

Afghanistan's heroin pipeline

By **MAX RUST AND PHIL GEIB**

Amid 10 years of war, Afghanistan has become the world's primary supplier of opium poppy, the plant used to make heroin.

The nation's leading cash crop is responsible for billions of dollars in societal costs there and elsewhere, affecting areas such as health care and law enforcement.

No country understands this more than Russia, home to one of the world's largest heroin addict populations and a partner, with the U.S., in stemming the flow of heroin.

As the U.S.-Russia Bilateral Presidential Commission Counternarcotics Working Group meets this week in Chicago, Tribune Newspapers, with assistance from the New York-based EastWest Institute, examines the topic of Afghan heroin and its global reach.

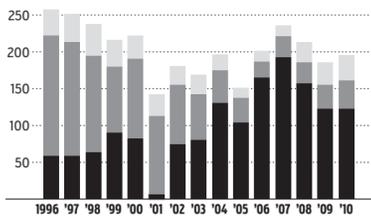
The supply

Providing nearly 90 percent of the world's poppy crop, Afghanistan is by far the largest source of opium and heroin. An overall rise in poppy cultivation since the 1990s can be attributed in some part to the U.S.-led invasion of the country in 2001 and the removal of the Taliban regime, which, in 2000, placed a ban on growing the plants. Although cultivation levels nationwide are nearly the same as in 2005, a look at regional production reveals a slight geographic shift from north to south.

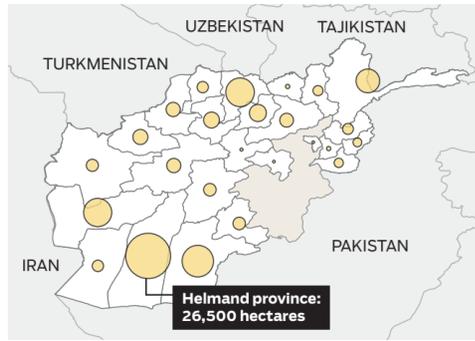
Cultivation of opium poppy

Scale in thousands of hectares (one hectare equals 2.5 acres)

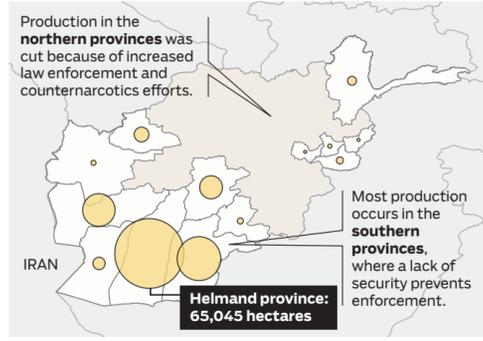
■ Afghanistan ■ Myanmar ■ Others



Afghanistan poppy cultivation by province in 2005 ...



... and in 2010



World heroin production, 2009 In tons

The primary end product of poppy production is heroin, of which Afghanistan is by far the world's leading provider.



NOTE: One other minor producer, Colombia, is not included in the chart.

The demand

Heroin and opium depart Afghanistan for their destined markets through three major gateways. From these areas, the drugs are smuggled to countries around the world via land and, increasingly, by plane and ship. Along the way, the drugs pass through some of the world's highest per capita opiate-consuming nations.



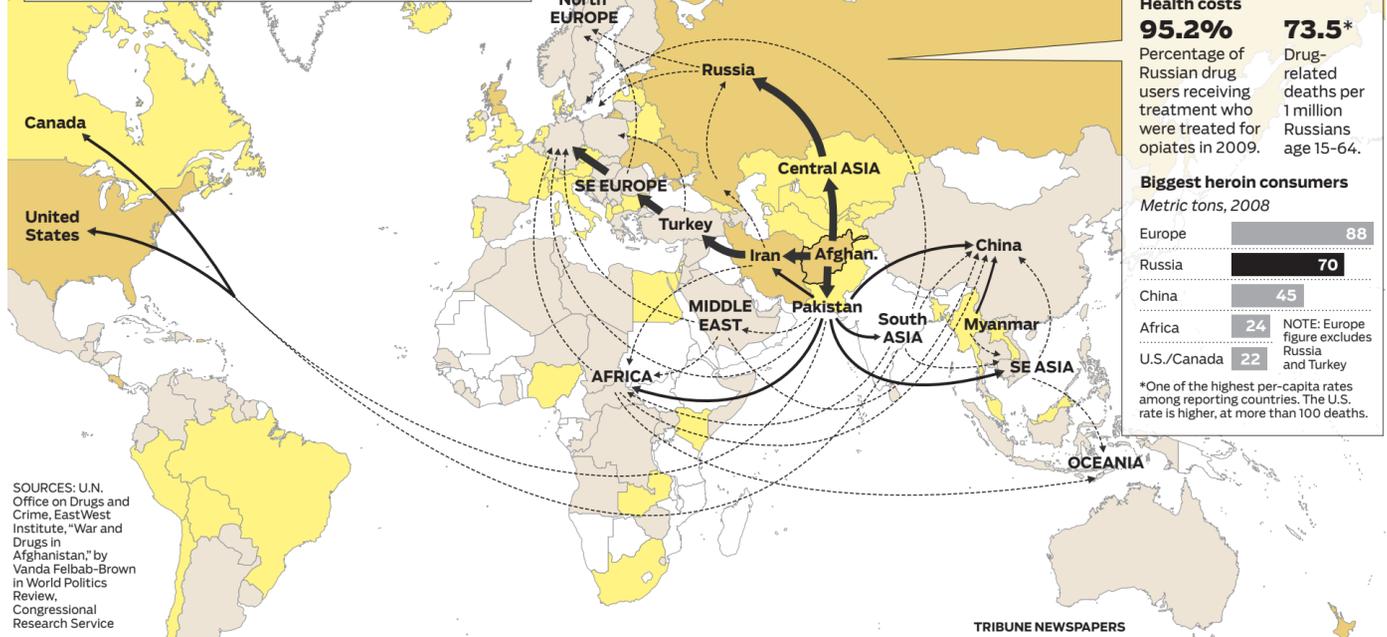
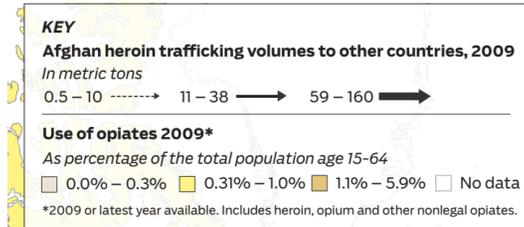
Pakistan
Most heroin enters from Afghanistan's Kandahar and Helmand provinces, where a lack of law enforcement and a relatively strong Taliban presence facilitate smuggling. The bulk is moved through Lahore, Karachi and other coastal cities, where it is forwarded to Europe, Southeast Asia and, increasingly, Africa, where relatively weak law enforcement is advantageous to smugglers.



Iran
Heroin enters mainly from the Afghan border but also from Pakistan. The drug is then moved to the coast, through Iraq, across the border to Azerbaijan, and primarily through Turkey and on to Europe through a channel known as the "Balkan Route." Lax visa requirements along the way make this a favored route among traffickers.



"Northern Route"
Heroin flows across Afghanistan's porous northern border into Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, then ultimately to Kazakhstan. In 2009, 83 percent of the heroin entering Afghanistan's northern neighbor countries was trafficked onward to Russia, where the majority of it was consumed. The rest was trafficked onward to Eastern Europe.



Russia: Big market to the north

According to the United Nations, Russia is home to nearly 1.7 million opiate users. The vast majority of them are heroin addicts, but that figure could be higher, according to some estimates.

Health costs
95.2% Percentage of Russian drug users receiving treatment who were treated for opiates in 2009.
73.5* Drug-related deaths per 1 million Russians age 15-64.

Biggest heroin consumers
Metric tons, 2008

Europe	88
Russia	70
China	45
Africa	24
U.S./Canada	22

NOTE: Europe figure excludes Russia and Turkey

SOURCES: U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, EastWest Institute, "War and Drugs in Afghanistan," by Vanda Felbab-Brown in World Politics Review, Congressional Research Service

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