



Afghanistan: Leading in Hashish Production

Muhammad Ajmal Khan Karimi¹

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Released on 31st March 2010, the first survey on cannabis cultivation conducted in Afghanistan by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) indicated that in addition to being the world's biggest opium producer, Afghanistan had now become a major supplier of cannabis as well. It is estimated that Afghanistan grows 10,000 to 24,000 hectares of cannabis every year. Hashish is a product of cannabis resin contained in the flowering tops of hemp, chewed or smoked for its intoxicating and euphoric effects.² According to UNODC's Executive Director, Maria Costa, "the astonishing yields of the Afghan cannabis crop (estimated at 1,500 and 3,500 tons a year) makes Afghanistan the world's biggest producer of hashish."³ The survey was conducted in 1,634 villages, and in 20 provinces, and showed that there were large scale cannabis cultivations in half (17 out of 34) the provinces in Afghanistan. The gross income per hectare of cannabis is US\$ 3,900, while the income from opium stands at US\$ 3,600. Cannabis is also cheaper to harvest and process than opium. Nonetheless, the survey found that farmers were still more likely to grow opium rather than cannabis, because the latter had a shorter life span, as it is a summer crop. Cannabis production also helps sustain the insurgency and affects the lives of thousands of Afghans, as the rate of addiction to illegal drugs increases every year.

¹ Muhammad Ajmal Karimi is a Senior Research Analyst at CAPS

² Hashish defined by <http://www.yourdictionary.com>- accessed on 29 April 2010

³ UNODC. "Afghanistan World Leader in Hashish Production." 31 March 2009. www.unodc.org. 05 July 2010



According to Costa, “in the last five years, cannabis cultivation has shifted away from the north to the southern parts of Afghanistan.”⁴ This is because like opium, cannabis cultivation is now being concentrated in regions that are instable and lawless.⁵ The insurgency in Afghanistan has been able to establish parallel government structures in most of the provinces across the country and particularly in areas where cannabis is cultivated. Insurgents control the areas and thus create opportunity for the cultivation of the drug. The main trading points of cannabis appear to follow opium trafficking routes; such as, the provinces of Balkh, Uruzgan, and Kandahar. In 2008, a massive seizure of cannabis (245, 000 kg) was made in Kandahar, close to the border with Pakistan.

In 2009, cannabis cultivation took place in 17 provinces; such as Logar, Paktia, Nangarhar, Badakhshan, Takhar, Balkh, Baghlan, Faryab, Jowzjan, Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Zabul, Badghis, Farah, Heart and Nimruz. The aforementioned provinces have two factors in common: geographic location and high insecurity. The southern provinces such as Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan, and Zabul face the brunt of the counter-insurgency operations, as they are home to the insurgency. They also share a border with Pakistan, another source of insecurity as insurgents infiltrate into Afghanistan from these borders. Consequently, as the insurgency expanded its operations from the south to the north, it was able to carry the insecurity in southern regions to western regions of the country. Thus, western provinces such as Badghis, Heart, Farah, and Nimroz are considered insecure as a result of this expansion. Such a rise in insecurity has also been noticed in Northern provinces as well, as insurgent attacks have increased in Baghlan and Kunduz. Conversely, in Afghanistan’s eastern, north-eastern and central provinces the contributing factor to people’s reliance on cannabis cultivation is more a cause of lagging government influence than instances of insecurity.

Hence, the rise in cannabis cultivation is not only a product of insecurity; weak governance, corruption, ill equipped Afghan National Army and Police Force and slow and ineffective development projects are all causes of instability in Afghanistan. In the seven provinces mentioned above, the Afghan government does not have the capacity to prevent farmers from cultivating illegal crops, as it cannot provide them a better

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid

alternative. Moreover, due to the presence of insurgents government officials cannot travel beyond the district centers in the volatile provinces such as; Kandahar, Helmand, Zabul, Uruzgan, and Paktia.

Trading of Cannabis

Many illegal cannabis trading centers are situated in different parts of the country. There are cannabis trading centers in Baghlan-i-Jadad, Talwa Barfak, Andarab, Puli-Hisar and Deh-Salah in Baghlan province; Chintal, Balkh, Chaharbolak and Gurziwan in Balkh province and Qaysar, Kohistan and Pashtonkot in Faryab province. Hesarak and Sherzad in Nanagarhar province are famous for such illegal trading centers. Ahmad Abad, Sayd Karam in Paktya province and Kharwar and Mohammad Agha districts in Logar province, Khash and Baharak districts in Badakhshan province and Taloqan in Takhar province are known for illegal cannabis trading centers. Southern regions such as, Dehnaw in Uruzgan province and Spin Boldak in Kandahar province are considered the most famous centers of Cannabis cultivation, because they produce high quality hashish. Spin Boldak is considered a central hub for the preparation of hashish. Western provinces, such as Farah and Nimruz are major trading centers, since these provinces border Iran.

There are three primary trading routes in Afghanistan. One of the primary trafficking routes runs from Afghanistan to Iran and then through to Turkey and Western Europe. Another primary route runs from Afghanistan through Pakistan to Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Iran. A third significant trading route goes from Central Asia to Russia.⁶ It is crucial to cut these trading routes in order to prevent the cultivation of these illegal crops. Europe, Central Asia and Eastern countries must restrict the entry of illicit drugs by implementing better enforcement mechanisms domestically and by tightening their borders and enhancing the capacity of their border police in tracing, detecting and

⁶ Sananda Sahoo. "Heroin lab menace grows in Afghanistan." 05 March 2010. http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/LC05Df01.html. 05 July 2010

preventing entry of these illicit drugs. Unless these routes are closed down, both the production and usage of these drugs will continue to increase affecting more countries.

Factors that motivate cannabis cultivation

There are several factors involved in turning farmers to opium or cannabis cultivation. The foremost being the insecurity situation plaguing the country. In insecure areas farmers are not able to find work in any other sector other than farming. Thus, with cannabis, being both cheap and profitable to produce, farmers end up resorting to hashish production. The second motivating factor is that cannabis is easily accessible to drug traffickers who purchase the drug from farmers and then trade it both within and outside of the country. Opium and hashish are also taxed by insurgents (Taliban and other anti-government groups) and the revenue collected from these taxes help sustain the insurgency. Additionally, countries such as Iran, Pakistan and Central Asian countries facilitate the means to trade Hashish and opium produced in Afghanistan.

Poverty is another factor that invokes farmers to cultivate cannabis. In the UNDP poverty index⁷, Afghanistan ranked 135 out of 135 countries in proportion of people below certain threshold levels in each of the dimensions of the human development index.⁸ Living conditions in Afghanistan have worsened due to the ongoing conflict which has compelled those living in chronic poverty to cultivate cannabis as a means to meet their basic human needs. The unemployment rate in Afghanistan stands at 35% and is ranked 180 among 196 countries.⁹ If families living in rural Afghanistan depend solely on other crops, it will take more time and generate less revenue than cannabis cultivation.

⁷ UNDP. "Human development Index"

http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_20072008_EN_Indicator_tables.pdf. 05 July 2010.

⁸ The Human Poverty Index (HPI-1), focuses on the proportion of people below certain threshold levels in each of the dimensions of the human development index - living a long and healthy life, having access to education, and a decent standard of living. By looking beyond income deprivation, the HPI-1 represents a multi-dimensional alternative to the \$1.25 a day (PPP US\$) poverty measure.

⁹ The World Fact Book. "Unemployment rate comparison" <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2129.html>. 05 July 2010

Afghanistan's first position in the production of hashish in 2010 is a result of these factors and numerous other variables, all connected to the lack of development, weak governance, and insecurity. It could be predicted that not only Afghans but also foreigners are involved in the trading of hashish, because without external support it would be impossible to export these illicit drugs to western countries. Thus, it becomes imperative for the international community and the Afghan government to develop a unified strategy on how to provide these farmers with alternatives, so that they can earn more money as well as grow their regular crops. These farmers should be financially supported so that could support their families and have no need to cultivate illegal crop for fulfilling their wants and needs. In addition, the international community and the Afghan government should build and strengthen the capacity of the Afghan institutions to be able to control the illegal crop cultivation in Afghanistan.



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