

Heroin Production in Afghanistan: Helmand, Nangarhar and Badakhshan

Figure 23: Locations of Opium Markets, Heroin Processing Labs, and Unofficial Border Crossings

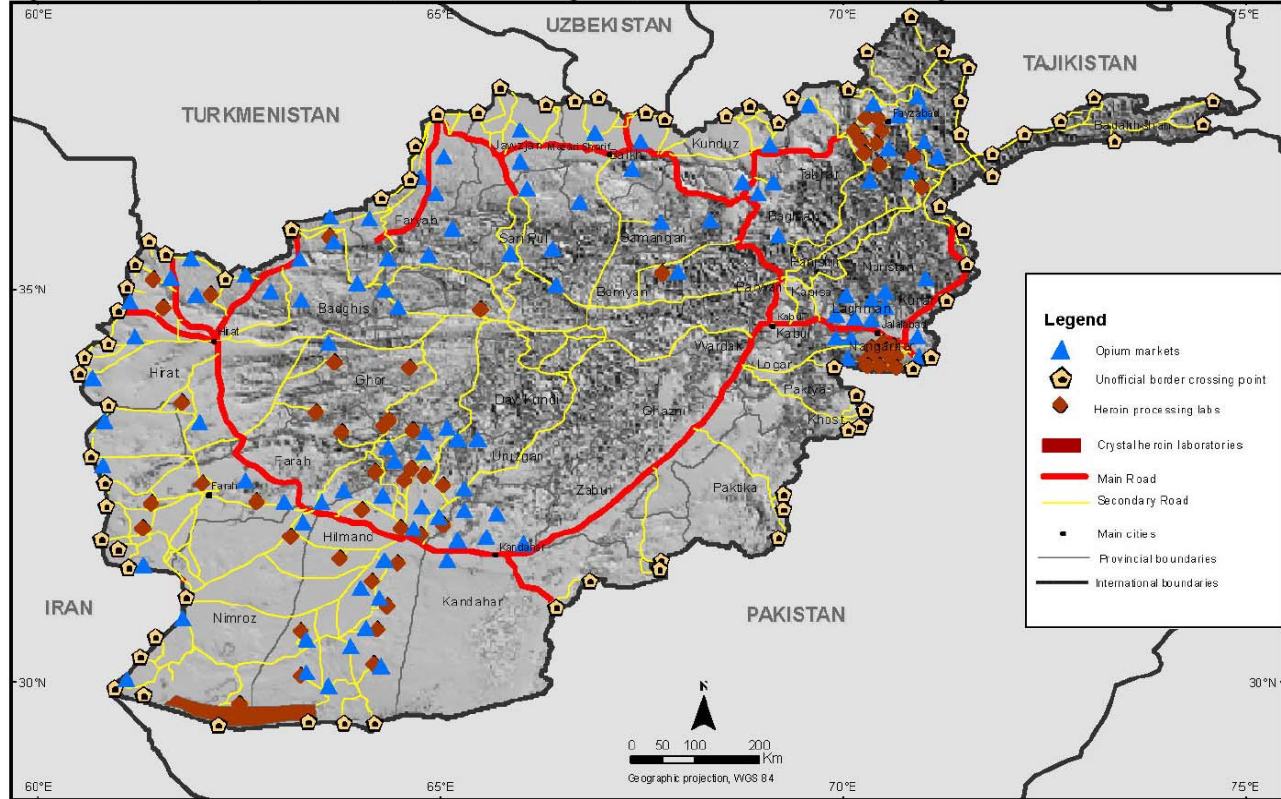


Figure 1

Opium markets, located throughout Afghanistan and along major transit routes, are where traders can sell raw opium and obtain precursor chemicals and other supplies for refinement (morphine base and heroin). Refinement workshops are located in areas typically situated near unofficial border crossing points, near poppy farms, extremely isolated locales, or areas where governance is weak and instability is high (Figure 1). Refinement workshops are fairly crude and can be contained within two rooms of any given compound. Metal drums, wood-fire stoves, and simple iron presses (car jacks) are typical instruments used in basic processing. Some reports suggest foreign chemists, such as Iranian, Turkish and Pakistani nationals, provide technical assistance, particularly when it comes to further refining morphine base into heroin.¹

¹ Jon Boone, "Afghan drug lords hire foreign chemists," July 28 2008, [http://www.ft.com/cms/s/adfbb7f6-5ccb-11dd-8d38-000077b07658,Authorised=false.html? i_location=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2Fs%2F0%2Fadfbb7f6-](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/adfbb7f6-5ccb-11dd-8d38-000077b07658,Authorised=false.html?i_location=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ft.com%2Fcms%2Fs%2F0%2Fadfbb7f6-)



Heroin laboratories are restricted to ungoverned areas near the border with Pakistan, such as Helmand’s Dishu district and Nangarhar’s Achin district. Mobile labs have been reportedly used in both Helmand and Nangarhar and consist of gas fired stoves attached to the back of large trucks. It takes about seven kilograms of Afghan opium to make one kilogram of morphine base. The conversion rate of morphine base to heroin is 1:1.

The UN suggests 70% of these labs are present in only three provinces: Helmand (23), Nangarhar (25), and Badakhshan (14).² Additionally, the UN estimates two-thirds of all Afghan opiate exports are now refined into morphine base or heroin domestically before leaving the country.³ Traditionally, Afghan opium would be sent to Pakistan, Iran or smuggled to Turkey via Iran for further processing. Pakistan launched a major crackdown against such facilities in the FATA area in 1995, systemically destroying hundreds of illicit drug processing workshops and forcing the industry westward into Afghanistan. In 2007, UN analysts compiled a list of the main heroin/morphine processing locations in Afghanistan. Two years ago, all of Nangarhar’s twenty-five processing laboratories were located in the Achin district. (Figure 2)⁴

Zone Name	Village	District	Province	Cross border	Local	Main	Total
Central and Eastern	Abdul Khel-1	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Abdul khel-2	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Abdul Khel-3	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Anachal-1	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Anachal-2	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Baghdara-1	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Buttan-1	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Buttan-2	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	China-1	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	China-2	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Inzero kalai-2	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Inzro kalai-1	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Khandara-1	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Khandara-2	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Khawari-1	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Khawari-2	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Khawari-3	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Miagi Pati-1	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Miagi Pati-2	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Miagi pati-3	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Mohmand Tangai-1	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Mohmand Tangai-2	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Zaghari-1	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	Zaghari-2	Achin	Nangarhar		1		1
	<i>Central and Eastern Total</i>					25	

Figure 2

[Sccb-11dd-8d38-000077b07658.html%3Fnclick_check%3D1&_i_referer=http%3A%2F%2Fblog.foreignpolicy.com%2Fposts%2F2008%2F07%2F29%2Fafghanistan_importing_drug_experts&nclick_check=1](http://www.cccb-11dd-8d38-000077b07658.html%3Fnclick_check%3D1&_i_referer=http%3A%2F%2Fblog.foreignpolicy.com%2Fposts%2F2008%2F07%2F29%2Fafghanistan_importing_drug_experts&nclick_check=1)

² Illicit Drug Trends in Afghanistan, UNODC, June 2008, p. 15

³ Illicit Drug Trends in Afghanistan, UNODC, June 2008, p. 6

⁴ Monitoring of Drug Flow in Afghanistan, UNODC, October 2007, p. 13.



Opium market in Northern Zone

In southern Helmand, the massive smuggling hub of Baramcha in neighboring Pakistan (Baluchistan's Chagai district), serves as a mega-heroin producing center, with capabilities of processing industrial quantities of morphine base and heroin. The undisputed kingpin of Baramcha, a Baluch named Haji Juma Khan, was arrested by authorities in Jakarta, Indonesia in late October 2008 after arriving on an international flight from Dubai. Khan is believed to have orchestrated his powerful drug trafficking network since at least 1999. Prior to his arrest, Khan maintained links with the Taliban, al Qaeda and with commanders loyal to warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

Following his arrest, US authorities extradited Khan to New York and charged him with several counts of narco-terrorism. Intelligence and eyewitness testimony has linked Khan to the November 19, 2007 suicide bombing that killed six bodyguards and the son of Nimroz provincial governor Dr. Ghulam Dastagir. Khan is also suspected of providing a payment to insurgents for the deadly January 8, 2008 complex assault and suicide bombing launched against the five-star Serena hotel in Kabul that left eight people dead, including a US citizen. Khan remains in US custody and is awaiting trial in New York.

Helmand remains the most pivotal cog in the Afghan drug machine; producing 66% of the country's poppy output in 2008 alone. Poppy cultivation, processing, and smuggling have seriously plagued the Afghan government's legitimacy and ability to govern in southern Afghanistan. Rampant corruption and a tidal wave of domestic drug abuse are only part of the social erosion caused by the illicit drug industry. Provincial officials have recently stated nearly 60% of Helmand's police force abuse drugs and that there are at least 70,000 addicts now living in Helmand.⁵ Insurgents have firmly aligned themselves with traffickers in Helmand, coordinating ambushes, and roadside bomb and suicide attacks against eradication personnel. (see below)

In Badakhshan province, scores of open air refinement and processing workshops dot the rugged countryside. Although the UN has identified 14 such laboratories operating in Badakhshan, Tajik officials

⁵ "60pc of Helmand police use drugs: official," *ABC News*, February 19, 2009, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/02/18/2495328.htm> "Official: 70,000 addicts in Taliban hotbed of S Afghanistan," *China View*, April 13, 2009, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-04/13/content_11180360.htm

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believe at least 80 such facilities exist.⁶ In March 2009, Afghan counternarcotics police raided a heroin lab in Badakhshan's Argo district, arresting one suspected traffickers and confiscating 24 cans of heroin, seven gas cylinder (for stove), 15 bottles of acid, two power generators and some other materials using for making heroin, according to a report filed by *Pajhwok Afghan News*.⁷ Other processing locations in the Argo district include the villages of Barlasi Chinar, Nem Tala and Turok.⁸

Attacks against Eradication and Counternarcotics Personnel

In 2007, armed farmers caused most of the violence recorded against eradication teams and counternarcotics personnel according to the UN. Sixteen recorded security incidents against eradication teams were recorded in seven provinces: Nangarhar, Kandahar, Farah, Laghman, Helmand, Badghis and Badakhshan. 15 policemen and four farmers died in the attacks and 31 others suffered serious injuries. Eradication equipment, such as tractors used to crush the poppy plants, were also targeted. At least ten tractors used by eradication teams were set on fire and destroyed during the 2007 campaign.

In 2008, the UN recorded 78 fatalities caused by "mine explosions, gun attacks, and suicide bombings targeting eradication teams and counternarcotics personnel," an increase of about 75% if compared to the 19 deaths in 2007.⁹ Attacks took place in Helmand, Kandahar, Herat, Nimroz, Kapisa, Kabul and Nangarhar provinces. One of the deadliest attacks occurred in Nangarhar on April 30, when a Taliban suicide bomber detonated at the Khogyani district headquarters killing 19 people, including the district police chief and scores of counternarcotics policemen.¹⁰ Fazal Ahmad, a MCN/UNODC surveyor who was collecting narcotics data for the 2008 Opium Survey, also died in the blast.

The trend of criminals supporting or facilitating attacks against eradication personnel and government targets by outsourcing to insurgent factions such as the Taliban has continued in 2009. By mid-April 2009, three suicide attacks (one unsuccessful) targeting counternarcotics headquarters and staff throughout southwestern Afghanistan left 16 people dead and 55 wounded. Below is a summary of the most high profile narco-terrorist attacks against counternarcotics personnel in 2009:

April 10, 2009: A Taliban suicide bomber detonated at the police headquarters in Lashkar Gah killing two policemen and three civilians, two of them children. Over 17 others were wounded including four policemen. "This attack is a joint struggle of smugglers and the Taliban against anti-narcotics forces," provincial official, Dawoud Ahmadi, told reporters. "We have launched a poppy-eradication campaign,

⁶ Ibid, p. 15. Dan MacDougal, "The Moscow Drug Mules," *Mail Online*, November 7, 2008, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/moslive/article-1081228/The-Moscow-drug-mules.html>

⁷ Jafar Tayar, "Police destroy heroin factory in Badakhshan," *Pajhwok Afghan News*, March 26, 2009 <http://www.pajhwok.com/viewstory.asp?lng=eng&id=71779>

⁸ Monitoring of Drug Flow in Afghanistan, UNODC, October 2007, p. 18.

⁹ Afghanistan Opium Survey 2008, UNODC, August 2008, p. 19-20. [http://www.unodc.org/documents/publications/Afghanistan Opium Survey 2008.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/publications/Afghanistan%20Opium%20Survey%202008.pdf)

¹⁰ "MOI: suicide blast kills 19 in poppy-team attack," *Quqnoos.com*, April 30 2008 http://quqnoos.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=505

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and they want to stop or weaken the campaign in the province.” Additionally, three cars and a tractor were destroyed in the attack.¹¹



March 16, 2009: A Taliban suicide bomber dressed in a police uniform approached a team of counternarcotics officers at the Lashkar Gah police headquarters and detonated himself, killing eight police officers and two civilians. The deadly blast left 31 others wounded.

March 8, 2009: Unidentified gunmen assassinated a policeman in the northern province on Baghlan. Local officials blamed the Taliban, saying the Taliban killed Naqibullah after discovering he worked with provincial counternarcotics personnel. The Taliban denied involvement in the killing.¹²

February 23, 2009: A Taliban suicide bomber detonated himself outside the gate of the counternarcotics police headquarters in Zaranj, the provincial capital for Nimroz province. The blast killed one police officer and injured seven others including three civilians. A second suicide bomber dressed in a police uniform was shot and killed by police. A third would-be bomber managed to escape.

¹¹ Zainullah Stanikzai, “Four cops as many civilians perish in Helmand blast,” *Pajhwok Afghan News*, April 09, 2009, <http://www.pajhwok.com/viewstory.asp?lng=eng&id=72518>

¹² Habib Rahman Sherzai, “Counter narcotics cop killed in Baghlan,” *Pajhwok Afghan News*, March 8, 2009 <http://www.pajhwok.com/viewstory.asp?lng=eng&id=70838>