

The Spoils of 9/11:
The US Invasion of Afghanistan and Heroin Production
from 2001-2025

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September 10, 2026

*Excerpts from Michel Chossudovsky's Original 2005
[Article](#) (updated to 2025)*

What is important to understand is that one of the key strategic objectives of the October 2001 war on [Afghanistan](#) was to restore the opium trade following the Taliban government's successful 2000-2001 drug eradication program which led to a 94 percent collapse in opium production. This program was supported by the United Nations.

In the course of many years following the US-NATO October 2001 invasion, there was a surge in Afghan opium production. In turn the number of heroin addicts in the US has increased dramatically. Is there a relationship?

- There were 189,000 heroin users in the US in 2001, before the US-NATO invasion of Afghanistan.
- By 2016 that number went up to 4,500,000 (2.5 million heroin addicts and 2 million casual users).

In 2000-2001, the Taliban government –in collaboration with the United Nations– had imposed a successful ban on poppy cultivation. Opium production declined by more than 90 per cent in 2001. In fact the surge in opium cultivation production coincided with the onslaught of the US-led military operation and the downfall of the Taliban regime. From October through December 2001, farmers started to replant poppy on an extensive basis.

The Vienna based UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reveals that poppy cultivation in 2012 extended over an area of more than 154,000 hectares, an increase of 18 percent over 2011. A UNODC spokesperson confirmed in 2013 that opium production is heading towards record levels. In 2014 the Afghan opium cultivation hit a record high, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's 2014 Afghan Opium Survey. War is good for business. The Afghan opium economy feeds into a lucrative trade in narcotics and money laundering.

According to the [UNODC](#):

Opium production in Afghanistan rose by 43 per cent to 4,800 metric tons in 2016 compared with 2015 levels, according to the latest Afghanistan Opium Survey figures released today by the

Afghan Ministry of [Counter Narcotics](#) and the UNODC. The area under opium poppy cultivation also increased to 201,000 hectares in 2016, a rise of 10 per cent compared with 183,000 hectares in 2015.

This represents a twentyfold increase in the areas under opium cultivation since the US invasion in October 2001. In 2016, opium production had increased by approximately 25 times in relation to its 2001 levels, from 185 tons in 2001 to 4800 tons in 2016.

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In response to the post-Taliban surge in opium production, the Bush administration has boosted its counter terrorism activities, while allocating substantial amounts of public money to the Drug Enforcement Administration's West Asia initiative, dubbed "Operation Containment."

According to the 2012 Afghanistan Opium Survey released in November of that year by the Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), potential opium production in 2012 was of the order of 3,700 tons, a decline of 18 percent in relation to 2001, according to UNODC data.

However, there is reason to believe that this figure of

3,700 tons is grossly underestimated. Moreover, it contradicts the UNOCD's own predictions of record harvests over an extended area of cultivation. While bad weather and damaged crops may have played a role as suggested by the UNODC, based on historical trends, the potential production for an area of cultivation of 154,000 hectares, should be well in excess of 6,000 tons. With 80,000 hectares in cultivation in 2003, production was already of the order of 3,600 tons.

It is worth noting that UNODC has modified the concepts and figures on opium sales and heroin production, as outlined by the European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA).

A change in UN methodology in 2010 resulted in a sharp downward revision of Afghan heroin production estimates for 2004 to 2011. UNODC used to estimate that the entire global opium crop was processed into heroin, and provided global heroin production estimates on that basis. Before 2010, a global conversion rate of about 10 kg of opium to one kg of heroin was used to estimate world heroin production. For instance, the estimated 4,620 tonnes of opium harvested worldwide in 2005 was thought to make it possible to manufacture 472 tonnes of heroin. However, UNODC now estimates that a large

proportion of the Afghan opium harvest is not processed into heroin or morphine but remains “available on the drug market as opium” (EU Drug Markets Report: A Strategic Analysis, EMCDDA, January 2013).

There is no evidence that a large percentage of opium production is no longer processed into heroin as claimed by the UN. This revised UNODC methodology has served, through the outright manipulation of statistical concepts, to artificially reduce the size of of the global trade in heroin.

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Opium production declined by more than 90 per cent in 2001. In fact the surge in opium cultivation production coincided with the onslaught of the US-led military operation and the downfall of the Taliban regime. From October through December 2001, farmers started to replant poppy on an extensive basis. The success of Afghanistan's 2000 drug eradication program under the Taliban had been acknowledged at the October 2001 session of the UN General Assembly (which took place barely a few days after the beginning of the 2001 bombing raids). No other UNODC member country was able to implement a comparable [program](#):

Turning first to drug control, I had expected to concentrate my remarks on the implications of the Taliban's ban on opium poppy cultivation in areas under their control. . . We now have the results of our annual ground survey of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. This year's production [2001] is around 185 tons. This is down from the 3300 tons last year [2000], a decrease of over 94 per cent. Compared to the record harvest of 4700 tons two years ago, the decrease is well over 97 per cent. Any decrease in illicit cultivation is welcomed, especially in cases like this when no displacement, locally or in other countries, took place to weaken the achievement.

In the wake of the 2001 US bombing of Afghanistan, the British government of Tony Blair was entrusted by the G-8 Group of leading industrial nations to carry out a drug eradication program, which would, in theory, allow Afghan farmers to switch out of poppy cultivation into alternative crops. The British were working out of Kabul in close liaison with the US DEA's "Operation Containment."

The UK sponsored crop eradication program is an obvious smokescreen. Since October 2001, opium poppy

cultivation has skyrocketed. The presence of occupation forces in Afghanistan did not result in the eradication of poppy cultivation. Quite the opposite. The Taliban prohibition had indeed caused “the beginning of a heroin shortage in Europe by the end of 2001,” as acknowledged by the UNODC.

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Heroin is a multibillion dollar business supported by powerful interests, which requires a steady and secure commodity flow. One of the “hidden” objectives of the war was precisely to restore the CIA sponsored drug trade to its historical levels and exert direct control over the drug routes. Immediately following the October 2001 invasion, opium markets were restored. Opium prices spiraled. By early 2002, the opium price was almost 10 times higher than in 2000.

Afghanistan produces over 70 percent of the global supply of heroin and heroin represents a sizable fraction of the global narcotics market, estimated by the UN to be of the order of \$400-500 billion. There are no reliable estimates on the distribution of the global narcotics trade between the main categories: Cocaine, Opium/Heroin, Cannabis, Stimulants and Others [such as hallucinogens].

The proceeds of the drug trade are deposited in the

banking system. Drug money is laundered in the numerous offshore banking havens in Switzerland, Luxembourg, the British Channel Islands, the Cayman Islands and some 50 other locations around the globe. It is here that the criminal syndicates involved in the drug trade and the representatives of the world's largest commercial banks interact. Dirty money is deposited in these offshore havens, which are controlled by the major Western commercial banks. The latter have a vested interest in maintaining and sustaining the drug trade.

Once the money has been laundered, it can be recycled into *bona fide* investments not only in real estate, hotels, etc, but also in other areas such as the services economy and manufacturing. Dirty and covert money is also funneled into various financial instruments including the trade in derivatives, primary commodities, stocks, and government bonds.

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[Afghanistan Opium Survey 2025](#)

The total area under opium poppy cultivation in 2025 was estimated at 10,200 hectares, 20 percent lower than in 2024 (12,800 hectares) and a fraction of the pre-Taliban levels recorded in 2022, when an estimated 232,000 hectares were cultivated nationwide. Accordingly, opium production has also declined in 2025, at a rate even

greater than that of cultivation, dropping by 32 per cent compared to 2024, to an estimated total of 296 tons.

Farmers' income from opium sales fell by 48 per cent from \$260 million in 2024 to \$134 million in 2025. After the ban, many farmers shifted to growing cereals and other crops. Worsening weather conditions, such as droughts or low rainfall, however, resulted in over 40 percent of farmland laying barren.