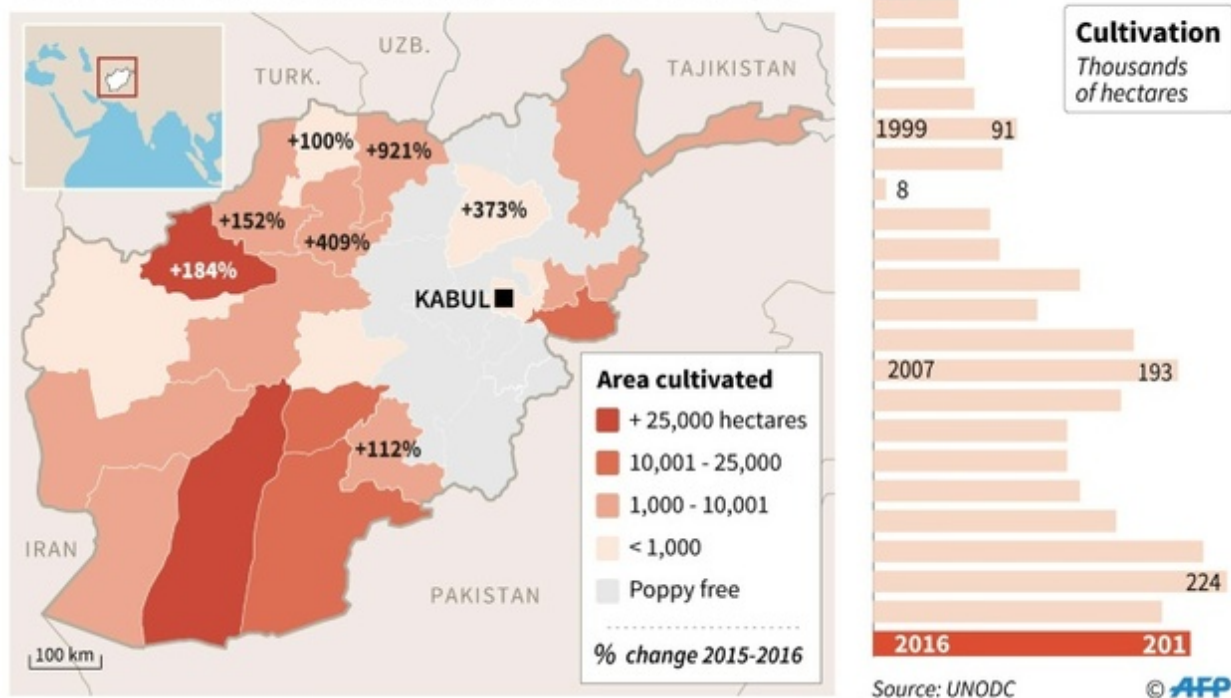
nation that rotates in (Press TV, 2017). The process is called “Push down pop up”; as one NATO nation along with provincial government forces attempt to suppress opium poppy production in one area, weak border security in other provinces create opportunity for opium poppy production to increase in areas with less NATO oversight (Redmond, November 2011).

Decrease and zero production of opium poppy also appear in areas where Afghanistan government has confidence of the local population, where government provides incentives to farmers to eradicate their opium crop or not produce one at all (Asia Foundation, 2017).

To rebuild Afghanistan, sixty percent of aid for “projects” is funded through private Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). These organizations consist of private contractors working towards the donors agenda. (Source: The USAID/Afghanistan Plan for Transition, 2015-2018). The economy of Afghanistan is based on several key industries: NGOs, Drugs, and Agriculture (FAO, 2012-2015). Also, “Since 2001, the US has spent about \$8.6 billion on counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan” (The Guardian, 2018).

Afghan opium production

UN monitors noted a 10 percent jump in production over the last year



Source: UNODC, 2016

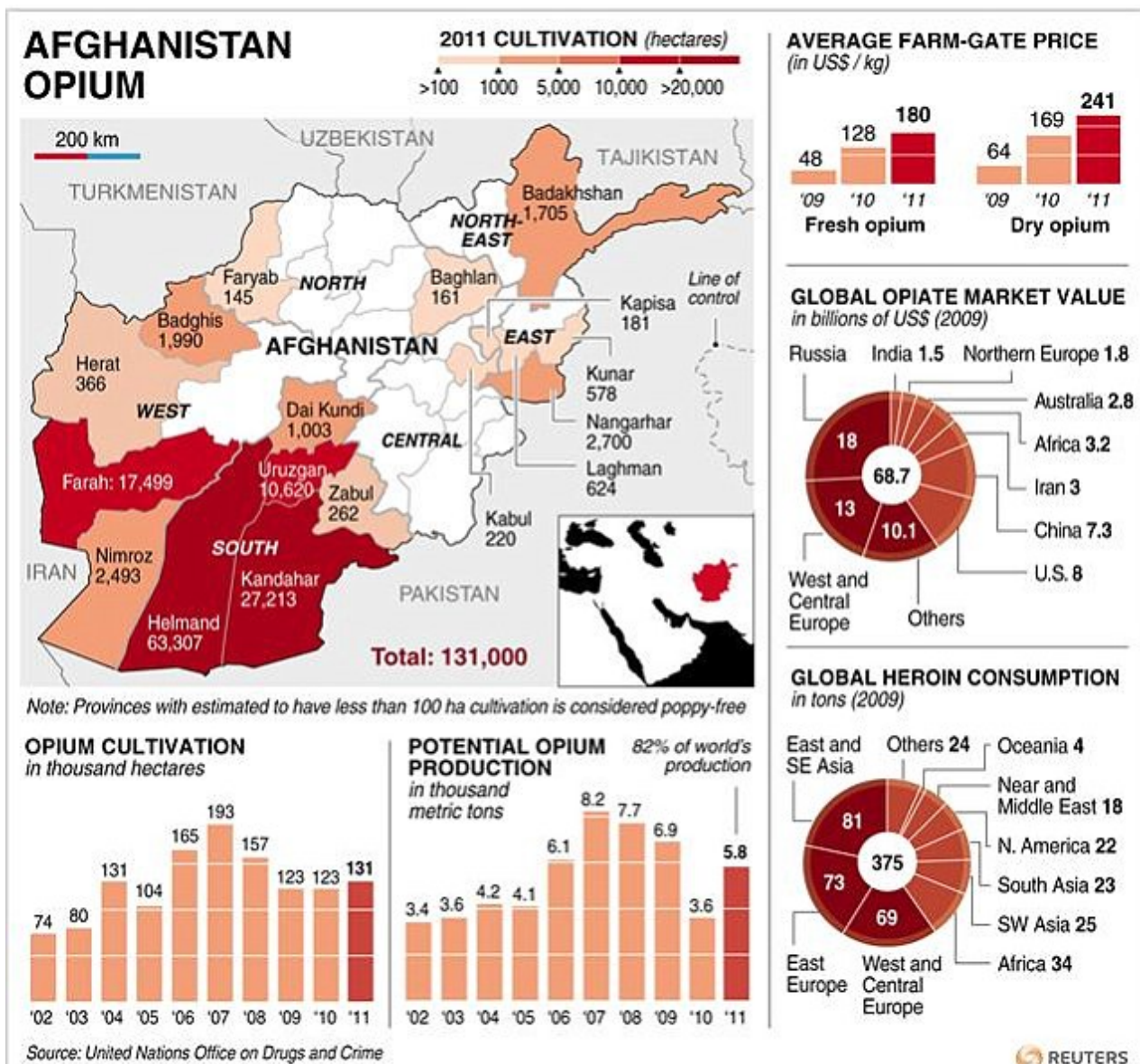
Areas of increased opium poppy production appear to be in the Northern, Western, and Southern provinces of Afghanistan where the climate is Warm Mediterranean (Csa), Warm semi-arid (BSh), and Warm desert (BWh). The Eastern region has seen a slight increase in opium production do to the Taliban having turned away from opium poppy eradication toward mineral smuggling of Talc, Chromite, and Marble across the border into Pakistan to fund their operations. Border security surrounding Afghanistan is porous, providing opportunity to smuggle stuff in and out of the country (Ghosh, 2018).

Who Profits from Opium Drug Trade?

Answer: Everyone who invests in Afghanistan Opium trade.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's World Drug Report (2017) lists street value in USofA for heroin at \$200 per gram: 189,000 grams X \$200 = \$37,800,000 per 50 gallon drum.

Value of Opium production in 2017 was worth between US\$ 4.1 to 6.6 billion, or 20 and 32 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and provided up to 354,000 full time jobs to rural areas for opium poppy weeding and harvesting. Other countries benefit from the drug trade as well (UNODC, 2017).



Afghanistan Opium Cultivation, 2011. Source United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2011

Areas of decreased opium poppy production appear in the Central (Central Highlands) and North-eastern (Hindu-Kush) regions of Afghanistan where elevation exceeds 10,000 feet above sea-level. The North-eastern and Northern regions appear to have the worst agricultural land due to high mountain regions while the rest of the country appears to be suitable for agriculture:

“Winter can get very harsh, particularly in the mountain regions. Some areas are isolated

from autumn's first snow fall until the spring thaw has melted the snow again. In the most severe cases, this can mean up to and beyond six months a year" (Norwegian Afghanistan Committee, 2018).

The UNODC reports several reasons why Islamic farmers in Afghanistan produce opium poppies. One reason is lack of "Governor-led eradication" (UNODC, 2017, pg. 27). Other reasons are Islamic politics and economic opportunity:

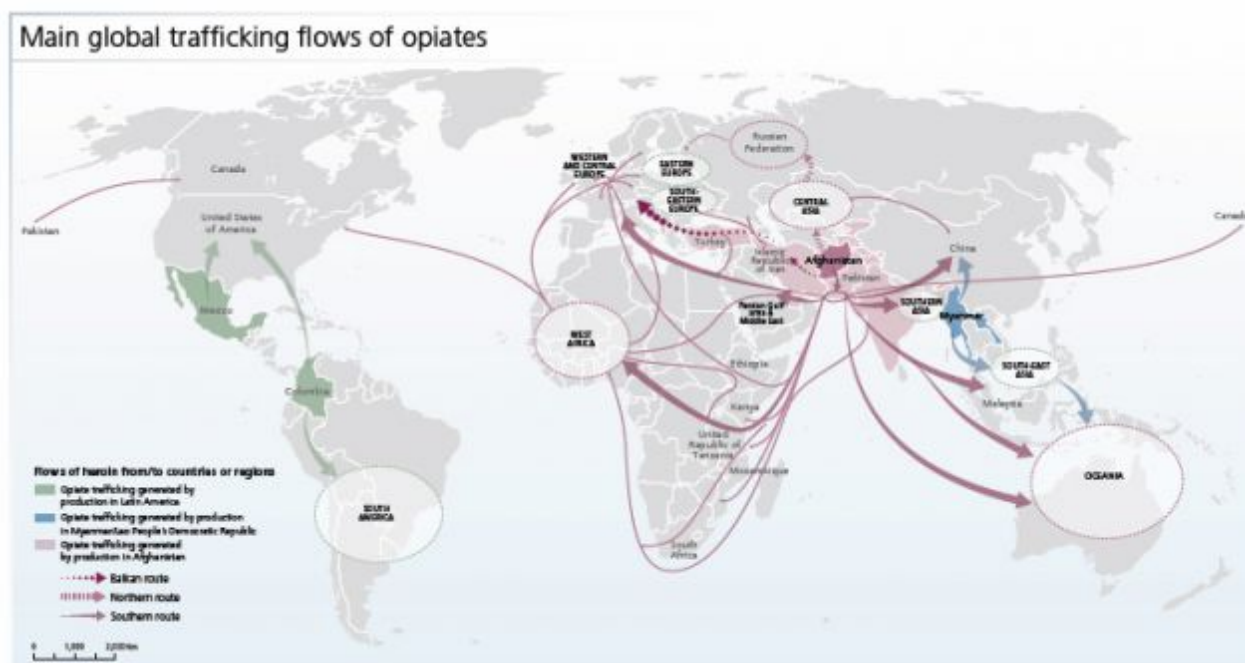
"Opium is permissible because it is consumed by kafirs (infidels) in the West and not by Afghans." Exhibiting the Taliban leaders' understanding of the politics of the drug economy, Rashid added, "We cannot push the people to grow wheat as there would be an uprising against the Taliban if we forced them to stop poppy cultivation. So we grow opium and get our wheat from Pakistan" (Redmond, 2011).

Where does the Opium go?

Border security surrounding Afghanistan is porous, providing opportunity to smuggle opium out of the country.

The Taliban allow the sale of Afghanistan opium poppy to Pakistan, collecting a 20 percent tax where:

"The value of Opium production in 2017 was worth between US\$ 4.1 to 6.6 billion, or 20 and 32 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and provided up to 354,000 full time jobs to rural areas for opium poppy weeding and harvesting" (UNODC, 2017). Add to that the \$8.6 billion the United States spends on counter-narcotic efforts in Afghanistan (The Guardian, 2018).



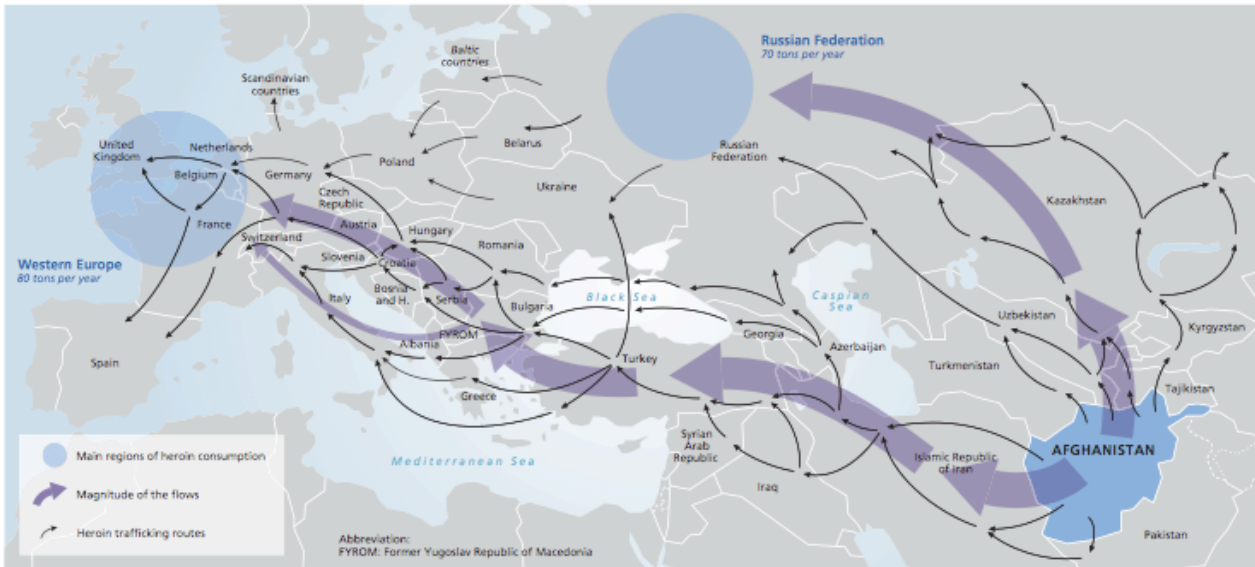
Sources: UNODC, responses to annual report questionnaire and individual drug seizure database.

Opium flow out of Afghanistan. Source UNODC, 2008

Opium and heroin are ingested and transported inside paid refugees (men, women, and children) called Packers. The Balkan route is the main trafficking route for world opiate trafficking.

Map 3: The Northern and Balkan routes

Source: UNODC



Balkans Opium route. Source: UNODC, 2008

Another route is the Opistan route.

HEROIN FLOWS FROM AFGHANISTAN



“Opistan” route. Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2016

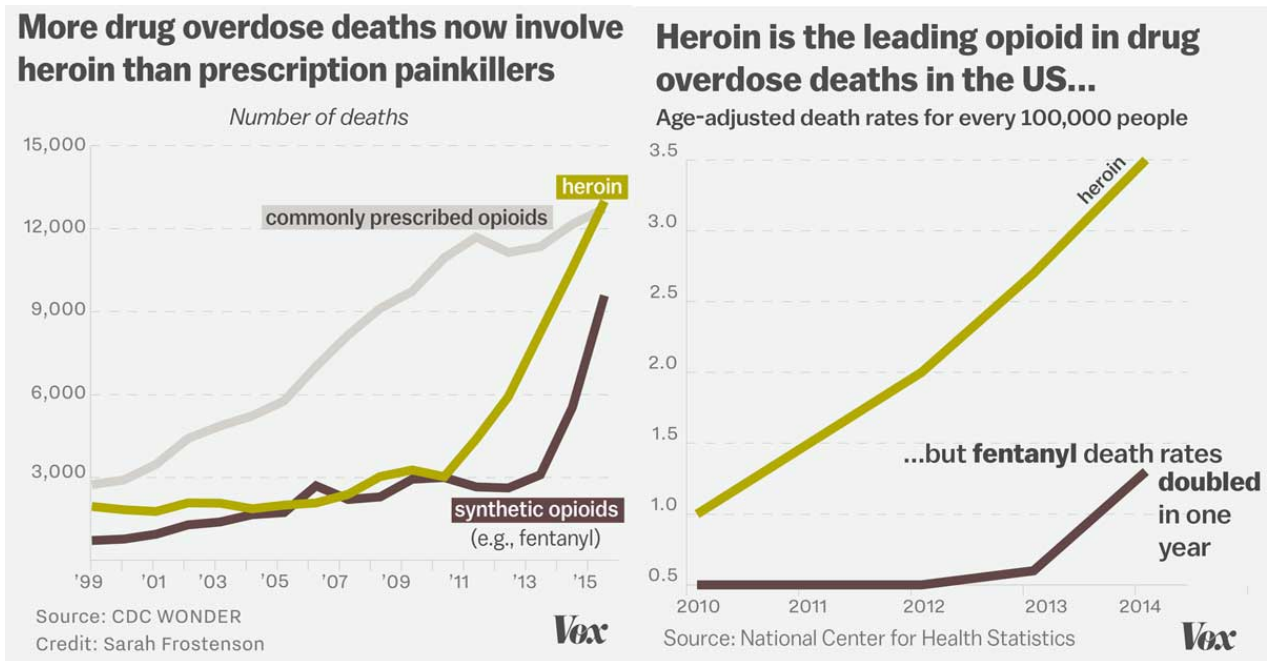
While another is Diplomatic flights. These flights, into and out of war zones, have Diplomatic immunity and can not be searched for contraband: drugs, weapons, or people.

The United States government occupies Afghanistan because it believes opium poppy

production there “significantly threatens the United States” (Thomas, 2009).

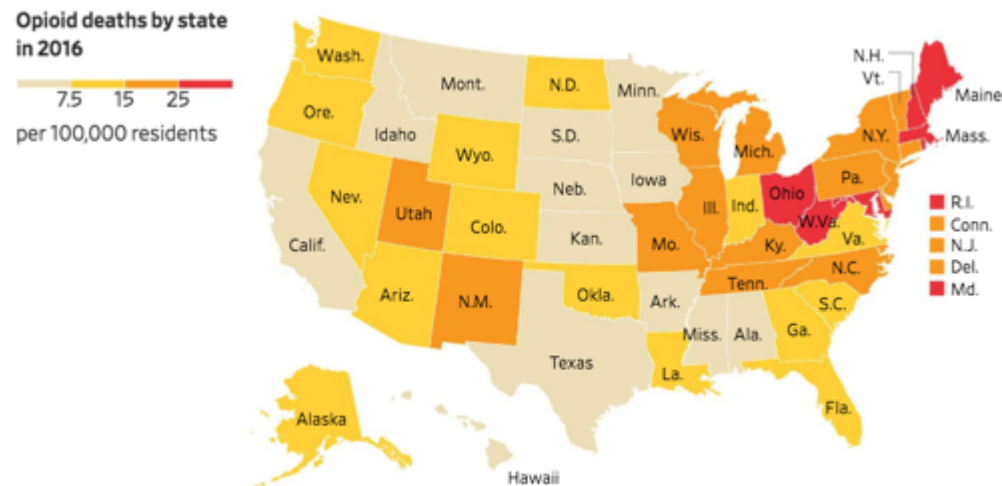
Results of the Long War

Increase in drug overdose deaths in USA.



Source: National Center for Health Statistics

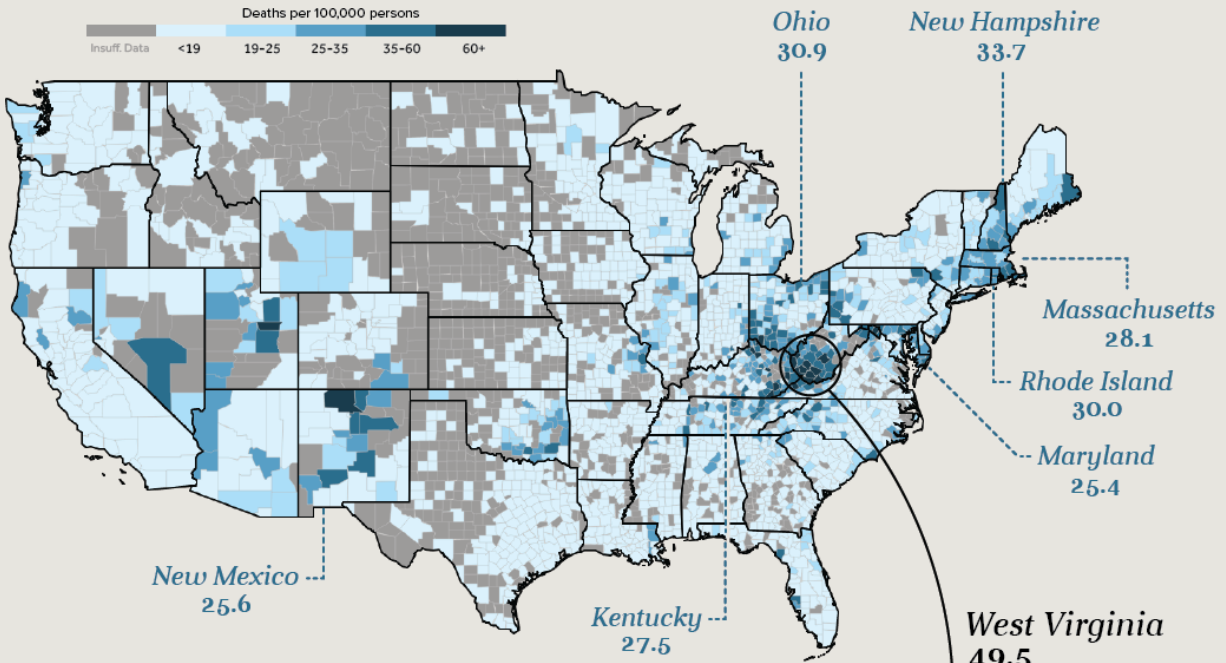
With heroin and synthetic opioids impacting states...



Source: The Kaiser Foundation, 2016

and communities closer to home.

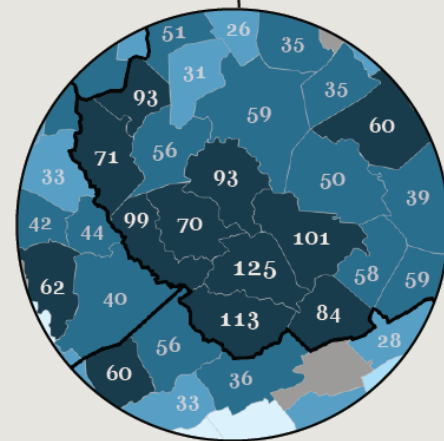
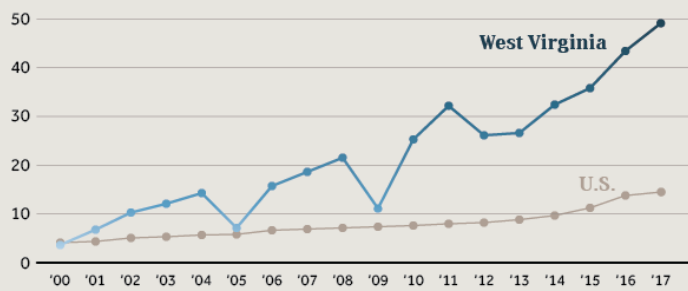
OPIOID OVERDOSE DEATHS IN THE UNITED STATES



West Virginia, in particular, has been hit hard by the opioid crisis. In some counties, the death rate from opioid related overdose is approaching a similar level as cancer.

RATE OF OPIOID-RELATED OVERDOSE

Deaths, age-adjusted, per 100,000 persons

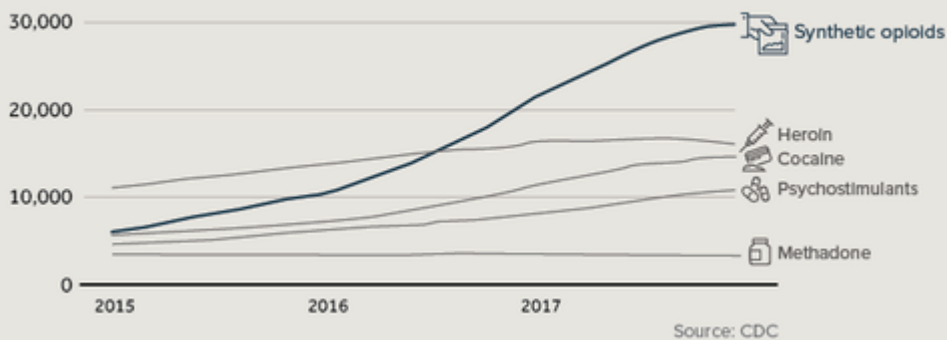


For context, here are some other death rates (U.S., per 100,000 persons, 2016)

Death by Firearm	Opioid Overdose	Diabetes	Accident	Cancer
11.8	14.1	21.0	47.4	155.8

Sources: CDC, University of Chicago (NORC), USDA

OVERDOSE DEATHS IN PRECEDING 12 MONTHS



Source: CDC, University of Chicago (NORC), USDA, 2017. The Staggering Numbers Behind America's Opioid Epidemic, ZeroHedge.com, 10/17/2018.

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