



COUNTERNARCOTICS:

LESSONS FROM THE U.S. EXPERIENCE IN AFGHANISTAN





Cover photo credit:

Afghan farmers work in their poppy field in Khugyani District of Nangarhar Province on April 29, 2013. (AFP photo by Noorullah Shirzada)



Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

Counternarcotics: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan is the fifth lessons learned report issued by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. Since 2002, stemming opium poppy cultivation and drug production in Afghanistan has been an important, though not primary, goal for the United States, its coalition partners, and the Afghan government. While very little Afghan heroin comes to the United States, the Afghan drug trade has undermined reconstruction and security goals in many ways, including by financing insurgent groups, fueling government corruption, eroding state legitimacy, and exacting an enormous human and financial toll. Given the upward trend of opium poppy cultivation and the number of Afghans who rely on the opium industry, it is critical that U.S. policymakers determine how best to mitigate the drug trade's impact on U.S. reconstruction goals in Afghanistan.

This report examines the U.S. counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan, detailing how the Departments of Defense (DOD) and State, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) tried to deter farmers and traffickers from participating in the cultivation and trade of opium, build Afghan government counterdrug capacity, and develop the country's licit economy. While we found several examples of success—some Afghans were able to move away from poppy cultivation and Afghan counterdrug units became increasingly capable, trusted partners—those successes were limited in their impact. The report identifies lessons to inform U.S. counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan and other major drug-producing and transit countries, and provides 13 actionable, evidence-based recommendations to strengthen these efforts.

Our analysis reveals no counterdrug program undertaken by the United States, its coalition partners, or the Afghan government resulted in lasting reductions in poppy cultivation or opium production—and, without a stable security environment, there was little possibility of success. We found the U.S. government failed to develop and implement counternarcotics strategies that effectively directed U.S. agencies toward shared, achievable goals. For example, though strategies highlighted the need for coordinated interventions, such as eradication and development assistance, these efforts were not consistently implemented in the same geographic locations. Further, eradication efforts had no lasting impact on the opium poppy problem. The U.S. push from 2005 to 2008 for aerial spraying damaged U.S.-Afghan relations during that time, hindering cooperation on other fronts. Alternative development programs intended to

support farmers in their transition away from poppy cultivation were often too short-term, relied on the simple substitution of other crops for poppy, and sometimes even contributed to increased poppy production. Counternarcotics goals were often not incorporated into larger security and development strategies, which hindered the achievement of those goals.

While discussions of counternarcotics efforts generally focus on numbers—related to drug crop cultivation, production, arrests, seizures, and cost—we should not forget the human element of these efforts. Many U.S. and Afghan security forces, Afghan civilians, DEA agents, and contractors have been killed or wounded in the course of counternarcotics-related missions. Similarly, this report attempts to ground its treatment of counternarcotics issues in an appreciation for the role opium poppy plays in the lives of millions of rural Afghans, whose livelihood may depend on the success or failure of an opium harvest and, yet, who also suffer from the drug trade’s corrosive effects. It is our hope that this report succeeds in capturing the many facets of this enduring issue.

SIGAR began its lessons learned program in late 2014 at the urging of General John Allen, Ambassador Ryan Crocker, and others who had served in Afghanistan. Our lessons learned reports comply with SIGAR’s legislative mandate to provide independent and objective leadership and recommendations to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness; prevent and detect waste, fraud, and abuse; and inform Congress and the Secretaries of State and Defense about reconstruction-related problems and the need for corrective action.

Congress created SIGAR as an independent agency. Unlike other inspectors general, SIGAR is not housed within any single department. SIGAR is the only inspector general focused solely on Afghanistan reconstruction, and the only one devoted exclusively to reconstruction issues. While other inspectors general have jurisdiction over the programs and operations of their respective departments or agencies, SIGAR has jurisdiction over all programs and operations supported with U.S. reconstruction dollars, regardless of the agency involved. Because SIGAR has the authority to look across the entire reconstruction effort, it is uniquely positioned to identify and address whole-of-government lessons.

Our lessons learned reports synthesize not only the body of work and expertise of SIGAR, but also that of other oversight agencies, government entities, current and former officials with on-the-ground experience, academic institutions, and independent scholars. The reports document what the U.S. government sought to accomplish, assess what it achieved, and evaluate the degree to which these efforts helped the United States reach its reconstruction goals in Afghanistan. They also provide recommendations to address the challenges stakeholders face

in ensuring efficient, effective, and sustainable reconstruction efforts, not just in Afghanistan, but in future contingency operations.

SIGAR's Lessons Learned Program comprises subject matter experts with considerable experience working and living in Afghanistan, aided by a team of seasoned research analysts. I want to express my deepest appreciation to the team members who produced this report. I thank Kate Bateman, project lead; David Mansfield, subject matter expert and lead researcher; Matthew Bentrutt, Nikolai Condee-Padunov, Sonia Pinto, and Matthew Rubin, research analysts; Olivia Paek, graphic designer; Elizabeth Young, editor; and Joseph Windrem, program director. In producing its reports, the program also uses the significant skills and experience found in SIGAR's Audits, Investigations, and Research and Analysis directorates, and the Office of Special Projects. I thank all of the individuals who provided their time and effort to contribute to this report.

In addition, I am grateful to the many U.S. government officials at State, USAID, DOD, the Department of Justice, DEA, and other agencies who provided valuable insights and feedback. This report is truly a collaborative effort meant to not only identify problems, but also to learn from them and apply reasonable solutions to improve future reconstruction efforts.

I believe our lessons learned reports will be a key legacy of SIGAR. Through these reports, we hope to reach a diverse audience in the legislative and executive branches, at the strategic and programmatic levels, both in Washington and in the field. By leveraging our unique interagency mandate, we intend to do everything we can to make sure the lessons from the United States' largest reconstruction effort are identified, acknowledged, and, most importantly, remembered and applied to ongoing reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, as well as to future conflicts and reconstruction efforts elsewhere in the world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JF Sopko', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2002, stemming opium poppy cultivation and drug production in Afghanistan has been an important, though not primary, goal for the United States, its coalition partners, and the Afghan government. While very little Afghan heroin comes to the United States, the Afghan drug trade has undermined reconstruction and security goals in many ways, including by financing insurgent groups, fueling government corruption, eroding state legitimacy, and exacting an enormous human and financial toll. From fiscal year (FY) 2002 through FY 2017, the U.S. government allocated approximately \$8.62 billion for counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan. This included more than \$7.28 billion for programs with a substantial counternarcotics focus and \$1.34 billion on programs that included a counternarcotics component.

Despite this investment, drug production and trafficking remain entrenched. Afghanistan is the world's largest opium producer, and opium poppy is the country's largest cash crop, with an estimated annual export value of \$1.5 billion to \$3 billion in recent years. In 2017, poppy cultivation and opium production reached record highs. U.S. counternarcotics activities in Afghanistan have thus failed to produce lasting reductions in both cultivation and production. Given the upward trend of cultivation figures and the number of Afghans who rely on the opium industry, it is critical that U.S. policymakers determine how best to mitigate the drug trade's impact on U.S. strategic interests in Afghanistan.

U.S. counternarcotics programs and policies over the past 16 years have included efforts to develop Afghanistan's licit economy, build Afghan government counterdrug capacity, and deter farmers and traffickers from participating in the cultivation and trade of opium. This report charts how counternarcotics strategies in Afghanistan evolved and how counterdrug initiatives were incorporated into the overall reconstruction effort. It categorizes U.S. counternarcotics efforts into four strands of activity: interdiction and counterdrug law enforcement, eradication, alternative development, and the mobilization of Afghan political and institutional support. In addition, the report uses Geographic Information System (GIS) imagery and analysis in new ways to evaluate counternarcotics program implementation and outcomes over time.

The report draws critical lessons from the U.S. counternarcotics experience in Afghanistan to inform and improve ongoing counterdrug and reconstruction efforts. In addition, the report provides actionable, evidence-based recommendations that can strengthen U.S. counternarcotics programs in Afghanistan as well as other countries facing drug-related challenges.

FINDINGS

Our report identifies 13 key findings regarding the U.S. counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2017 that serve as the basis for the report's lessons and recommendations:

1. No counterdrug program undertaken by the United States, its coalition partners, or the Afghan government resulted in lasting reductions in poppy cultivation or opium production.
2. Without a stable security environment, there was little possibility of effectively curtailing poppy cultivation and drug production in Afghanistan.
3. The U.S. government failed to develop and implement counternarcotics strategies that outlined or effectively directed U.S. agencies toward shared goals.
4. Eradication and development assistance efforts were not sufficiently coordinated or consistently implemented in the same geographic locations.
5. Counternarcotics goals were often not incorporated into larger security and development strategies, which hindered the achievement of those goals and the wider reconstruction effort.
6. Counternarcotics efforts were not a consistent priority at the most senior levels of the U.S. or Afghan government.
7. Eradication efforts, including compensated eradication, had no lasting impact on poppy cultivation or national-level drug production.
8. The failed U.S. push for aerial spraying damaged the U.S.-Afghan relationship and unity of effort in the coalition's counterdrug mission.
9. Alternative development programs were too short-term and often relied on the simple substitution of other crops for poppy. These programs did not bring about lasting reductions in opium poppy cultivation and sometimes even contributed to increased poppy production.
10. In limited areas with improved security and greater economic opportunities, some Afghans were able to diversify their livelihoods away from opium poppy. However, local reductions in poppy cultivation were almost always short-lived or offset by increases elsewhere.
11. U.S. support helped Afghan counterdrug units develop promising capacity and become trusted partners. However, these units did not have a strategic impact on the drug trade due to insecurity, corruption and poor capacity within the criminal justice system, and lack of high-level support from the Afghan government.
12. Poor-quality estimates of poppy cultivation levels, eradication numbers, and drug money going to the insurgency made it more difficult for policymakers to accurately assess the problem and determine effective policy responses.
13. The counternarcotics performance metrics used in Afghanistan, particularly the overemphasis on annual estimates of poppy cultivation and eradication, contributed to ineffective policy decisions.

When the United States and its coalition partners intervened in Afghanistan in 2001, poppy cultivation was at an historic low due to a successful, short-lived Taliban ban on cultivation. Afghanistan had just 7,606 hectares of opium poppy cultivation in 2001, or approximately 1/43rd of the estimated 328,000 hectares in 2017.¹ This low level of cultivation was an anomaly, however, and policymakers knew the drug trade could pose serious challenges to the reconstruction effort. Counternarcotics was included as one of the five pillars of the Security Sector Reform (SSR) framework established at a 2002 donor nation conference, at which the UK agreed to serve as the lead nation for counternarcotics.

The initial two years of counterdrug work were marked by increased poppy cultivation and drug production as farmers and traffickers took advantage of the power vacuum that followed the collapse of the Taliban government. The lack of functioning Afghan law enforcement and judicial institutions on which counternarcotics work normally relies limited the options available to address the drug trade. In the spring of 2002, the UK started an eradication program based on compensating farmers whose poppy crops were destroyed. This approach proved to be misguided and ineffective, as it was inconsistently applied and undercut by corruption. Yet, the UK embraced the unrealistic goal of eliminating poppy cultivation within 10 years.² At this stage, U.S. counternarcotics programs were minimal, in part due to the U.S. military's concerns that counterdrug efforts would detract from higher priority counterterrorism goals.

By mid-2003, the UK had helped to establish a Counter Narcotics Directorate under the Afghan National Security Council and a National Drug Control Strategy for Afghanistan. But progress was stymied by the need to build law enforcement units from scratch, a fragmented SSR effort, and a lack of focus on counternarcotics within the Afghan government. These challenges led the UK to build the Afghan Special Narcotics Force, which was tasked with raiding and destroying drug-production facilities while other counternarcotics institutions were still developing.

Rural development programs to encourage alternative sources of income in poppy-growing areas were also slow to get started. The U.S. State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) initially supported small-scale alternative development projects conditioned on reductions in poppy cultivation. However, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was reluctant to support these initiatives due, in part, to concerns that conditioning aid on reductions in poppy cultivation could be self-defeating.³ These conflicting approaches, coupled with growing concerns over the UK's effectiveness as lead nation for counternarcotics, led to a restructuring of the U.S. counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan in 2003 and a push by some U.S. officials for a greater U.S. counterdrug role.

A large increase in poppy cultivation in 2004 strengthened this push, particularly in Congress and the State Department. In 2005, the U.S. government put forth a new counternarcotics strategy that emphasized poppy crop eradication. To achieve eradication goals, INL strongly advocated for aerial spraying of chemical herbicides, a policy that proved highly divisive. When officials within the U.S., Afghan, and coalition governments expressed opposition to aerial spraying, the focus shifted to manual eradication and led to the creation of the Central Poppy Eradication Force. At the same time, USAID significantly increased alternative development programming, which aimed to reduce poppy cultivation and promote viable economic alternatives.

By 2006, the initial Department of Defense (DOD) resistance to counternarcotics was ebbing. DOD began to give higher priority to counternarcotics objectives in response to rising levels of cultivation, as well as the increasingly common view that there was a nexus between the drug trade and the insurgency. The Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats began to provide training and equipment to Afghan agencies in the hopes of achieving both counterdrug and counterinsurgency objectives. The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) deployed more personnel in country, including agents for the recently launched Foreign-Deployed Advisory and Support Teams to mentor Afghan units and raid drug production sites. In 2008, DEA, DOD, and Treasury established the Afghan Threat Finance Cell to target financial flows related to terrorist and insurgent groups, the drug trade, and corruption. These interagency efforts reflected both an increased focus on and resources for U.S. counterdrug programs in Afghanistan.

A number of international partners also scaled up their counternarcotics efforts after 2004. The British government established a Counter Narcotics Trust Fund to coordinate donor financial support, as well as new counterdrug programs in cooperation with the United States. These programs included intelligence organizations and judicial reform efforts to prosecute and convict drug traffickers. Other donor institutions, including the World Bank, European Commission, and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), examined how economic development programs could help counter the drug trade and lent technical expertise. On the military side, a 2008 change to NATO's operations plan allowed International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) personnel to combat drug-trafficking activities linked to the insurgency. Despite these initiatives, poppy cultivation, the primary metric by which counternarcotics programs were judged, remained at historically high levels.

Beginning in 2009, the U.S. counternarcotics effort underwent significant changes due, in part, to the surge of coalition military and civilian personnel.

This surge coincided with a change in U.S. counternarcotics strategy overseen by the newly appointed Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Richard Holbrooke. Ambassador Holbrooke's appointment marked the end of the U.S. government push for aerial spraying and the disbanding of the centrally led eradication force. On the law enforcement side, specialized counterdrug institutions like the Counter Narcotics Justice Center and National Interdiction Unit were demonstrating increased capability, but were hindered by corruption within the Afghan government.

In 2010, a new U.S. counternarcotics strategy emphasized rural development to provide legal economic opportunities and interdiction initiatives explicitly focused on cutting drug funding to the insurgency. This strategy was supported by the influx of thousands of ISAF and Afghan security forces into major poppy-growing provinces that aided programs like the Helmand Food Zone (HFZ). The food zone program was viewed as a comprehensive set of counternarcotics interventions and supported the reduction of poppy cultivation in some areas of the province. However, declines in poppy on higher-quality agricultural land were offset by the spread of cultivation to outlying desert areas. Interdiction operations increased with the greater security force presence, but later proved unsustainable because of their dependence on the temporary influx of coalition and Afghan forces.

After leveling off in 2009 and 2010, poppy cultivation began to rise again in 2011. In Helmand, the rise was compounded by misguided efforts to replace poppy with wheat, which had the unintended effect of displacing people and poppy to desert areas. In 2012, the U.S. government scaled back its counternarcotics strategy in recognition of the reduced numbers of coalition personnel and the shortcomings of previous efforts. The new strategy focused on two primary objectives: building self-sufficient Afghan counterdrug capabilities and weakening the links between insurgents and narcotics.

Within the reconstruction effort as a whole, the focus on counternarcotics was also reduced after 2012. In practice, U.S. efforts consisted primarily of supporting specialized counterdrug units and scaled-back eradication initiatives. USAID shifted away from requiring specific counternarcotics indicators in alternative development programs and paid little attention to drug-related impacts. Some U.S.-supported demand-reduction and addiction treatment programs continued, but were increasingly centered on Kabul. DEA's reduced ability to conduct operations outside Kabul, due in part to the smaller U.S. military footprint and corruption concerns, illustrated the new reality on the ground.

International interest and investment in the counternarcotics effort also waned after 2012. The Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework included only a minor counternarcotics commitment and listed no counternarcotics-specific indicators

under its governance, rule of law, and human rights goals. On the ground, the Afghan government's ability to carry out counterdrug work was hampered by the need to combat an increasingly active insurgency. For example, specialized counternarcotics forces were often called on for general security and counterterrorism missions. This eroding security environment, weakening government control, and reduced economic growth, combined with the lack of attention to counternarcotics programs, contributed to poppy cultivation topping 200,000 hectares for the first time in 2013, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

From 2013 to 2016, drug production continued at or near the highest levels ever consistently seen in Afghanistan. The 2013 U.S. Civilian-Military Strategic Framework for Afghanistan included only a passing reference to counternarcotics, with no mention of eradication or interdiction. State continued to operate under its 2012 strategy, but neither State's nor DOD's efforts appeared to appreciably dampen narcotics production and trade. In August 2017, the Afghan government launched the Kabul Compact with the United States. While the compact has included a fluctuating number of counternarcotics benchmarks, these are non-binding commitments.

A 2017 UN survey indicated poppy cultivation had reached a new record high of 328,000 hectares. In November 2017, U.S. and Afghan forces initiated airstrikes against "Taliban narcotics production" facilities in Helmand Province. The strikes represented a significant use of new authorities included in the South Asia strategy, announced in August 2017 by the administration of President Donald Trump. DOD described the airstrikes as the start of a new, "sustained air interdiction campaign" to disrupt Taliban financial networks.⁴ While U.S. and Afghan forces had targeted heroin laboratories in prior years, the level of attention from senior military commanders and use of aerial bombardment were unprecedented.

While the increases in Afghan drug production make clear that counternarcotics efforts have largely failed, it is important to acknowledge that these increases are not solely due to failures of counternarcotics programs. The exponential rise in opium poppy cultivation and drug production is rooted in far-reaching, persistent challenges in Afghanistan—namely, lack of security, a poor economy, weak governing institutions, and failures of the wider reconstruction effort.⁵

Given these challenges, there are serious limitations to the U.S. capacity to bring about large-scale, lasting reductions in poppy cultivation and drug production. The opium economy will continue to undermine U.S. goals in Afghanistan. Therefore, ongoing U.S. reconstruction efforts must effectively address, or at least attempt to mitigate, the drug-related threats to Afghan security and stability.

LESSONS

This report distills 11 lessons from the U.S. counternarcotics experience in Afghanistan to date. These lessons are intended to inform and improve ongoing counterdrug initiatives in Afghanistan, and those in other regions facing drug-related challenges. The lessons also identify key factors and principles policymakers should apply when making decisions about counternarcotics-related programs.

In major drug-producing and transit countries that receive significant levels of U.S. foreign assistance:

1. A whole-of-government U.S. counternarcotics strategy should be developed to coordinate various agencies around shared, long-term goals.
2. The U.S. ambassador, in coordination with the U.S. military commander in country, should have responsibility for directing agencies to implement the counternarcotics strategy.
3. The goals of a U.S. counternarcotics strategy should be aligned with and integrated into the larger security, development, and governance objectives of the United States and the host nation.
4. U.S. counternarcotics strategies and programs should be based on a robust understanding of how the illicit drug economy functions and how it relates to local socioeconomic and political conditions.
5. To implement a balanced counternarcotics strategy, development programs and eradication should be colocated on the ground. In addition, tracking funding by strategy component is critical for effective oversight and evaluation of counternarcotics efforts.
6. Development assistance programs should include measures to mitigate the risk of programs inadvertently contributing to drug production and trafficking.
7. Development assistance programs that aim to incentivize a shift away from illicit drug production should be sustained for more than five years, support farmers' household income diversification, and consider the needs of different socioeconomic groups.
8. Eradication can be an effective deterrent to drug-crop cultivation when undertaken in areas where viable alternative livelihoods to drug-crop cultivation exist and the state has an enduring presence.
9. The U.S. government should strive to reach consensus with the host nation and other partner countries on counternarcotics goals and measures. Lack of consensus can alienate host and partner governments and preclude a cohesive counternarcotics effort.
10. Specialized counterdrug units and targeted law enforcement interdiction efforts have limited impact without a competent judicial system or extradition agreements.

11. U.S. support for host-nation counternarcotics institutions should be resourced according to the priority that nation is willing and able to place on counterdrug efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report also makes 13 recommendations intended to strengthen U.S. counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan and in other countries facing drug-related challenges. To improve counternarcotics outcomes, ensure better returns on U.S. investments in partner nations, and advance the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan, SIGAR recommends the following actions that can be taken by Congress and executive branch agencies.

Afghanistan-Specific Recommendations

1. The U.S. government should finalize its revised counternarcotics strategy for Afghanistan. This strategy should prioritize efforts to disrupt drug-related financial flows to insurgent and terrorist groups, promote licit livelihood options for rural communities, and combat drug-related corruption within the Afghan government.
2. The Director of National Intelligence should produce an annual assessment of how much funding the Afghan insurgency obtains from the drug trade and the extent of the insurgency's direct involvement in that trade.
3. Given ongoing U.S. military operations and the significant numbers of U.S. forces in country, civilian leaders should coordinate counternarcotics efforts closely with the commander of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan.

General Recommendations

Legislative Branch Recommendations

4. Congress should consider strengthening counterdrug reporting requirements, as set out in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, and in Section 706(1) of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for FY 2003 (Public Law 107-228), to include indicators of long-term drug production trends, such as crop diversification, income levels, and the number of people dependent on the drug trade for their livelihood.
5. Congress should consider requiring certification from the Secretary of State that viable alternative livelihoods are in place and potential negative outcomes have been considered prior to the obligation of funding for drug-crop eradication.
6. The House and Senate Appropriations Committees should consider requiring an annual report from the Secretary of State for each country that has been designated a major drug-transit or drug-producing country and receives U.S. counternarcotics assistance. The report should detail how

counternarcotics assistance for a given country is coordinated across U.S. agencies, track total U.S. counterdrug assistance to that country by fiscal year, and provide a breakdown of assistance supporting each objective of the counternarcotics strategy.

Executive Branch Recommendations

7. U.S. agencies responsible for counternarcotics efforts in major drug-transit or drug-producing countries should focus their eradication efforts in areas that are more secure, have persistent state presence, and offer more diverse livelihood opportunities.
8. The Secretary of State should require that, for each country designated a major drug-transit or drug-producing country and receiving U.S. counternarcotics assistance, the U.S. ambassador to that country convene all U.S. agencies providing counternarcotics assistance to design a strategy that identifies actionable steps to integrate a counternarcotics perspective into larger security, development, and governance objectives. This strategy should be devised in close cooperation with the recipient country and should set forth practical and sustainable counterdrug goals.
9. The USAID Administrator should require an assessment of the potential impact a development project could have on illicit crop cultivation prior to obligating funds for development programs in major drug-transit or drug-producing countries.
10. U.S. agencies responsible for counternarcotics efforts should use geospatial imagery, crop mapping, and other effective monitoring and evaluation systems to more accurately capture both development and counternarcotics outcomes. This data should be shared among all U.S. agencies with counterdrug responsibilities.
11. U.S. agencies charged with reporting to Congress on drug-crop cultivation, eradication, production, and trafficking estimates should include caveats regarding the reliability of those figures and level of confidence in them.
12. USAID should have primary responsibility for designing and administering development programs in drug-producing countries. INL should focus on areas where it has a comparative advantage, such as strengthening the rule of law, building law enforcement and interdiction capacity, and initiating demand-reduction programs.
13. State, DOD, and Justice should consider supporting small, specialized counternarcotics units as a means to build host-nation counterdrug capacity. However, this assistance should be proportional to the willingness and capacity of host-nation leaders to support such units, and should be coordinated with broader U.S. efforts to strengthen political, security, and judicial institutions.



UNODC photo

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When the United States invaded Afghanistan in 2001, countering the Afghan drug trade was neither a primary justification nor a major focus of the U.S. effort. Afghan heroin did not then and does not now enter the United States in significant quantities.⁶ Since 2002, however, stemming opium poppy cultivation and drug production in Afghanistan has been an important, though not primary, goal for the United States, its coalition partners, and the Afghan government. Policymakers quickly came to the consensus that the Afghan drug trade undermined U.S. reconstruction and security efforts and eroded the legitimacy of the Afghan state.⁷ As the insurgency grew in strength and intensity in areas with high levels of poppy cultivation, links between the drug trade, insurgent financing, and government corruption led to a range of counternarcotics programs. At the same time, opium poppy is a mainstay of Afghanistan's rural economy. This presented a conundrum to policymakers seeking to combat the drug trade without impoverishing rural communities or turning them against the Afghan government and its international partners.

From fiscal year (FY) 2002 through FY 2017, the U.S. government allocated approximately \$8.62 billion for counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan. This included more than \$7.28 billion for programs with a substantial counternarcotics focus and \$1.34 billion for programs that included a

counternarcotics component.⁸ (See page 20.) Yet, drug production and trafficking remain entrenched. Afghanistan is the world's largest opium producer, and opium poppy is the country's largest cash crop, with an estimated annual export value of \$1.5 to \$3 billion in recent years.⁹ Given the upward trend of cultivation figures and the number of Afghans who rely on the opium industry, the drug trade will significantly influence Afghanistan's economy, security, and governance for the foreseeable future.¹⁰ It is critical that U.S. policymakers determine how best to mitigate the drug trade's impact on U.S. strategic interests in Afghanistan.

This lessons learned report draws important lessons from the U.S. counternarcotics experience in Afghanistan since 2002. These lessons can inform and improve ongoing U.S. efforts in Afghanistan, where the United States will likely remain engaged in counterdrug and reconstruction efforts for years to come. The report also provides actionable, evidenced-based recommendations that can strengthen U.S. counternarcotics programs in Afghanistan, as well as similar efforts in other countries.

At the time of publication in 2018, the report holds special relevance for U.S. policy in Afghanistan. With Afghan poppy cultivation and opium production reaching record highs in 2017, U.S. and international attention to drug-related challenges is heightened.¹¹ U.S. officials are refocused on links between the drug trade and insurgency; for example, in November 2017, U.S. and Afghan forces began an air interdiction campaign against "Taliban narcotics production" facilities. The strikes represented a significant use of new authorities included in the South Asia strategy announced by the administration of President Donald Trump.¹²

More broadly, a revised U.S. counternarcotics strategy for Afghanistan was undergoing interagency coordination, as of April 2018.¹³ This report's analysis and recommendations thus provide context and insights that can be applied to policy decisions on and implementation of ongoing U.S. efforts to counter the drug trade in Afghanistan.

The lessons and recommendations are also relevant to other countries where the United States seeks to reduce drug cultivation, production, and trafficking. The United States spends hundreds of millions of dollars per year on global counternarcotics efforts. In recent years, countries and regions receiving the highest levels of funding included Afghanistan, Colombia, Mexico, Central America, Pakistan, Peru, and the Caribbean basin.¹⁴ However, this report does not advocate the universal application of specific counterdrug interventions based on the U.S. experience in Afghanistan. As the report demonstrates, taking practices used in one country or region and assuming they will work elsewhere has often been counterproductive. Instead, we identify key factors that influence

TABLE 1

DEFINING FOUR STRANDS OF COUNTERNARCOTICS ACTIVITY	
Strand	Activities and Programs Included in SIGAR Analysis
Interdiction and Counterdrug Law Enforcement	• Seizure of illegal narcotics • Destruction of drug production facilities • Arrest and prosecution of those who traffic drugs • Intelligence collection and operations to trace, freeze, or confiscate proceeds from the drug trade • Support to Afghan units and institutions that carry out interdiction and counterdrug law enforcement activities
Eradication	• Physical destruction of a standing opium crop, done manually or through aerial or ground-based spraying of herbicides • Support to Afghan and contractor eradication forces, as well as payments, reimbursement, and assistance for conducting eradication
Alternative Development	• Development assistance intended to reduce poppy cultivation, contribute to rural economic development, and provide licit alternative livelihood opportunities
Mobilization of Afghan Political Support and Institution Building	• Programs to build institutional capacity at the ministerial and provincial levels • Programs to increase political will to reduce opium production, including development assistance as a reward for local reductions in opium cultivation • Programs to raise public awareness of the costs of involvement in cultivation, production, trade, and consumption of illicit drugs

the success or failure of counterdrug efforts, as well as principles policymakers should apply when making decisions about counternarcotics-related programs.

To examine U.S. counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2017, we categorize these efforts into four strands of activity: interdiction and counterdrug law enforcement, eradication, alternative development, and the mobilization of Afghan political support and institution building. (See table 1.) Our report discusses how the U.S. government—primarily the Departments of Defense (DOD) and State, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)—approached the Afghan drug trade, how U.S. counternarcotics efforts fit within the broader U.S. and international reconstruction effort, how the U.S. response evolved, and the effectiveness of that response.

This report is supported by SIGAR’s access to data from the whole of the reconstruction effort, including from both government and nongovernment sources. It includes an analysis of four sources of data that have never before been synthesized, some of which have not been previously available:

1. U.S. government budgetary information, disaggregated by both U.S. government agency and strand, or area, of counternarcotics activity
2. Official U.S. government, UK government, and UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) documents related to counternarcotics and reconstruction in Afghanistan
3. In-depth interviews of key actors who were involved in counternarcotics policy and practice, including individuals from DOD, State, USAID, DEA, the Department of Justice (DOJ), and the National Security Council (NSC), as well as institutions within the government of Afghanistan, the government

of the UK (the “lead,” then “partner” nation for counternarcotics under the Group of 8 Security Sector Reform framework), and UNODC¹⁵

4. Geographic Information System (GIS) data and analysis of the location, outputs, and outcomes of U.S. counternarcotics activities in Afghanistan

This report is organized both chronologically and by strand of counternarcotics activity. Following this introductory section, which provides background information on the Afghan drug economy and efforts to combat drug production and trade, chapter two characterizes the different eras of the counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan and explores the changing policy and operational context that shaped counternarcotics strategy over time.

Chapter three provides a detailed analysis of the main strands of the counternarcotics effort: interdiction, eradication, alternative development, and political mobilization. It explores the theories that underpinned each of the strands, how the strands evolved over time, the resources expended on them, and what they achieved. In addition, a detailed analysis of a sample of programs looks at both outputs and outcomes, including through the use of GIS imagery.

Chapter four examines the combined effects of the different strands to determine their impact on the level of opium poppy cultivation, the primary indicator by which the success of counternarcotics efforts was judged. This chapter draws on GIS analysis and fieldwork to better understand the factors that led to reductions in poppy cultivation.

Chapter five provides our conclusions, including key findings, lessons derived from our analysis, and recommendations for improving counternarcotics efforts in current and future contingency operations. The lessons and recommendations offer Congress and U.S. government agencies insights into how complex, cross-cutting issues such as counternarcotics can be better integrated into reconstruction efforts to deliver improved outcomes, with fewer negative impacts on the wider socioeconomic, political, and security environment.

While the lessons and recommendations should help to improve counternarcotics programs and policies, sustained reductions in poppy cultivation and narcotics trafficking in Afghanistan will require decades of effort. As Ambassador David Johnson, the former head of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), noted, it would be wrong to conclude that “if we were just to get the piping, plumbing, politics, and program design right by following the right ‘lessons learned,’ we would find success. That is a delusion.” He further stated:

With the right policies and programs you can improve this situation, but you must have the patience of Job and you must be willing to live with half solutions for a very long time, perhaps decades, perhaps forever.¹⁶

THE AFGHAN OPIUM ECONOMY

Poppy cultivation, opium production, and drug trafficking are illegal in Afghanistan. Opium is elemental, however, to the domestic economy.¹⁷ It is the country's most valuable cash crop, with an estimated annual export value of \$1.5 to \$3 billion in recent years.¹⁸ In 2017, poppy cultivation alone was estimated to provide up to 590,000 full-time-equivalent jobs, more than the number of people employed by the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF).¹⁹

Opium production has also generated investments in the agricultural sector, such as in herbicides, fertilizers, tractors, diesel pumps, and solar panels.²⁰ The income farmers have earned from opium has been used for maintaining food security and agricultural production, as well as investing in businesses, education for family members, vehicles, and homes for those with land and capital, thereby transforming the rural economy.²¹ The labor-intensive nature of opium production has also boosted the daily wages of those harvesting the crop, as well as those working in other sectors in opium poppy-growing areas.²² These benefits are not limited to the rural economy; urban areas also saw increases in wage labor rates and a construction boom that was attributed to both the international aid and opium economies.²³

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While opium production has brought significant economic benefits, its impact on the political economy of Afghanistan has been deeply corrosive. Corruption associated with the opium economy undermines state legitimacy and public institutions, particularly in the security and justice sectors. It affects the police, judicial system, parliament, and other state institutions, at national, provincial, and district levels.²⁴ While it is difficult to gather evidence on such illicit activity, Afghan government actors, including at the highest levels, have played a role in the drug trade, serving as facilitators and collecting payments from traffickers. In June 2005, for example, a combined DEA and Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan raid found more than 9 metric tons of opium in the offices of then-governor of Helmand Province, Sher Mohammed Akhundzada.²⁵

Former UK Ambassador to Afghanistan Sherard Cowper-Coles wrote that during his tenure from 2007 to 2009, there emerged a “belief that almost everyone in influential positions in public life was somehow tainted by the [opium poppy] trade. Some were actively involved; others (probably the majority) were passive shareholders, or, more often and more likely, received a cut for not

being involved, for turning a blind eye when the container-load of drugs passed through their province or district.”²⁶ As one analyst observed, “Afghan national police, border police, counternarcotics police, customs officials, and provincial, district, and municipal governors all have power within their jurisdictions to significantly impede or facilitate narcotics production and trafficking.”²⁷

A **value chain** is commonly defined as “the range of goods and services necessary for an agricultural product to move from the farm to the final customer or consumer. It encompasses the provision of inputs, actual on-farm production, post-harvest storage and processing, marketing, transportation, and wholesale and retail sales.”

Source: SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, January 30, 2018, p. 206.

The Taliban and other armed opposition groups also receive funds from the opium industry and are believed to collect payments from those involved at each stage of the **value chain**.²⁸ While there is general consensus that the Taliban derives significant funding from the drug trade, there has been a wide range of estimates as to how much. In a 2012 report, the UN Security Council Taliban Sanctions Monitoring Committee cited the Afghan government’s estimate that the Taliban earned approximately \$100 million from the illicit narcotics trade that year, or 25 percent of roughly \$400 million in total income for 2011–2012. The UN report noted, “The general notion that the poppy economy in Afghanistan is the main pillar of Taliban funding merits examination.”²⁹ In 2016, General John Nicholson, commander of NATO’s Resolute Support mission and of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, said the drug trade in Helmand Province provided about 60 percent of the Taliban’s funding.³⁰

The opportunity to profit from the opium trade has resulted in alliances between corrupt government officials, drug traffickers, and insurgents. Opium has been described as providing “the economic glue which binds together political coalitions.”³¹ Efforts to eradicate the opium crop absorb government resources and can fuel rural antipathy to the Afghan government and its international backers.³² At the same time, armed groups offer protection to farmers from those state institutions charged with destroying the opium crop.³³

Due in part to the illicit nature of opium production and trade, price data for opium are difficult to collect.³⁴ Price data are generally derived by UNODC from limited survey and seizure information, and the quality of that information varies significantly.³⁵ While price data are therefore relatively weak, it is still possible to construct a rough picture of the price structure and margins at different stages of the value chain.³⁶ With these caveats, price data provide useful information about the opium economy.

Historical Context of Afghan Opium Production

For centuries, opium poppy has been grown in the region known as the Golden Crescent, stretching across Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. During King Mohammed Zahir Shah's reign from 1933 to 1973, the ruling family controlled the Afghan opium trade and largely exported it to Iran.³⁷ After Zahir Shah was dethroned in a 1973 coup, Afghanistan slid into a period of unrest and conflict that endures today.

The 1979–1989 Soviet occupation crippled the Afghan economy and created an environment where illicit activity and criminal networks flourished. The war devastated the Afghan countryside, destroying irrigated land and smothering agricultural output. Millions of Afghans fled the country, while many who remained turned to poppy cultivation, since poppies required little water and could grow in poor agricultural conditions.³⁸ From 1984 to 1985, Afghan opium production was estimated to more than double, from 140 to 400 metric tons, and in 1986, doubled again.³⁹ Rebel *mujahedeen* forces, backed by the United States and Pakistan, relied on revenue from poppy cultivation and opium production to fund their operations against the Soviets.⁴⁰

Following the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989, Afghanistan shifted from occupation and insurgency to outright civil war. In 1996, the Taliban gained control of most of Afghanistan. Opium production soared under Taliban rule, nearly doubling between 1996 and 1999, from 2,248 to 4,565 metric tons.⁴¹ By 1999, Afghanistan became the world's largest supplier of illicit opium.⁴² Despite the rise in cultivation, the Taliban prohibited opiate consumption and initially opposed cultivation as well.⁴³

In 2000, the Taliban successfully carried out a ban on poppy cultivation, culminating in a 75 percent drop in the global supply of heroin.⁴⁴ The ban drove Afghan farmers into debt and contributed to rising unemployment and migration, exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.⁴⁵ The Taliban provided no alternative income to mitigate the economic impact of the ban, and instead requested greater development assistance from the international community.⁴⁶ To make matters worse, Afghanistan was in the midst of a severe and worsening drought that wiped out livestock and led to famine, death, and a regional exodus.⁴⁷

The motive behind the Taliban poppy ban remains a topic of debate. One explanation is the ban was an attempt to legitimize the pariah regime in the eyes of the international community after sweeping UN sanctions were applied.⁴⁸ Another theory is the Taliban sought to use a temporary ban to drive up global prices dramatically and then sell inventory for higher profit.⁴⁹ Whatever the reason for its execution, the ban became moot: The collapse of the Taliban government coincided with the 2001 fall growing season, and desperate Afghan farmers began planting poppy once again.⁵⁰ After 2001, poppy cultivation eventually rose to the unprecedented levels described in this report.

THE OPIUM TRADE FROM FARM TO ARM

CULTIVATION



Organization for Sustainable Development and Research (OSDR) photo



David Mansfield photo

Opium poppy is an input-intensive crop that typically requires more water, fertilizer, and labor than other crops planted in the fall, most notably wheat.⁵¹ The majority of the opium poppy crop in Afghanistan is planted between October and December; there is also a spring crop planted in higher elevations between February and June and evidence of a summer crop planted in Helmand between July and August.⁵²

Irrigation



Alcis Holdings Ltd. photo

Poppy planted in the fall needs little irrigation throughout the winter months. However, once the plant reaches the “cabbage” stage, farmers need to irrigate it every four to six days.⁵³ At the harvest stage, farmers will irrigate the crop before the final lancing. (See page 10.) In the former desert areas of the southwest, opium poppy is irrigated using diesel- and solar-powered deep wells.⁵⁴

Weeding



David Mansfield photo



OSDR photo

In the spring, poppy requires thinning and then weeding. Weeding is labor-intensive and can involve an entire family, particularly boys, who will often fit the task in around school and even weed the crop on other farms in return for daily wages. In southwest Afghanistan, a range of different herbicides are used on the opium crops to reduce the demand for hired and family labor.⁵⁵

Germination



OSDR photo

Poppy plants typically germinate two to three weeks after seeds are sown. The plants drop their flower petals at 12 to 14 weeks, exposing multiple capsules, which then ripen for one to two weeks.⁵⁶

Lancing



David Mansfield photo

Once the poppy capsules have ripened, they are lanced, which allows the opium resin to seep out. Each capsule can be lanced several times over a two-week period.⁵⁷ For poppy planted between October and December, the lancing process usually occurs between April and May.⁵⁸

Harvest



OSDR photo

The harvest is labor-intensive, requiring relatively skilled workers who can quickly select which capsules to lance and make precise incisions to maximize the flow of resin. Most farmers require some hired labor, but seek to reduce their costs by drawing on family labor, including withdrawing their children from school to help with the harvest.⁵⁹

Collection and Storage



David Mansfield photo



David Mansfield photo

The opium resin, also called raw opium, is collected systematically. The resin is scraped from the capsule using simple, locally made tools, and is typically done the morning after the crop was lanced.⁶⁰



David Mansfield photo



David Mansfield photo

Once the raw opium is collected, it is stored in a variety of ways. In the east, the crop is wrapped in opium poppy leaves and bound in 1.2-kg cakes known as *chakai*. In the south, the opium is moister and is stored in plastic bags weighing 4.5 to 9 kg. After packaging, the opium is then sold or kept in the home. In addition, after the harvest, some of the opium will be dried so it can be stored and sold at a later date, when prices rise. Once dried, opium can be stored for 10 years or longer.⁶¹



OSDR photo

None of the opium poppy crop is wasted. A very small number of seeds are kept for next year's crop; the rest of the seeds are used or sold to make cooking oil. The plants' capsules and stalks are dried and used as firewood.⁶²

PROCESSING

Morphine Extraction



UNODC photo



David Mansfield photo

The raw opium, or opium resin, is used as the base material to manufacture heroin and other derivative, opiate-based products. To process opium into heroin, morphine is extracted from the raw opium and processed into a morphine base.⁶³



David Mansfield photo



DEA Museum photo

To make the morphine base, the raw opium is mixed with a calcium solution and hot water in large barrels. The blend sits for several hours, during which the sediment from the raw opium settles at the bottom of the barrel, leaving a clear liquid that contains the morphine.⁶⁴

Siphoning and Filtering Liquid Morphine

The liquid is then siphoned out of the barrel and mixed with a binding chemical. This mixture is returned to the barrel, heated, and filtered.⁶⁵



DEA Museum photo

Drying Morphine Residue



DEA Museum photo

The residue is dried in the sun, resulting in a morphine base.⁶⁶

Turning Morphine into Heroin



UNODC photo



DEA Museum photo

To make heroin, the morphine base is combined with several different chemical solutions to create a heroin paste. The heroin base is then mixed with several more chemical solutions, filtered, and dried to produce powdered heroin.⁶⁷

EXPORT

The opiates produced in Afghanistan reach their primary markets in Europe, Asia, and Africa through several routes. The Balkan route supplies western and central Europe. The southern route funnels opiates through Pakistan or Iran to the Gulf region, Africa, Asia, and Western and Central Europe. The northern route runs through neighboring Central Asian states, Russia, and other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. While 90 percent of the heroin seized in Canada originates in Afghanistan, in recent years, an estimated 1 percent or less of heroin seized in the United States comes from Afghanistan.⁶⁸

DRUG TRAFFICKING ROUTES FROM AFGHANISTAN



Source: UNODC, *World Drug Report 2016*, June 2016, pp. xii–xiv; UNODC, *World Drug Report 2015*, May 2015, pp. xiii–xiv, 46.

The distribution of revenue within the opium industry, or “how much goes to farmers, traders at different levels, processors/refiners, long-distance traffickers and wholesalers, and retailers,” varies according to region.⁶⁹ These regional variations might be explained by proximity to borders where transit occurs, distance from central markets, climate and agricultural conditions, and eradication and law enforcement efforts.⁷⁰ For example, in 2016 the average **farm-gate price** of opium in the northern region of Afghanistan was \$126 per kilogram, while the average reported farm-gate price in the central region was \$280 per kilogram. The national average farm-gate price of dry opium at harvest time in 2016 was \$187 per kilogram.⁷¹

The **farm-gate price** is the price of harvested opium at the farm, prior to any subsequent price increase due to transportation, processing, or resale.

Small-scale opium traders, typically operating on a part-time or seasonal basis, purchase opium directly from farmers and, depending on the arrangement, provide inputs or credit to the farmer before the poppy is grown. Traders in regional opium bazaars buy opium from farmers and small-scale traders and “then sell to local consumers, clandestine labs, wholesale traders, and foreign traffickers.”⁷² Moving up in scale, “at the center of the trade are bulk buyers, large-scale traders who buy throughout the year and organize shipments direct to border areas or directly abroad.”⁷³ Along the value chain, opium products significantly increase in price, from farms in Afghanistan to distant consumer markets primarily in Europe and Asia, where wholesale and retail prices are considerably higher.⁷⁴

In 2006, UNODC estimated that 76 percent of the income from opium produced in Afghanistan went to traffickers, including heroin refiners, with just 24 percent going to poppy farmers.⁷⁵ UNODC estimated that in 2014, the value added by traffickers through the processing of Afghan opium into morphine and heroin and the export of processed and unprocessed opiates was \$1.81 billion.⁷⁶

Other Effects of the Opium Economy

In addition to direct economic and political effects, the opium crop has changed the physical geography of Afghanistan. For example, between 2003 and 2016, opium supported the settlement of 330,000 hectares of former desert land in southwest Afghanistan.⁷⁷ The price premium associated with this illegal crop provided the money for farmers to install deep wells, purchase water pumps, and even invest in solar technology to draw water from underground aquifers and bring once-barren land into agricultural production. While the long-term consequences of this encroachment onto previously uninhabited land are unknown, the current production may not be environmentally sustainable: Increasing salinization, decreasing ground water, and dwindling yields may prompt the 1 to 2 million people who came to depend on this land and the opium grown on it to move elsewhere.⁷⁸

Opium production also deeply affects the health and wellbeing of the Afghan people. One survey estimated there were 2 to 2.5 million drug users in Afghanistan in 2015. Of these, 1.3 to 1.6 million—5 percent of the population—were opiate users.⁷⁹ Exposure was particularly high among children in rural areas due to drug use within the household.⁸⁰ Kabul also had a concentrated population of drug users.⁸¹ These high rates of opiate use have a devastating effect on Afghan society and the country's capacity to develop its human capital and achieve economic growth. Overall, the Afghan population's exposure to violence and conflict, experience as refugees, and poor economic prospects, as well as the availability of opiates and other drugs, increased the risk of drug abuse.

Why Poppy is Cultivated

Since 2006, the UNODC's annual Afghanistan poppy survey has asked a sample of farmers why they grow poppy. In 2014, a World Bank report described the survey responses, noting, "High price' has been the most frequent response with the exception of 2007 and 2008, when 'poverty alleviation' was the most popular response."⁸² However, distilling the numerous factors that inform decisions to cultivate poppy into a single answer is misleading. The prevailing assumption, that Afghan farmers cultivate poppy for the highest financial return, diminishes the multifunctional role opium poppy plays in rural livelihoods. While profit incentives motivate many involved in poppy cultivation, other factors also influence decisions to grow the crop. These factors include access to land and water, household assets, access to markets and transport linkages, price, the availability of wheat for consumption, insecurity and poor governance, and pressure from insurgents.⁸³

Opium is a nonperishable, low-weight/high-value product that provides farmers with relative economic security in a high-risk environment. After decades of war-induced destruction of the rural economy, poppy has become a hedge against future periods of conflict, drought, and economic hardship.⁸⁴ Thus, it is reasonable to describe some who participate in poppy cultivation as risk managers, rather than profit maximizers, and opium as a "low-risk crop in a high-risk environment."⁸⁵

For the landless or land-poor, poppy is not simply a source of income. Cultivation provides access to a range of assets, including land, water, credit, and employment.⁸⁶ Landless and land-poor farmers may seek a sharecropping arrangement for cash income, as well as the chance to grow non-opium crops for household consumption and to provide residences for their families.⁸⁷ Itinerant laborers who do not participate in sharecropping agreements pursue on-farm wage labor opportunities, such as weeding and harvesting. Cash income earned by non-landholding families is often used to meet household food

requirements, settle debts, and invest in education and transportation, which can increase off-farm employment opportunities.⁸⁸

Different sharecropping agreements determine what portion of the final yield goes to the farmer, and what portion goes to the landowner.⁸⁹ Landowning households with greater socioeconomic status that can afford production inputs, like land, water, and fertilizer, have an economic advantage over the landless and land-poor. For example, a sharecropper who cannot afford to contribute to the production cost of the land may receive only a fifth of the final crop yield.⁹⁰ Inequitable sharecropping arrangements and the stockpiling of opium to sell at a later date when the prices are higher allow landowners to accrue greater profit.

Understanding the roles of different socioeconomic groups that participate in poppy cultivation is critical for developing effective and sustainable interventions. As William Byrd and Doris Buddenberg noted, the varying levels of household dependency on opium and different ways they benefit from the crop imply “that there is diversity in households’ responses to shocks like elimination of opium poppy cultivation.”⁹¹ Counternarcotics efforts, such as crop eradication, have had unintended effects, including local economic contraction and increased poverty. Coercive measures have also resulted in poppy cultivation being pushed to other geographic areas, or even intensified. According to some analysts, such measures have increased support for the Taliban and other anti-government elements.⁹² Counternarcotics programs that ignore local variations and do not account for the reasons why certain groups participate in poppy cultivation run the risk of being ineffective or counterproductive.⁹³

THE U.S. COUNTERNARCOTICS RESPONSE

The U.S. counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan comprised four distinct areas of activity, which we refer to as strands. Each strand was led by a U.S. government agency, in coordination with other U.S. government entities, donor nations, the Afghan government, and international and nongovernmental organizations (NGO).

U.S. counternarcotics strategies and activities have undergone significant changes since 2002. The United States first developed a five-pillar strategy in 2005, following a review of previous years’ counterdrug efforts. The pillars of this strategy were public information, alternative livelihoods, elimination and eradication, interdiction, and law enforcement and justice reform.⁹⁴ While these five pillars have served as organizing categories for the U.S. strategy since 2005, the level of emphasis on each pillar has significantly shifted over time. In 2012, a new U.S. strategy emphasized two primary goals: strengthening the Afghan

TABLE 2

COUNTERNARCOTICS STRANDS AND PILLARS		
Afghan Strategy Pillars	U.S. Strategy Pillars	SIGAR Strands
1. Public awareness	1. Public information	1. Mobilizing Afghan political support and building institutions
2. Demand reduction		
3. Institution building		
4. Law enforcement	2. Interdiction	2. Interdiction and counterdrug law enforcement
5. Criminal justice	3. Law enforcement and justice reform	
6. Alternative livelihoods	4. Alternative livelihoods	3. Alternative development
7. Eradication	5. Elimination and eradication	4. Eradication
8. International and regional cooperation		

government's capacity to combat the drug trade and countering the link between narcotics and the insurgency.⁹⁵

The Afghan government's own National Drug Control Strategy was organized into eight pillars beginning in 2006: public awareness, international and regional cooperation, alternative livelihoods, demand reduction, law enforcement, criminal justice, eradication, and institution building.⁹⁶ (See table 2.) The pillars were intended to support the strategy's four priorities: disrupting the drug trade, strengthening and diversifying legal rural livelihoods, reducing the demand for illicit drugs and treatment of problem drug users, and developing state institutions.⁹⁷

In 2015, the Afghan government produced an updated National Drug Action Plan that identified three goals: decrease opium poppy cultivation, decrease the production and trafficking of opiates, and reduce illicit drug demand in Afghanistan while increasing treatment for drug users. These goals included objectives that mirrored the pillars of the previous strategy, including licit alternatives to poppy, targeted eradication, improved capacity for interdiction and law enforcement, anti-money laundering and asset forfeiture, regional and international cooperation, expansion of drug use treatment and prevention, and public information campaigns.⁹⁸

To better understand how resources have been allocated for the U.S. counternarcotics effort, this report tracks funding and program activities by the following four strands of activity, which together encompass the pillars and priorities defined by the U.S. and Afghan counterdrug strategies:

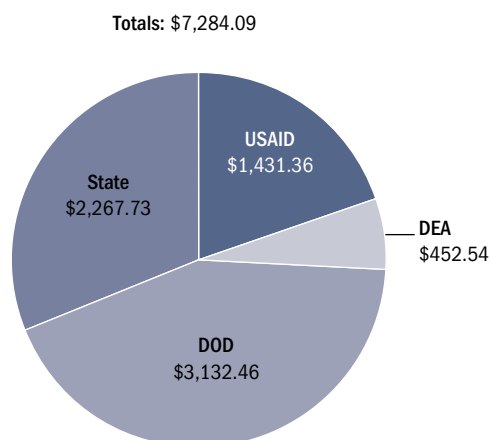
1. Interdiction and counterdrug law enforcement
2. Eradication
3. Alternative development
4. Mobilizing Afghan political support and building institutions

U.S. officials repeatedly emphasized the need for a balanced strategy—where each area of activity complemented the others—in order to deliver effective and enduring progress on U. S. counternarcotics goals.⁹⁹ While U.S. counternarcotics strategies focused on a multi-sector, balanced approach, it is less clear whether implementation reflected that balance. To our knowledge, this report represents the first U.S. government effort to holistically analyze U.S. funding for counternarcotics activities in Afghanistan to determine whether resourcing for counternarcotics initiatives matched the intent of U.S. strategies.

Of the more than \$7.28 billion appropriated for programs specifically focused on counternarcotics in Afghanistan through fiscal year 2017, the majority was allocated for four strands of programming: interdiction (\$4.5 billion), alternative development (\$1.46 billion), eradication (\$938 million), and mobilizing political support (\$184 million).¹⁰⁰ In this report, mobilizing political support includes funding for the Good Performers Initiative (GPI, \$83 million), institution building (\$40 million), and public diplomacy or information campaigns (\$61 million). Counternarcotics justice reform (\$11 million) is included as part of interdiction and law enforcement because a judicial outcome is one of the goals of successful counterdrug law enforcement. Of the remaining \$206 million, approximately \$110 million went toward drug demand reduction and approximately \$96 million could not be categorized according to strand of activity.¹⁰¹ Figure 1 shows funding by agency and figure 2 shows funding allocations according to the four strands discussed in this report. A brief description of each of the four strands, or program areas, follows.

FIGURE 1

U.S. COUNTERNARCOTICS FUNDING ALLOCATIONS BY AGENCY, 2002-2017 (\$ MILLIONS)

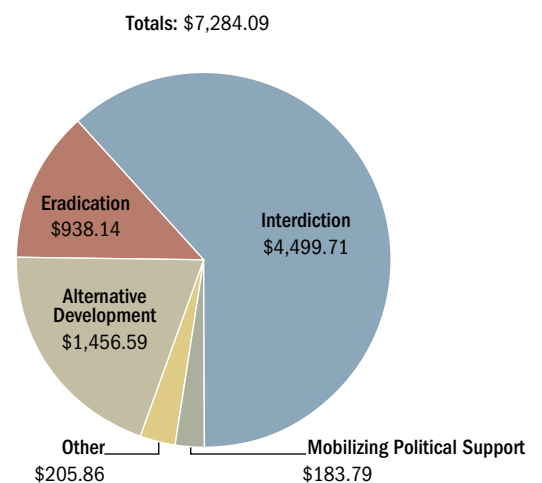


Note: Of the \$452.5 million DEA allocated for counterdrug efforts in Afghanistan, \$209 million was transferred to DEA from the State Department's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs.

Source: SIGAR analysis of budget data by year of allocation and strand of effort based on agency data calls, budget documentation, and correspondence.

FIGURE 2

U.S. COUNTERNARCOTICS FUNDING ALLOCATIONS BY STRAND, 2002-2017 (\$ MILLIONS)



Note: Mobilizing Political Support includes funding for the Good Performers Initiative, institution building, and public information. "Other" includes funding for (1) demand reduction programs (\$110 million) and (2) programs for which SIGAR does not have adequate funding information to categorize by strand (\$96 million).

Source: SIGAR analysis of budget data by year of allocation and strand of effort based on agency data calls, budget documentation, and correspondence.

Analyzing Total Funding for Counternarcotics

As shown in SIGAR's October 2017 *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, from FY 2002 through FY 2017, U.S. government support for counternarcotics-related efforts in Afghanistan totaled approximately \$8.62 billion.¹⁰² The analysis in this lessons learned report focuses on approximately \$7.28 billion of that total appropriated via a counternarcotics funding line or obligated to a program with a substantial counternarcotics focus. The analysis excludes \$1.34 billion for programs that included a counternarcotics component—such as the \$1.31 billion from the Afghan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) that was primarily used to purchase aviation assets for the Afghan Special Mission Wing (SMW).¹⁰³

Originally part of the Afghan Ministry of Interior, the SMW—supported by ASFF and DOD's Drug Interdiction and Counter-Drug Activities Fund (DOD CN)—was created to provide air support to drug interdiction and counterterrorism (CT) missions. While it still conducts both missions, the SMW's focus has evolved. It is now a component of the Ministry of Defense and most of its missions are CT operations.¹⁰⁴ In the last quarter of 2017, for example, the SMW flew 316 sorties: 92 percent were CT operations and 8 percent were counternarcotics operations.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, while the SMW is discussed in this report, the \$1.31 billion in ASFF funding—which included the purchase of aircraft and mission-related equipment—is not part of the report's analysis. At the same time, however, funds that were explicitly appropriated to the DOD CN Fund and obligated for the SMW are included in the \$7.28 billion analyzed in this report.

Finally, this report's analysis does not include funding for other development assistance efforts that may have affected counternarcotics objectives, but was not specifically intended or allocated to do so.

Interdiction and Counterdrug Law Enforcement

Interdictions to destroy drug-processing labs, seize illegal narcotics, and arrest and prosecute those who traffic in them, as well as trace, freeze, or confiscate their proceeds, are the primary tools employed by the United States in its drug control efforts around the world. In Afghanistan, these activities were core components of the U.S. effort to counter the narcotics trade and were paired with significant work to build the capacity of Afghan institutions to carry out their own interdiction efforts.

Globally, the seizure of illegal drugs and the arrest of those trafficking them in order to reduce supply are typically the most immediate goals of interdiction operations, but they are far from the only ones. Interdiction efforts also provide intelligence that contributes to additional seizures, arrests, and prosecutions that are intended to disrupt and dismantle international drug trafficking organizations.



A large cache of weapons and drugs found in Daykundi Province. (Resolute Support photo)

Although interdiction is primarily a law enforcement activity, military forces often conduct interdiction operations in support of law enforcement. State's program guidance on foreign assistance in interdiction efforts defines such assistance as helping countries "to prevent, interrupt, capture, or eliminate illegal drug production, movement or trafficking activities."¹⁰⁶ This assistance can also include technical, legal, and policy assistance, as well as the provision of transportation, material assistance, and personnel support.¹⁰⁷

Although U.S. government policy includes a comprehensive view of interdiction that encompasses a broad set of law enforcement interventions, as indicated above, this was not always reflected in counternarcotics initiatives on the ground in Afghanistan. Interdiction has the greatest impact when senior-level traffickers, particularly corrupt government officials involved in the drug trade, are arrested and prosecuted. Unfortunately, however, the Afghan judicial system has developed slowly and faced pervasive corruption. Successful cases against high-value targets have been relatively rare.¹⁰⁸

While a number of U.S. government entities have counterdrug responsibilities globally, the three primary agencies involved in counternarcotics law enforcement are State, DOD, and DEA. State is "responsible for coordinating all international drug control programs implemented by the U.S. government" and, within State, INL is the primary entity responsible for formulating and implementing international narcotics control policies.¹⁰⁹ Within a host nation, the U.S. chief of mission, typically the U.S. ambassador, has ultimate

responsibility for all U.S. counterdrug activities that take place in that country and strives to ensure all U.S. agencies are working toward common goals. DEA is the lead agency for counterdrug law enforcement and assisting counternarcotics intelligence efforts in foreign countries.¹¹⁰ Though prohibited by U.S. law from taking an active part in arrests in other nations, DEA conducts bilateral investigations, capacity-building operations, and intelligence gathering, and coordinates with foreign law enforcement agencies to combat the drug trade.¹¹¹ Finally, DOD serves as the lead agency for the detection and monitoring of illegal drug movements into the United States, as well as collecting, analyzing, and sharing intelligence on illegal drugs.¹¹² U.S. military commanders maintain command of military forces involved in international drug control activities.¹¹³ In Afghanistan specifically, through these three agencies, the U.S. government allocated more than \$4.49 billion for interdiction and counternarcotics law enforcement activities between 2002 and the end of fiscal year 2017.¹¹⁴

Eradication

Eradication is the physical destruction of a standing crop; it is a standard component of INL's counternarcotics efforts overseas.¹¹⁵ Eradication in Afghanistan was typically justified as (1) destroying some of the poppy crop, thereby reducing the amount of opiates available for distribution, sale, and final consumption; (2) extending the writ of the Afghan state into rural areas where the government traditionally had little presence; and (3) changing the risk-benefit calculus for farmers while deterring planting in future seasons.¹¹⁶

While the amount of money allocated to eradication and the nature of the eradication strategy changed over time, crop destruction was an important



Afghan police use sticks to eradicate a poppy field near the city of Qalat, Zabul Province. (Resolute Support photo by 1st Lt. Brian Wagner)

element of the U.S. government's counternarcotics strategy—and was, by far, the most controversial element. Two factors, in particular, were especially contentious: (1) targeting, or the conditions under which eradication would be undertaken and where such operations would be directed, and (2) method, how crop destruction would be carried out, most notably whether herbicides should be used. Both factors generated major disagreements within the U.S. government, as well as between the U.S. government, the Afghan government, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the UK government, and other coalition allies. (See pages 81–105.)

U.S. eradication efforts were led by INL, which controlled the bulk of eradication-related funding and designed the programs to carry out the effort. Between 2002 and 2017, the U.S. government allocated approximately \$938 million for eradication in Afghanistan, including all aviation support to INL's Air Wing prior to fiscal year 2010, as well as \$294.6 million for the Poppy Eradication Force, \$9.9 million for the Governor-Led Eradication (GLE) program, and \$13 million for UNODC reporting and research that included eradication verification.¹¹⁷

Alternative Development

Alternative development refers to aid projects that explicitly aimed to reduce poppy cultivation and promote “viable economic alternatives to poppy cultivation,” especially in rural areas.¹¹⁸ USAID was the lead U.S. agency for implementing alternative development projects. The agency's most active period of engagement on counternarcotics was between 2005 and 2008, when 75 percent of its total expenditures on agriculture projects in Afghanistan was categorized as alternative development.¹¹⁹ After 2009, although USAID continued to allocate funding to alternative development, its agriculture programs largely shifted to a counterinsurgency (COIN) and stabilization focus.¹²⁰

Between 2002 and 2017 the U.S. government allocated \$1.46 billion for alternative development programs.¹²¹ However, in practice these programs were not all designed to reduce economic dependence on opium poppy cultivation. Some projects were considered alternative development because they were being implemented in poppy-growing areas, but the projects were not necessarily geared toward counternarcotics goals.¹²² On the other hand, several alternative development programs specifically tied assistance to reductions in opium poppy cultivation; nevertheless, some of these programs did little to support farmers' transition out of poppy cultivation. A persistent shortcoming in U.S. alternative development efforts in Afghanistan was the failure to assess and understand the poppy economy, its impact on any rural development program, and the effect of a given intervention on rural households that were dependent on poppy.¹²³

Mobilizing Afghan Political Support and Building Institutions

The fourth strand of counternarcotics activity comprised a range of programs that sought to build support for counternarcotics efforts within the Afghan leadership and population. These programs typically focused on the national and provincial levels and aimed to build capacity and political will to reduce opium production. For example, the Good Performers Initiative attempted to incentivize change by offering rewards to both governors and local communities for reducing or abandoning opium production.¹²⁴ Also included within this strand were the public awareness programs that sought to increase a community's knowledge of the social costs and legal implications of involvement in the cultivation, production, trade, and consumption of illicit drugs.

State had the lead for activities within this strand, but was supported by both DOD and USAID. From 2002 to 2017, the U.S. government allocated approximately \$184 million to build Afghan institutions and political support to counter the drug trade.¹²⁵

KEY POINTS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE COUNTERNARCOTICS EFFORT IN AFGHANISTAN

This section provides an overview of issues that shaped counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan. A more detailed analysis of how they influenced particular policy positions is found throughout the report.

Lack of Security, Rule of Law, and Economic Opportunities Limited the Impact of Counternarcotics Efforts

Significant increases in Afghan poppy cultivation and drug production make clear that counternarcotics efforts have largely failed in Afghanistan. However, those increases are not solely due to failures of the counternarcotics effort; they also stem from lack of security, a poor economy, and failures of the wider reconstruction effort. Insecurity plagues large portions of the country, as reflected in the March 2018 U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) assessment that the Afghan government controlled or influenced only 56.3 percent of the country's districts.¹²⁶ Adding to the security challenge is Afghan government corruption. In 2017, a record high of 93 percent of Afghans surveyed by the Asia Foundation said "corruption is a problem in their daily lives," and 70 percent said it is a major problem.¹²⁷ Moreover, opportunities in the licit economy remain weak.

In other words, while the counternarcotics programs launched from 2002 to 2017 failed to curb the Afghan drug trade, the exponential rise in opium poppy cultivation and drug production is due to more than just these programs' failures. It is important to look beyond the narrow set of counternarcotics interventions and examine the context in which they were pursued.

Afghan Domestic Drug Use and Demand Reduction

A 2015 drug use survey estimated there were 2 to 2.5 million drug users in Afghanistan. Of these, 1.3 to 1.6 million—5 percent of the population—were opiate users.¹²⁸ Furthermore, the survey's toxicology tests indicate nearly one in three households tested positive for one or more drugs, and one-quarter of all rural households tested positive for opioid use.¹²⁹ This rate of drug usage is one of the highest in the world and has spillover effects in neighboring Iran and throughout Central Asia.¹³⁰ High rates of drug abuse adversely impact Afghanistan's public health and economic wellbeing. Other studies and reports consistently indicate high rates of drug use among the Afghan National Police (ANP), though estimates of the share of officers who test positive for drug use differ considerably.¹³¹ One study found that overall, nearly 10 percent of police officers tested positive for at least one drug. At the start of the study, however, when testing first began, the rate of drug use was observed to be greater than 20 percent.¹³² According to a 2010 report by GAO, officials at State reported that 12 to 41 percent of Afghan police recruits at Regional Training Centers tested positive for drugs.¹³³

The U.S. government has provided approximately \$110.3 million in support of demand reduction programs, including treatment programs for Afghans suffering from drug addiction.¹³⁴ Much of this funding was provided by INL to support the work of the Colombo Plan Drug Advisory Program (CPDAP), a regional intergovernmental program created in 1973 to build capacity for drug demand reduction in the Asia and Pacific region.¹³⁵ INL's support in Afghanistan funded dozens of substance abuse treatment centers, school-based prevention programs, outreach centers, women's shelters, a mobile exhibit, and a drug-use survey.¹³⁶ INL further supported the Colombo Plan's Universal Treatment Curriculum, a national-level training and certification system for drug-addiction counselors aimed at improving the delivery of addiction treatment in Afghanistan, as well as in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.¹³⁷ Additionally, INL funded several projects run by UNODC, including child and adolescent treatment centers across Afghanistan, and an assessment of drug dependence among Afghan children.¹³⁸

Assessments of the effectiveness of demand reduction programs suffer from a dearth of reliable data. The available evidence suggests, however, that access to treatment is severely lacking, with treatment services believed to reach only 3 to 6 percent of those in need.¹³⁹ At its height, INL supported treatment services for 28,000 patients per year.¹⁴⁰ While demand reduction is a critical part of an effective counternarcotics strategy, funding for such initiatives has been a small part of the broader counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan. (See figure 2 on page 19.)

SIGAR is initiating an audit of INL drug treatment programs in Afghanistan. The audit will focus on INL's efforts to expand Afghans' access to drug treatment programs and the transition of these programs to the Afghan government.

Strategies and Priorities Changed Over Time

The U.S. counternarcotics strategy was not static, but evolved over time. Priorities and funds shifted significantly between and within counternarcotics

activities from 2002 through 2017. The strategy's evolution was, in part, a function of the steep learning curve many officials faced and addressed as they became more aware of the realities of operating in Afghanistan. Shifts in strategy were also a consequence of key actors often fundamentally disagreeing on the importance of counternarcotics and the priority that should be given to its different activities. A change of staff in Washington and Kabul often led to a change in priorities and understanding of what was required and what would work, making long-term planning for the United States and its partners almost impossible. As one former Afghan minister commented:

How can you implement a national agenda like this? All the donors are doing different things. Many theories, many mentalities, many contextual misunderstandings. Even in the U.S. government, INL thinks one thing and USAID thinks something else. One person working in an international organization has one mentality; then the person leaves. A new person comes with different ideas and a different mentality. Some see counternarcotics as a law enforcement issue, others as development. Then what kind of development? Value chain? Others see counternarcotics as the provision of wheat seeds like in Helmand, then others talk of it being a problem of political commitment.¹⁴¹

An important factor in the evolution of the counternarcotics strategy was the U.S. interaction with the Afghan government and other Western donors, particularly the UK. How U.S. priorities and interests in counternarcotics aligned or conflicted with those of these key partners had an effect on the development and delivery of the overall strategy.

Long-Term Pursuits, Measured by Short-Term Effects

The success of counternarcotics efforts was typically measured by short-term effects. Eradication, for example, provided a short-term demonstrable action, destroying some of the opium crop each year. Yet, farmers' transition from an opium-dependent livelihood to one that relied on diversified cropping systems and income was typically a long-term pursuit.

Successful, sustained reductions in poppy cultivation also required a wider process of improved governance, security, and economic growth. Establishing the necessary legislative framework and judicial system to investigate, arrest, prosecute, and punish those responsible for processing and trading significant amounts of illegal drugs—some of whom had strong ties to government authorities—was also a long-term effort ill-suited for short-term metrics.

Elements Necessary for Effective Counternarcotics Results Were Often Outside the Control of Those with Counternarcotics Responsibilities

Many of the foundational elements necessary for enduring counternarcotics effects—such as a stable security environment, effective Afghan governing institutions, and better economic conditions—were beyond the control of those

COMPARISONS WITH PLAN COLOMBIA

Plan Colombia was a comprehensive program launched in 1999 to reduce illicit drug production and improve security in Colombia. The program was a state-building, counterinsurgency, and counterdrug initiative that included increased interdiction activities, aerial eradication, and alternative livelihoods projects for farmers.¹⁴²

Comparisons between the war on drugs in Colombia and the counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan have been common. Colombia and Afghanistan share the distinction of being the world's largest producers of illicit coca and opium, respectively.¹⁴³ Official narratives compared the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia's (FARC) taxation of coca and trafficking activities with growing reports of the Taliban doing the same for opium in Afghanistan, and often spoke of the need for a Plan Colombia-style response in Afghanistan.¹⁴⁴ The underlying logic of a "Plan Afghanistan" tied counternarcotics with counterinsurgency and, as with the FARC in Colombia, argued that widespread crop destruction would deprive the Taliban of its funding and undermine its claims that it could protect farmers from eradication of their crops. USAID produced a 2004 presentation, "Colombian Applications to Afghanistan," that detailed these comparisons and their potential pitfalls.¹⁴⁵ The first public call for a Plan Afghanistan was issued by Assistant Secretary of State for INL Robert Charles in November 2004.¹⁴⁶

Then in 2006, the intensification of the Taliban insurgency and a concurrent spike in poppy cultivation seized the attention of President George W. Bush and the NSC. Inspired by the success of eradication in Colombia, the administration increasingly pushed for similar efforts, particularly spraying, in Afghanistan. A number of high-level U.S. officials who had worked the counternarcotics portfolio in Colombia were transferred to Kabul or covered the Afghanistan counternarcotics program from Washington.¹⁴⁷ To encourage the Afghan government to adopt a Colombian-style counternarcotics policy, the administration supported exchanges between Afghan and Colombian officials. Colombian police were sent to Kabul to train the Afghan National Interdiction Unit of the Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNPA), and Afghan government officials traveled to Bogotá to learn more about the counternarcotics campaign in Colombia.¹⁴⁸

For some U.S. officials, the comparisons between the two countries were overplayed. They cited the lack of political commitment by the Afghan government, especially President Hamid Karzai, and juxtaposed



Planes from Colombia's drug enforcement agency spray chemicals to kill coca plants in the mountains of Catatumbo, northeast of Bogotá. (AFP photo by Marcelo Salinas)

it against the Colombian authorities' and President Álvaro Uribe's greater ownership of counternarcotics policies.¹⁴⁹ As one former Afghan minister stated, attempting a Plan Afghanistan was "a total miscalculation on the part of the United States to implement a model that [has] worked in a functioning state, in a situation of a failed state."¹⁵⁰

There were far more differences between the two countries than similarities. Colombia was a middle-income country, while Afghanistan was one of the poorest countries in the world.¹⁵¹ Colombia was able to contribute significant funding to counterdrug efforts on a scale Afghanistan could not match. In fact, the U.S. government's contribution of \$10 billion dollars to Plan Colombia from 2000 through 2016 represented only 5 percent of Colombia's total expenditure on the plan.¹⁵² The coca economy also made up a much smaller share of Colombia's gross domestic product compared to opium in Afghanistan.¹⁵³ Furthermore, Colombia's government institutions, particularly its state security apparatus, were well established. In Afghanistan, many state institutions had to be built from scratch starting in 2002.

It is also important to note the structural differences between the U.S. engagement in Colombia and Afghanistan. As a former senior DOD official involved in the Colombian counterdrug effort noted, U.S. military forces worked under the direction of the State Department while operating in Colombia.¹⁵⁴ In Afghanistan, the U.S. military was in the lead, deciding what was to be included in the military campaign and what was not. To senior military leadership, especially in the early years of reconstruction, drugs were largely a peripheral issue.¹⁵⁵

Finally, unlike Colombia, the Afghanistan campaign had a multilateral component. In Afghanistan, the support of allies was critical to the mission, but also led to donors acting at cross-purposes, created duplication of efforts, and impeded consensus. Moreover, the designation of the UK as the lead nation for counternarcotics efforts had no parallel in Colombia, where the United States was the only country providing significant counternarcotics assistance.

with the responsibilities for achieving counternarcotics goals, for example, INL and DEA. DOD and parts of the intelligence community had considerably more resources and influence over policies that could affect security and governance, but had no direct responsibility for achieving drug-control targets.

Moreover, some security interventions delivered counternarcotics effects but were not explicitly designed to do so and did not draw upon counternarcotics funding. A notable example of this was the incursion of almost 15,000 U.S. Marines and Afghan security forces into Helmand's Marjah district in February 2010, which contributed to dramatic reductions in levels of opium poppy cultivation the following year.¹⁵⁶

Interventions Were Inaccurately Described, Categorized, and Attributed

Over the course of the reconstruction effort, many programs were labeled as counternarcotics to obtain funding or so individuals and agencies could be seen as engaging with a policy priority. Some of these programs were not actually designed to address the production and trade of illicit drugs, despite the counternarcotics label and the funding they drew upon. For example, some rural development programs that received funding under the rubric of alternative development ignored opium poppy cultivation during design and implementation, and some inadvertently facilitated an increase in opium production over time.¹⁵⁷

Counternarcotics efforts had to compete for funds and resources, particularly military support, with other established priorities, including those of COIN and counterterrorism (CT). In order to gain policy prominence for counternarcotics, as well as funding and support, agencies responsible for counternarcotics often linked drug-control objectives to COIN, CT, and other DOD priorities. This successfully garnered more resources, but at times resulted in counternarcotics objectives becoming secondary to or poorly integrated with those broader initiatives.

Problems with Metrics and Performance Measurement

For senior U.S. policymakers, levels of poppy cultivation came to not only describe the scale of the drug problem in Afghanistan, but also the progress toward counternarcotics and state-building objectives at the national and provincial level.¹⁵⁸ While cultivation was the primary metric used to judge the success of U.S. counternarcotics efforts, it was not the only one. Levels of opium production and related measures, such as the scale of crop destruction and the number of poppy-free provinces, were also considered. These statistics were often cited as evidence of counternarcotics successes or failures, and were used to support particular policy arguments.¹⁵⁹

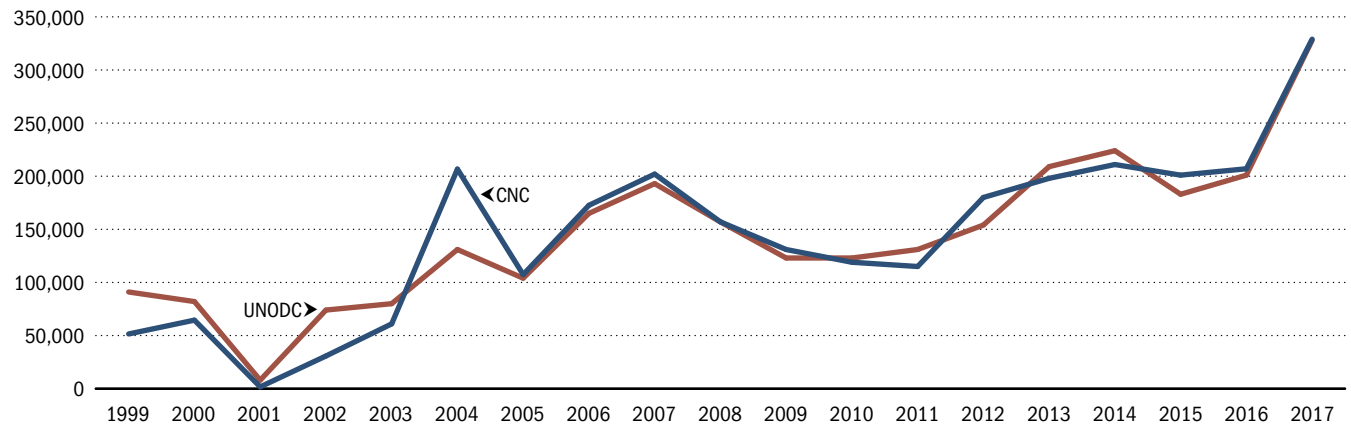
Although poppy cultivation levels served as the default measurement for counterdrug efforts, this metric was not necessarily the best indicator for gauging progress on U.S. priorities. While the 2007 U.S. counternarcotics strategy recognized “the Afghan opium trade is much more than a drug problem” and “Afghanistan’s drug money weakens key institutions and strengthens the Taliban,” reporting requirements did not always measure progress against these aspects of the problem.¹⁶⁰ For many senior policymakers, and particularly members of Congress, the primary indicator of success or failure was cultivation, when a more comprehensive set of indicators would have included metrics such as denial of funding to the insurgency or the arrest of corrupt officials involved in the trade. As former senior advisor to the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAP) Dr. Barnett Rubin wrote, “The urgent security interest of the United States in the drug trade in Afghanistan is NOT the quantity of drugs produced, but the amount of money from the industry that supports insurgency/terrorism and government corruption.”¹⁶¹ This misalignment between strategic priorities and reporting metrics was even more problematic when combined with the inaccuracies that plagued poppy cultivation estimates.

Data Sources

Two organizations provided the official data on national and subnational poppy cultivation trends and tracked this information over time. UNODC’s annual opium poppy survey was viewed by many as the most credible source of data on levels of poppy cultivation and was commonly cited. The second data source was the annual estimate of the Central Intelligence Agency’s Crime and Narcotics Center (CNC). CNC based its estimate on a well-established survey that drew upon high-resolution imagery over many years.¹⁶² The UNODC survey did not begin using satellite imagery to assess cultivation until 2002—and even since then, it has used a mix of methods, including a “sampling approach” of high-resolution imagery for major opium poppy-producing provinces and, for those provinces UNODC considered minor producers, a ground-based survey, followed by a “targeted approach” to imagery collection.¹⁶³

In the early years of reconstruction, there were dramatic differences between the UNODC and CNC estimates of poppy cultivation. In 2002, UNODC reported around 74,000 hectares of poppy cultivation nationwide, while CNC estimated approximately 31,000 hectares.¹⁶⁴ (See figure 3.) In 2004, UNODC reported 131,000 hectares, while CNC estimated 206,700 hectares of cultivation.¹⁶⁵ The discrepancy between the two surveys was so great that the UK, in its capacity as lead nation for counternarcotics, hired a third-party expert to gain better insights into different survey methodologies and to support the improvement of the UNODC survey.¹⁶⁶ It was not just an issue of the UN survey’s credibility, but, as one official noted, “There was recognition that there needed to be better

FIGURE 3

AFGHANISTAN TOTAL POPPY CULTIVATION ESTIMATES, 1999–2017 (HECTARES)

Source: UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017: Cultivation and Production*, November 2017, p. 13; CNC, data provided to SIGAR, October 2015, March 2017, and March 2018.

understanding of differences, for benchmarking and measuring counternarcotics efforts.”¹⁶⁷ While the UK’s investments and increased cooperation between UNODC and CNC led to an alignment of national-level poppy estimates, discrepancies continued at the provincial level.¹⁶⁸ (See figure 4).

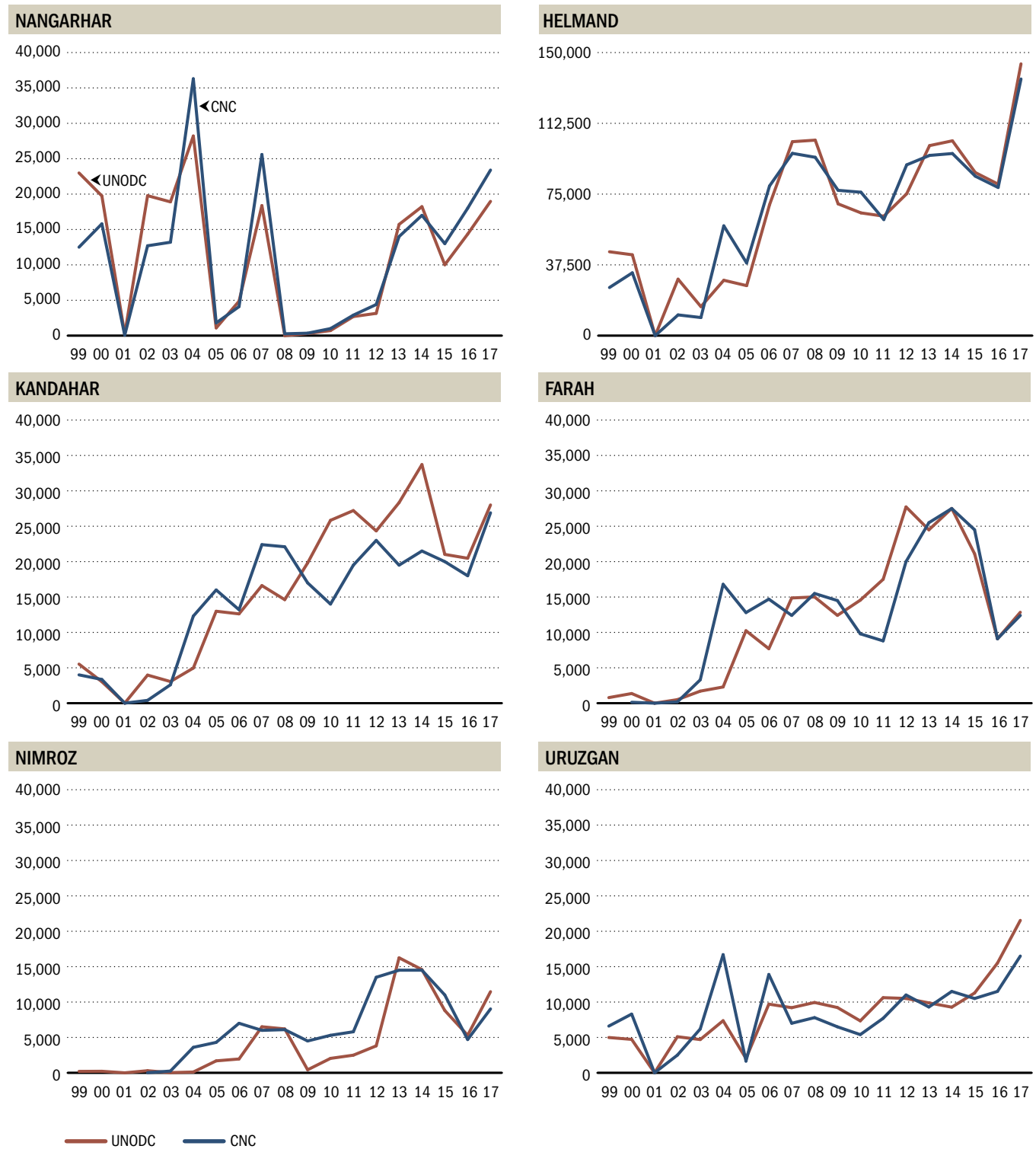
Data on Cultivation and Eradication

The lack of accurate data posed significant problems when poor data was used to judge policy options and the performance of provincial governors, as was the case with the Good Performers Initiative. Nonetheless, the problems with data were frequently glossed over in discussions with senior U.S. officials, and a level of certainty was attributed to the estimates that did not reflect reality.¹⁶⁹ A former senior NSC official referred to the UN report as being “really instrumental in influencing policy: It was the core input into these policy conversations;” yet, the report was widely acknowledged to be flawed.¹⁷⁰

A notable example of UNODC findings being used to support a particular policy position can be seen in what came to be known as the “credible threat” doctrine. This concept assumed it was necessary to destroy 25 percent of the standing poppy crop each year to deter future planting, and was attributed to UNODC.¹⁷¹ Those closely involved in eradication at the time questioned the figure’s veracity, as well as the underlying assumption that eradicating a certain fraction of the crop would deter planting. According to a former eradication contractor, one UNODC staff member admitted it was “an arbitrary number.”¹⁷² One former UK government contractor complained, “UNODC made it up. It was nonsense.”¹⁷³ A former UNODC official with knowledge of the Afghanistan program reported he had “no idea where credible threat came from.”¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the 25 percent

FIGURE 4

TOTAL POPPY CULTIVATION ESTIMATES BY PROVINCE, 1999–2017 (HECTARES)



Source: UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003: Cultivation and Production*, October 2003, pp. 85–88; UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2012: Cultivation and Production*, May 2013, p. 92; UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017: Cultivation and Production*, November 2017, p. 16; CNC, data provided to SIGAR, October 2015, March 2017, and March 2018.

number formed the backbone of the argument that greater levels of crop destruction were required, including in the push for spraying.¹⁷⁵

Another example of UNODC rhetoric used to support policy positions was the 2007 UNODC poppy survey report, in which UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa claimed recent expansion in poppy cultivation was largely confined to well-off Afghan provinces and declared “opium cultivation in Afghanistan is no longer associated with poverty.”¹⁷⁶ The U.S. Coordinator for Counternarcotics and Justice Reform in Afghanistan, Ambassador Thomas Schweich, used this statement to press for eradication, particularly aerial spraying, arguing eradication would not harm poor farmers because it was wealthy farmers who were growing opium poppy.¹⁷⁷ Costa also advocated spraying, at first privately to U.S. government representatives and then publicly at a NATO meeting.¹⁷⁸ The following year, Costa’s statement on the absence of a relationship between poppy and poverty was challenged by a UNODC evaluation of the poppy survey and proven to be uninformed by independent research.¹⁷⁹

In addition to concerns with the estimates of poppy cultivation, estimates of the amount of opium poppy crop destroyed were perhaps more political and typically less accurate. Much of the eradication data that was regarded as a critical measure of counternarcotics success or failure was, in fact, self-reported during the initial years of the reconstruction effort. For example, the hectareage reported as eradicated in 2002 and 2003 by the UK and the Afghan Transitional Authority was self-reported and unverified.¹⁸⁰ A former UK government contractor described eradication reporting that, when compared to imagery analysis, proved to be grossly exaggerated.¹⁸¹ The U.S.-funded Poppy Eradication Force (PEF) also self-reported on the eradication it conducted.¹⁸²

It was not until 2005 that UNODC attempted to verify the numbers reported by the Afghan government under the GLE campaign.¹⁸³ Imagery collection and analysis by the UK proved the scale of the over-reporting in 2006 and 2007, contributing to friction between Kabul and London, as well as between INL and the UK’s Afghan drugs team.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, UNODC’s reluctance to engage in eradication verification—out of fear its surveyors would be seen as law enforcement personnel rather than neutral data collectors, thereby undermining the annual poppy survey—meant it was not until 2008 that there was greater confidence in the eradication estimates provided by the UN and the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN).¹⁸⁵

Despite concerns regarding the overall estimates of poppy cultivation and the veracity of the eradication data, these numbers were regularly cited in the media and official documents without the necessary caveats. U.S. officials often overlooked or were misinformed about the problems of eradication verification.

Even testimony to Congress rarely reflected doubts about the accuracy of the statistics that were so often used to judge the Afghan drug problem and the counternarcotics response.¹⁸⁶

Poor Data Regarding Links between Poppy and Insurgents

The contribution of the Afghan opium trade to insurgent finances was routinely cited as a primary reason for increased counternarcotics efforts. This argument was the foundation for more widespread crop destruction: Destroy the crop and destroy the insurgency's primary source of funds.¹⁸⁷ However, the basis of this claim was disputed, and there were methodological problems with the data on which it was based.¹⁸⁸ For example, U.S. officials sometimes assumed farmers paid 10 percent of their crop to the Taliban as *ushr*, a generic term for tax in Afghanistan. Yet in many rural areas, such payments might be in cash or in kind; they might be a percentage of the final crop, a fixed amount per household or per unit of land, or simply what a farmer can afford. If a farmer says he pays *ushr* to the Taliban, it cannot be assumed that he pays 10 percent of his crop.¹⁸⁹

Assessments as to the amount of money the insurgency received from narcotics, as well as the relationship between the drug trade and the insurgency and terrorist groups, varied significantly over the course of the reconstruction effort. In October 2001, INL's Director of the Office of Asia, Africa, Europe, and Newly Independent States, William Bach, testified that, "While we do not have clear evidence directly linking drug traffickers and terrorists in Afghanistan, Taliban responsibility is obvious, particularly given its de facto control over 90 percent of the country."¹⁹⁰ On the previous day, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair stated that the Taliban and al-Qaeda "jointly exploit the Afghan drugs trade."¹⁹¹ In February 2004, DEA Administrator Karen Tandy stated that, in DEA's view, "We do not have evidence capable of sustaining an indictment of direct links between terrorism and narcotics trafficking groups within Afghanistan."¹⁹²

In the early reconstruction years, there were also debates within DOD about the linkages between the insurgency and narcotics, debates which some have asserted were due to DOD's reluctance to assume a larger counternarcotics role. One former DOD official stated the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) believed poppy was funding the insurgency, but there was resistance to this idea at U.S. Central Command because it would lead to deeper military involvement in counternarcotics.¹⁹³

By 2007, counternarcotics-related reports made more explicit links between the resurgent insurgency, rising levels of drug-crop cultivation, and the funding the Taliban received from the crop.¹⁹⁴ The commander of ISAF, General Dan McNeill, publicly stated, "When I see a poppy field, I see it turning into money and then into IEDs [improvised explosive devices], AKs [assault rifles], and

RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades].”¹⁹⁵ As journalist Steve Coll recounted, the intensification of the insurgency in 2006 and a concurrent spike in poppy cultivation seized the attention of some officials in Washington, who drew parallels between the Taliban’s and the Colombian FARC’s reliance on drug revenues. (See pages 27–28.) But, these discussions occurred at the same time “a fierce argument erupted among U.S. intelligence agencies about whether opium and heroin were, in fact, a significant aspect of the Taliban’s insurgency.”¹⁹⁶

Upon his appointment as SRAP in 2009, however, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke moved away from eradication; a CIA study reportedly said the Taliban got most of its money from illegal taxation and contributions from Pakistan and Persian Gulf nations, rather than drugs.¹⁹⁷ The UN Security Council’s Taliban Sanctions Monitoring Team reported that Afghan officials estimated Taliban profits from the drug trade were around \$100 million in 2011–2012, or one-quarter of their estimated \$400 million income for that year.¹⁹⁸ In 2016, however, Resolute Support and USFOR-A commander General John Nicholson said that approximately 60 percent of Taliban funding came from the drug trade.¹⁹⁹

The lack of consensus on the relationship between the drug trade and the insurgency influenced U.S. counterdrug policies. Kirk Meyer, the director from 2008 to 2011 of the Afghan Threat Finance Cell, an interagency, Kabul-based unit formed to disrupt financial networks related to terrorism, the Taliban, narcotics trafficking, and corruption, stated, “The drug trade was really bad, but I personally never believed it was as big a funding source for the insurgency as a lot of people thought.”²⁰⁰ At the same time, other informed voices argued that opium was the critical cash source for the insurgency. In 2018, DOD pointed out that given the increase in levels of cultivation and production in recent years, and the lucrative nature of the narcotics trade, “it’s plausible the Taliban now place greater emphasis on narcotics as a primary source of revenue.”²⁰¹ The range of opinion illustrates not only the challenges of accurately estimating the drug trade’s impact on insurgent financing, but also how policy has been informed by different and at times competing estimates.



CHAPTER 2

A CHRONOLOGY OF COUNTERNARCOTICS OVER THE AFGHAN RECONSTRUCTION EFFORT

DOD photo

Afghanistan produces 90 percent of the world's illicit opium; it is the country's largest export and a mainstay of the rural economy. The corruption associated with opium's illegal trade permeates many levels of the Afghan government. Yet, counternarcotics was of necessity only one of many priorities for the U.S. reconstruction effort in Afghanistan. That effort comprised a number of different agencies, each with its own view of what was important, its own mandate and budget, and its own reporting lines to Congress and the White House. This was often a competitive environment, where agencies battled for resources to pursue what were, or were often perceived to be, conflicting objectives and programs.

Within the context of the multilateral counternarcotics mission, U.S. government agencies, coalition partners, and Afghan authorities struggled to reach consensus. Opinions on the importance of counternarcotics often varied between partners. Even within the Afghan government, officials had significantly different views regarding what should be done.²⁰² Divisions were also apparent within the UK's efforts as lead nation for counternarcotics. In particular, the British military leadership was often firmly opposed to eradication, concerned it would "stir things up" in Helmand Province.²⁰³

Those responsible for counternarcotics fought for primacy throughout the reconstruction effort. Sometimes, counternarcotics concerns reached the highest levels of the U.S. government; other times, they barely registered. As one expert noted, the driving factor in attracting senior policymakers' attention was typically "an increase in the level of cultivation. The rise in this metric, often accompanied by a narrative of the failure of the state-building project in Afghanistan, generated the political pressure to respond, and to respond quickly, with efforts that might lead to a dramatic reduction in opium production almost regardless of whether these reductions would endure."²⁰⁴

STARTING FROM NOTHING: 2002–2003

The initial two years of counternarcotics activities in Afghanistan were characterized by limited attention from the U.S. government and a nonexistent infrastructure to deal with drug production and trafficking. There were few Afghan government institutions or Western donors with which to engage, and this institutional vacuum, coupled with low levels of funding, meant that coordination was largely improvised in the field, without clear guidance. There was also a tendency to create new, and what would often become parallel, structures.

During these early years, poppy cultivation was rising rapidly, a rebound effect of the Taliban's nationwide poppy ban in 2000. The Taliban used a combination of coercion and the promise of future development assistance to implement and enforce the ban. In August 2001, it was reported that cultivation had decreased from 82,000 hectares to 8,000 hectares between 2000 and 2001.²⁰⁵ Despite the ban's dramatic short-term success, many in the international community believed the results would be short-lived.²⁰⁶ Poppy farmers and sharecroppers who had received loans prior to the ban were subsequently unable to pay off their debts with opium.²⁰⁷ Traffickers and money-lenders monetized the debt according to opium's rising market value, which had increased from around \$100 per kilogram in September 2000 to \$500 in July 2001.²⁰⁸ The Taliban provided no alternative income to mitigate the economic impact and loss of livelihood farmers experienced because of the ban.²⁰⁹ According to Afghanistan scholar and former SRAP advisor Barnett Rubin, "The heavy debt of the peasantry was one of the principal factors that led to the resurgence of opium cultivation after the start of the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan."²¹⁰ By 2003, cultivation had spread to 28 provinces, up from 24 in 2002.²¹¹

The UK as Lead Nation for Counternarcotics

Following the rout of the Taliban regime in late 2001, NATO allies and the Afghan Interim Administration divided up tasks for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. The April 2002 Group of Eight (G8) Security Sector Reform (SSR)

framework gave the UK the role as lead nation for counternarcotics. Having assumed the lead for developing the Afghan National Army (ANA), the U.S. government was broadly supportive of the UK's assumption of the counternarcotics role.²¹² INL supported the UK lead, agreeing that reconstruction and development were top priorities and that counternarcotics should be integrated into them, with “eradication as a minor piece” of the effort.²¹³ Further, the UK's leadership helped to address widespread donor concerns over the capacity of UNODC, which had been leading counterdrug efforts in Afghanistan up to that point.²¹⁴

In spring 2002, the UK implemented a compensated eradication program.²¹⁵ The program, Operation Drown, was designed to offer a one-time payment of \$350 per *jerib* (1/5 of a hectare or almost 1/2 acre) to farmers whose crop was destroyed during the operation.²¹⁶ While successful in the short-term, it was perceived by many as setting the wrong tone.²¹⁷ Operation Drown focused on demonstrable, short-term action to reduce cultivation levels, but gave little thought to long-term strategy or how these reductions could be sustained. Additionally, allegations of corruption and over-reporting undermined the program.²¹⁸

The UK compounded the errors of compensated eradication by embracing unrealistic goals and timeframes. The UK pledged to reduce poppy cultivation by 70 percent in five years and eliminate the crop altogether in ten years.²¹⁹ This target was later incorporated into the Afghan government's first National Drug Strategy.²²⁰

U.S. Reluctance to Engage on Counternarcotics

Within the U.S. government, there was little desire to engage on counternarcotics during this period.²²¹ For example, INL did not have a Foreign Service Officer in Kabul until the spring of 2003.²²² U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad referred to “purposely downplay[ing] counternarcotics” because of his view that many of the reconstruction projects already planned would “help reduce opium production.”²²³ Recognizing the UK's lead, Khalilzad also “did not want to diminish the UK's responsibility to act.”²²⁴

DOD was unwilling to be involved in counternarcotics efforts at this point, believing counternarcotics interfered with DOD's mandate to defeat the Taliban and al-Qaeda.²²⁵ A former senior DOD official recounted, “DOD fundamentally didn't understand what getting involved in counternarcotics entailed. Everyone was focusing on traditional roles. They would only talk to those in their battlespace. From a DOD perspective, it was tactical, and about finding and killing al-Qaeda.”²²⁶ Several officials interviewed by SIGAR recalled

that Lieutenant General David Barno, the commander of Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan, was reluctant to pursue counternarcotics efforts.²²⁷ Barno himself recalled “an infinite number of different things that people wanted us [the coalition military] to do” in 2004, and his decision to take “any direct military role in counternarcotics right off the plate, because I thought that would be a distraction for us in 2004, especially with the elections.” The main effort Barno assigned to military units was to “set conditions for a successful Afghan presidential election” in 2005.²²⁸

The CIA adopted a similar position; it did not want to be distracted by counternarcotics.²²⁹ The CIA instead prioritized its relationships with significant traffickers, such as Haji Bashir Noorzai and Haji Juma Khan.²³⁰

Institution Building and Strand Development

Institution building and program delivery got off to a slow start during this period. The UK established the Counter Narcotics Directorate (CND) in Kabul. It was placed under the Afghan National Security Council and had responsibilities for strategy, coordination, and monitoring. The UK also wrote a National Drug Control Strategy, which stated that implementation was the responsibility of the line ministries, including the Ministry of Interior (MOI), the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL), and the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH).²³¹

Factionalism within the Afghanistan Interim Administration meant that, despite a presidential order, the CND operated in parallel with the preexisting State High Commission for Drug Control for nine months before absorbing the High Commission’s functions and staff.²³² (See figure 5.) Some in the new Afghan government also showed little understanding of the complexity of counternarcotics and had unrealistic expectations of what could be achieved. As a senior UK official commented, “[Chairman of the Interim Administration] Karzai saw the issue as a simple enforcement issue, easily fixed.”²³³

Initial progress within the counternarcotics effort was slow, and what was achieved was largely a function of coordination by individuals on the ground. The law enforcement effort, in particular, had almost no Afghan institutions or resources with which to partner. A former senior UN adviser with considerable experience in Afghanistan described what he found at the time, noting, “Counternarcotics was a small department inside the Department of Smuggling inside general policing. It had two people serving, when there should have been eight. The provinces in April 2002 were even more soul-destroying. Many of the police stations were gutted; there was nothing in many of the provinces at all.”²³⁴ A former official of the UK’s revenue and customs authority described

Kabul-based officers in the CNPA in April 2002 as having “no equipment, no radios, and [using] their own vehicles.”²³⁵ DEA reopened its country office in Kabul in February 2003, but was reluctant to operate outside of Kabul because of security concerns and the fact that Afghan partner units did not yet exist. (See figure 5.) Instead, DEA focused on intelligence gathering and interdicting Afghan drugs as they transited through neighboring countries.²³⁶

Each lead nation assigned under the SSR framework brought different skills, institutions, and budgets to bear. Despite the interdependence of the SSR sectors, progress varied widely across them. For example, the UK’s efforts as the counternarcotics lead were closely intertwined with Germany’s efforts to reform the ANP and Italy’s role as the lead nation for judicial reform.

Cooperation between UNODC, the UK, the German law enforcement community, and Minister of the Interior Ali Ahmad Jalali led to the establishment and training of the CNPA in both Kabul and the provinces. The CNPA was intended to serve as a special force within the ANP, responsible for counternarcotics operations throughout the country.²³⁷ While offices, equipment, and training courses were provided, resources were still thin on the ground, and ill-conceived plans led to the provision of equipment without covering recurrent maintenance costs. This inability to fund maintenance and consumables “undermined the nature of the support being provided.”²³⁸ In late 2003, CNPA did not have procedures in place to pay informants. They were, however, expected and encouraged to conduct investigations. Consequently, CNPA officers, particularly those in the provinces, found themselves having to pay informants and make deals using a portion of the opiates seized.²³⁹

The UK began to build a parallel counternarcotics force within the MOI called the Afghan Special Narcotics Force (ASNF), also known as Task Force-333 (TF-333, figure 5). This was a specialized paramilitary unit trained and equipped by the UK and also supported by the United States. The task force was charged with conducting raids and destroying heroin laboratories.²⁴⁰ TF-333 was modeled on the UK Special Forces and focused on “doing what you can do now and giving time for the rest of the counternarcotics pillars and effort to deliver.”²⁴¹ While TF-333 proved successful in destroying labs, it was not conceived as part of a long-term judicial sector development effort.²⁴² The unit’s focus on interdiction through raids and seizure operations resulted in tactical successes, but had a limited impact on the longer-term goal of dismantling and prosecuting drug-trafficking networks.

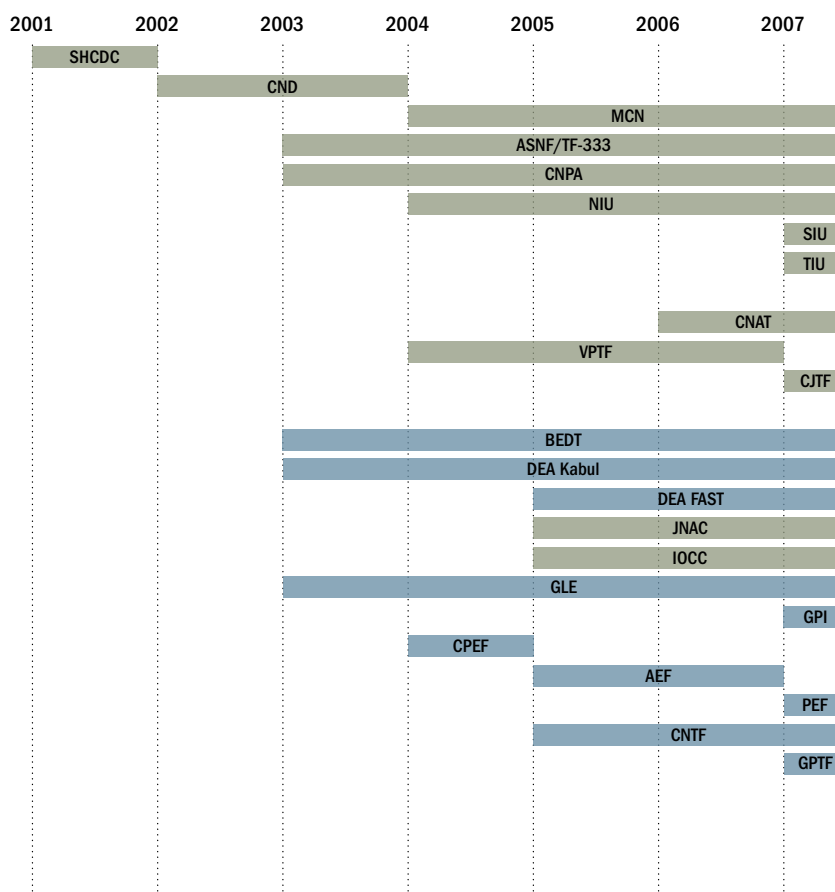
Similar to counternarcotics law enforcement efforts, rural development programs in poppy-growing areas were slow to get started. INL initially supported small-scale, alternative development projects implemented by NGOs

FIGURE 5

SELECT AFGHAN AND U.S./INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS AND INSTITUTIONS, 2001–2018

KEY & ABBREVIATIONS

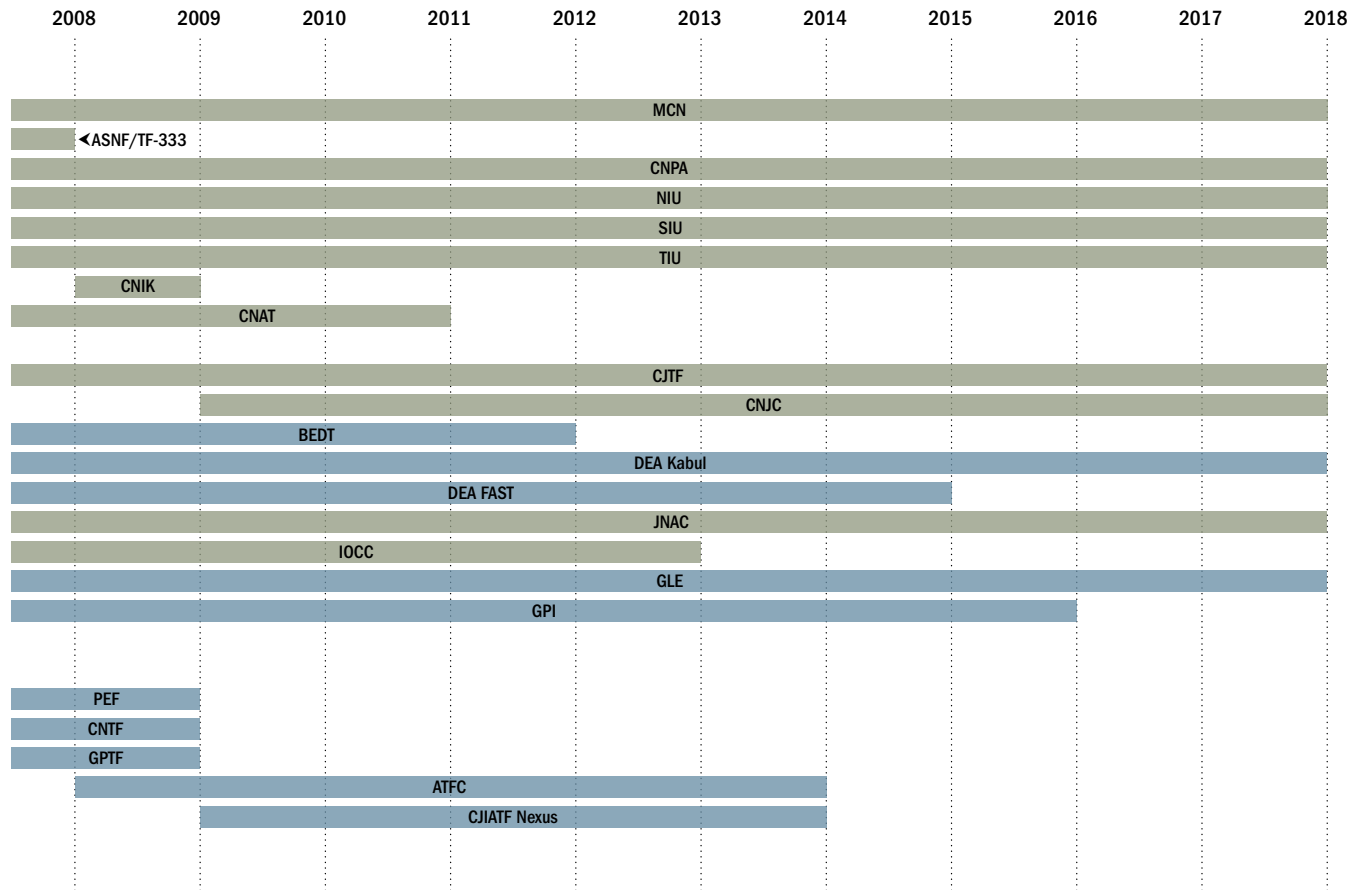
AFGHAN	
ASNF/TF-333:	Afghan Special Narcotics Force-Task Force-333
CND:	Counter Narcotics Directorate
CNIK:	Counter Narcotics Infantry Kandak
CNJC:	Counter Narcotics Justice Center
CNAT:	Counter Narcotics Advisory Team
CNPA:	Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan
CJTF:	Criminal Justice Task Force
MCN:	Ministry of Counter Narcotics
NIU:	National Interdiction Unit
SIU:	Sensitive Investigative Unit
SHCDC:	State High Commission for Drug Control
TIU:	Technical Investigative Unit
VPTF:	Vertical Prosecution Task Force
U.S./INTERNATIONAL	
AEF:	Afghan Eradication Force
ATFC:	Afghan Threat Finance Cell
BEDT:	British Embassy Drugs Team
CPEF:	Central Poppy Eradication Force
CJIATF:	Combined Joint Interagency Task Force
CNTF:	Counter Narcotics Trust Fund
DEA Kabul:	Drug Enforcement Administration Kabul
DEA FAST:	DEA Foreign-Deployed Advisory Support Team
GPI:	Good Performers Initiative
GPTF:	Good Performers Trust Fund
GLE:	Governor-Led Eradication
IOCC:	Interagency Operations Coordination Center
JNAC:	Joint Narcotics Analysis Centre
PEF:	Poppy Eradication Force



Note: The State High Commission for Drug Control preceded the U.S. and international invasion of Afghanistan. The Counter Narcotics Directorate (CND) became the Ministry of Counter Narcotics (MCN). TF-333 did not end in 2008, but rather was re-tasked to focus on counterterrorism in 2009. The Central Poppy Eradication Force (CPEF) was later renamed the Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) and then renamed the Poppy Eradication Force (PEF). The Vertical Prosecution Task Force (VPTF) was later renamed the Criminal Justice Task Force (CJTF). The last available record of the Counter Narcotics Infantry Kandak (CNIK) was in 2009. In 2014, MCN began implementing a revised Good Performers Initiative (GPI) II, but this program was phased out before it came into effect and GPI was discontinued.

Source: For the full list of sources, please see page 248.

in the south of the country, conditioned on reductions in poppy cultivation.²⁴³ However, USAID was reluctant to support these initiatives and was wary of an INL that “wanted in on the development game where financial resources were being directed. Moreover, USAID believed INL took a hardline approach to USAID’s relatively small-scale rural development schemes focused on addressing food insecurity and increasing food production.”²⁴⁴ Some in USAID had already raised concerns that making assistance conditional on reductions in poppy cultivation was “self-defeating” and did not want to be involved in what USAID leadership saw as a losing effort.²⁴⁵ As a result, USAID withdrew from early alternative development efforts, “happy to step out of it,” and “recused [itself] from the debate;” at the same time, USAID increased its support for programs focused on agricultural production.²⁴⁶ Even at this early stage, then,



senior USAID and INL leaders were operating with contradictory policies regarding alternative development and its place within the U.S. counterdrug strategy. According to a former senior USAID official, “USAID was not requested to direct resources to programs whose goal was alternative development, but did work in Helmand and Kandahar on agricultural production and marketing schemes.”²⁴⁷

In summer 2003, USAID launched its own \$150 million rural development effort, the Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program (RAMP). RAMP focused on irrigation rehabilitation and roads, without conditioning assistance on reductions in poppy cultivation.²⁴⁸ Similarly, several programs funded by other donors, including the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the European Union (EU), and the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization, did not include conditionality measures.²⁴⁹ (See pages 108–109 for a discussion of conditionality.)

At this time, many disparate counternarcotics activities were taking place. As one senior DOD official noted, “Everyone did their own thing, not thinking how it fit in with the larger effort. State was trying to eradicate, USAID was marginally trying to do livelihoods, and DEA was going after bad guys.”²⁵⁰ By the end of 2003, U.S. government officials and experts began to view this uncoordinated effort as ineffective and in need of significant changes.

The United States began to take a more dominant role in counternarcotics, far outspending the UK, which was still designated as the lead nation. U.S. officials had begun to lose patience with the SSR process.²⁵¹ As President Bush later recalled, “The multilateral approach to rebuilding, hailed by so many in the international community, was failing.” Bush further stated, “America had to take on more of the responsibility, even though we were about to undertake a major new commitment in Iraq as well.”²⁵² Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith argued that, “As lead nation in the counternarcotics effort, [the UK] failed to invest the necessary resources.”²⁵³

Robert Charles’ appointment as the head of INL in late 2003 contributed to a greater focus on counternarcotics within the reconstruction mission. Charles was one of the architects of Plan Colombia and, once at INL, pressed for a much more aggressive counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan, including aerial spraying.²⁵⁴ Charles looked to lead from the back, actively criticizing the UK in public and lobbying key members of Congress to support more demonstrable action.²⁵⁵

The late 2003 restructuring of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul by newly appointed Ambassador Khalilzad was part of the U.S. government’s reevaluation of the U.S. approach to reconstruction, including counternarcotics.²⁵⁶ Following a visit by John Walters, the director of the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), Ambassador Khalilzad appointed a “drug czar” specifically for Afghanistan, who would serve as the director of the Kabul Counter Narcotics Task Force. The director was tasked with coordinating the actions of U.S. agencies responsible for the counternarcotics effort.²⁵⁷ This led to resentment from INL, both in Kabul and in Washington.²⁵⁸ Subsequent INL leadership sought to undermine the director, arguing that the position should answer to INL leadership in Washington and not to the ambassador.²⁵⁹

COUNTERNARCOTICS AS A PRIORITY: 2004–2008

In 2004, a spike in poppy cultivation to 131,000 hectares garnered widespread U.S. media attention, and members of Congress called for more progress in wiping out that cultivation.²⁶⁰ This added to the momentum already building within the U.S. government for placing a greater emphasis on counternarcotics.

By 2006, the priority given to counternarcotics was not just a response to high levels of cultivation, but also a consequence of the prevailing view that the opium economy helped to fuel the insurgency. Counternarcotics became a source of tension between different U.S. government agencies, donor nations, ISAF, and the Afghan government. Disagreements began to emerge as the parties sought to balance elements of the counternarcotics effort, in particular crop eradication, with other strategic objectives, such as COIN and CT.

In 2005, INL's push for aerial spraying, to the exclusion of other counterdrug efforts, and its effort to get DOD more involved in counternarcotics became major points of division within the U.S. government. (See page 93.) At a congressional hearing, Assistant Secretary Charles lambasted the U.S. military for failing to target the opium trade and make crop destruction the principal objective.²⁶¹ As former DOD official Michael Waltz noted, "The U.S. strategy may have been holistic in design, but in execution one pillar quickly became the primary focus: eradication."²⁶²

Also in 2005, the U.S. Embassy in Kabul issued the first U.S. counternarcotics strategy for Afghanistan. (See table 3.) The strategy was shaped by Ambassador Khalilzad, who was described by an official at the embassy as "pragmatic; he believed in a balanced approach and recognized there was only so much that could be done, and that DOD and CIA would allow."²⁶³ Though it was not

TABLE 3

U.S. COUNTERNARCOTICS STRATEGIES AND OBJECTIVES FOR AFGHANISTAN

Strategy	Objectives
2005 U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy	The 2005 counternarcotics strategy introduced the five pillar plan: elimination or eradication, interdiction, justice reform, public information, and alternative livelihoods. The strategy underscored the importance of eradication, which had not been a major focus of preceding counternarcotics efforts.
2007 U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy	The 2007 counternarcotics strategy focused on improving implementation of the five pillars. The strategy outlined three major goals: 1. Dramatically increasing development assistance to incentivize licit development, while simultaneously amplifying the scope and intensity of both interdiction and eradication operations. 2. Coordinating counternarcotics and counterinsurgency planning and operations in a manner not previously accomplished, with a particular emphasis on integrating drug interdiction into the COIN mission. 3. Encouraging consistent, sustained political will for the counternarcotics effort among the Afghan government, U.S. allies, and international civilian and military organizations.
2010 U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy	The 2010 counternarcotics strategy focused on the expansion of Afghan government control and counternarcotics operations with a COIN nexus. Under the 2010 strategy, the United States stopped funding large-scale eradication operations, but continued to fund the Governor-Led Eradication effort. Two of the goals in this strategy were to: 1. Counter the link between narcotics and the insurgency. 2. Enhance and increase agricultural development and licit alternatives to poppy.
2012 U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy	The 2012 strategy maintained the U.S. commitment to support the Afghan National Drug Control Strategy. It took into account the reduction of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan and the then-pending transfer of security responsibilities from ISAF to the ANDSF. The strategy outlined two major goals: 1. Build the government's ability to be a self-sufficient force in reducing the drug trade, stabilizing the region, and improving the security situation. 2. Further weaken the link between insurgents and narcotics, specifically targeting the funds insurgents receive from the narcotics industry.

Source: GAO, *Afghanistan Drug Control: Strategy Evolving and Progress Reported*, GAO-10-291, March 2010, p. 10; State, *U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy*, August 2007, p. 2; SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, July 30, 2016, p. 119; State, *U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan*, March 2010, pp. 2, 7; SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, January 30, 2017, p. 188.

included in the 2005 strategy, Assistant Secretary Charles and INL continued to press for aerial spraying. According to an official involved, Charles’ pitch on counternarcotics was “structured so that it would sound strong and stand even without DOD. Khalilzad presented the 2005 strategy to the U.S. cabinet recognizing that DOD wouldn’t necessarily engage. The strategy went straight to President Bush and the conversation was from Kabul to the U.S. cabinet. Khalilzad also had three conversations on counternarcotics with Karzai.”²⁶⁴ While aerial spraying was ultimately rejected, consensus for a greater U.S. counternarcotics role, particularly in eradication, began to emerge. (See pages 97–100.)

The U.S. government increased its expenditures on counternarcotics during this period, including greater investments in poppy eradication. A major component of eradication was the Central Poppy Eradication Force, later renamed the Afghan Eradication Force (AEF) and then the Poppy Eradication Force. (See figure 6.) The eradication force reported to the MOI and was managed by INL through a contract with DynCorp International. The eradication force became the bulwark of INL’s efforts in Afghanistan from 2004 to 2008 and served as an important way for Washington to drive counternarcotics policy in Afghanistan.²⁶⁵

As concern over the scale of poppy cultivation grew, Ambassador Khalilzad and others reportedly told USAID to focus on alternative development.²⁶⁶ The pressure in these years was such that, between 2005 and 2008, USAID allocated an average of 75 percent of its total agricultural program budget for Afghanistan to alternative development.²⁶⁷ In 2005, USAID launched three large rural development programs: Alternative Development Program (ADP) North, ADP East, and ADP South, with a total of \$332.78 million in funding.²⁶⁸ A fourth program, ADP Southwest, was launched in 2008.

Despite USAID’s increased expenditures, some officials within the U.S. government expressed doubts that these alternative development projects would reduce opium poppy cultivation, as well as concerns about USAID’s

FIGURE 6

ERADICATION FORCE OVER TIME



Source: GAO, *Afghanistan Drug Control: Strategy Evolving and Progress Reported, but Interim Performance Targets and Evaluations of Justice Reform Efforts Needed*, GAO-10-291, March 2010, p. 14.

commitment to achieving counternarcotics goals.²⁶⁹ These doubts arose, in part, from USAID's inability, or unwillingness, to articulate how the development interventions it was funding would support a farmer's transition out of poppy cultivation. USAID asserted that any rural development in a poppy-growing area could be considered alternative development.²⁷⁰

Policy disagreements between INL and USAID over the effectiveness of making development assistance contingent on reductions in poppy cultivation added to USAID's apprehension about being too closely involved in counternarcotics. There was concern that "if USAID's programs were seen as merely the spearhead of a poppy eradication campaign, it would undermine [USAID's] efforts to build the trust with local communities needed to effectively provide development assistance."²⁷¹ Doug Wankel, who served as director of the Kabul Counter Narcotics Task Force at the U.S. Embassy, stated, "USAID mostly paid lip service to counternarcotics, rather than being an active participant. They gave the feeling they didn't want to be in the photograph when the picture was taken."²⁷²

"USAID mostly paid lip service to counternarcotics, rather than being an active participant. They gave the feeling they didn't want to be in the photograph when the picture was taken."

—Doug Wankel,
former director of the Kabul Counter Narcotics Task Force, U.S. Embassy Kabul

By at least 2006, the initial DOD resistance to counternarcotics began to ebb.²⁷³ The priority given to counternarcotics was not just a function of high levels of cultivation, but also a consequence of the increasingly common view that there was a nexus between the drug trade and the insurgency.²⁷⁴ There was also a growing recognition that the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats (OSD/CNGT) could bring authorities and funds to bear that could be useful to the wider reconstruction effort in Afghanistan, for example, by supporting entities like the Afghan Border Police.²⁷⁵ DOD's collective opposition to INL's push for aerial spraying and concerns that INL was not prioritizing interdiction further empowered OSD/CNGT to take on a larger counterdrug role.²⁷⁶

UK officials also reinvigorated their counternarcotics efforts in response to U.S. criticism.²⁷⁷ They pushed for CND to become the Ministry of Counter Narcotics to coordinate all Afghan government counternarcotics initiatives. Additionally, the UK helped establish the Counter Narcotics Trust Fund (CNTF), a UN-administered fund meant to increase the profile of the counterdrug effort and streamline funding of relevant ministries within the Afghan government.²⁷⁸

In Kabul, counternarcotics conferences, strategies, and implementation plans proliferated.²⁷⁹ For example, the UK and United States initiated semiannual joint talks on counternarcotics to help align their interests and programming.²⁸⁰

Counternarcotics-related activities in the provinces also expanded. The creation of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) provided a platform for greater engagement with provincial authorities by military, diplomatic, and development professionals. In some provinces, military forces played a major role in the counternarcotics effort, sometimes even equating the success of their mission with decreased levels of opium poppy cultivation.²⁸¹

Provincial governors, in particular, came to be seen as the bulwark of counternarcotics efforts and were asked to impose bans on opium poppy cultivation. Supporting efforts included the Counter Narcotics Advisory Team (CNAT), the Good Performers Initiative, and the integration of counternarcotics into provincial development planning. Some of these initiatives coincided with dramatic reductions in poppy cultivation, particularly in the provinces of Balkh in 2007 and Nangarhar in 2008, and were hailed as major successes, reinforcing the call to allocate greater resources directly to the provinces.²⁸²

A number of new counternarcotics institutions were also created, and existing institutions began to engage in counternarcotics, most notably in DOD and subsequently ISAF. Following a change to its operations plan in October 2008, ISAF military forces were permitted to directly engage in counternarcotics operations that were directed at targets linked to the insurgency.²⁸³ This change provided the military and air support to law enforcement officials that they had been pressing for since late 2004. Several institutions were also established to improve intelligence sharing, including the U.S.-UK Joint Narcotics Analysis Centre (JNAC) in London, and the U.S.-led Interagency Operations Coordination Center and the Combined Joint Interagency Task Force-Nexus (CJLITF-N) in Kabul.²⁸⁴ The United States also provided military support to TF-333.²⁸⁵

During this time, DEA overcame its initial objections about the lack of Afghan law enforcement partner institutions with which to build cases and came to realize that, despite the CNPA's infancy, DEA could engage more directly in country.²⁸⁶ The agency began to increase its presence in Afghanistan, with the number of its personnel rising from 13 to 117, including those in Foreign-Deployed Advisory and Support Teams (FAST).²⁸⁷ FAST comprised DEA agents able to operate in military-style raids with Afghan or U.S. Special Operations Forces and to train and mentor Afghan units.²⁸⁸ DEA also worked to establish specialized units within the CNPA through programs funded by DOD and State.

The wider development community also engaged more constructively on counternarcotics from 2004 to 2008. The Asian Development Bank, European Commission, and World Bank all pursued initiatives to more effectively address the causes of opium poppy cultivation.²⁸⁹ The World Bank developed guidelines for “Treating the Opium Problem in World Bank Operations in Afghanistan,” also known as “counternarcotics mainstreaming guidelines,” that advocated the integration of counterdrug programming into wider development programs and projects.²⁹⁰ Several projects developed within the rubric of the **National Priority Programs (NPP)** were evaluated during their design to ensure they accounted for the causes of poppy cultivation and did not unintentionally exacerbate its growth. This demonstrated a modest move toward mainstreaming counterdrug goals within the larger development effort.²⁹¹ DFID and the World Bank also produced a report examining how development efforts might better address the causes of opium poppy cultivation.²⁹² This report served as the basis for the design of the Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development Facility, a rural development program funded by the British and Danish governments to “strengthen licit agricultural markets and minimize adverse incentives to revert to opium production” in rural areas where poppy had been all but eliminated.²⁹³

National Priority Programs were the 22 programs prioritized by the Afghan government to support the 2008 *Afghanistan National Development Strategy*. NPPs were organized into six areas: security, human resource development, infrastructure development, private sector development, agriculture and rural development, and governance.

Two major efforts dominated the counternarcotics agenda between 2004 and 2008. The first was INL’s sustained push to adopt a more robust eradication campaign, particularly aerial spraying. Assistant Secretary Charles’ initial push in 2005 was followed by repeated efforts to convince the Afghan government to spray the poppy crop, despite opposition from other parts of the U.S. government, the Afghan government, ISAF, other donor countries, and multilateral institutions.²⁹⁴ This pressure tracked closely with rising cultivation numbers, until the scale of cultivation in 2007 prompted senior U.S. officials to again press for aerial spraying with President Karzai, before it was rejected for the final time.²⁹⁵

While the low levels of manual eradication that had been undertaken thus far strengthened INL’s push for chemical eradication, there were serious and persistent disagreements. The UK had agreed to support ground-based spraying; at the same time, the contention over aerial spraying continued.²⁹⁶ Given the degree of opposition to aerial spraying in the Afghan administration and across the international community, many officials, including some within the U.S. government, questioned the wisdom of repeatedly pushing this policy. It consumed the time of U.S. officials and expended political capital with a number of major allies, including the Afghan government, to no avail.²⁹⁷

The second major effort that dominated the agenda at this time was the development of an end-to-end legal system to investigate, detain, and prosecute those involved in the trade, processing, and trafficking of illicit drugs. The

U.S. government, in concert with the UK, began investing more resources in building the institutions necessary to convict and incarcerate criminals, including drug traffickers. These investments, through a State Department-led interagency effort, were intended to “build prisons, build courthouses, train judges, train prosecutors . . . to create a system where the rule of law is a reality.”²⁹⁸ Newly-formed counterdrug law enforcement bodies, including the National Interdiction Unit (NIU) and its supporting Sensitive Investigative Unit (SIU) and Technical Investigative Unit (TIU), were intended to build cases to be tried in the strengthened Afghan judicial system.²⁹⁹ Additional initiatives, such as the Criminal Justice Task Force created in 2005 to investigate and prosecute major drug traffickers, required time to deliver results.

October 2008 also saw the successful push by U.S. and Afghan officials for ISAF forces to take more direct action against the Afghan drug trade. Despite opposition from some coalition partners, ISAF forces were now explicitly authorized to act “with the Afghans against facilities and facilitators supporting the insurgency, in the context of counternarcotics, subject to authorization of respective nations.”³⁰⁰

By 2008, U.S. policymakers were increasingly concerned about the links between the insurgency and drug trade, and expanded U.S. efforts to sever those links. The NSC established the Afghan Threat Finance Cell (ATFC), a Kabul-based unit led by DEA, with strong support from Treasury and DOD. The ATFC’s mission was “to identify and disrupt financial networks related to terrorism, the Taliban, narcotics trafficking, and corruption.”³⁰¹ (See pages 71–72.) In addition, the unit focused on capacity building within Afghan institutions, partnering with specially vetted Afghan units like the SIU and TIU to conduct investigations.³⁰²

This period—in which counternarcotics was at the fore of the policy debate—came to a close in late 2008. With the 2009 appointment of SRAP Richard Holbrooke, aerial eradication was off the table and the Afghan Eradication Force was disbanded. The administration of President Barack Obama believed the focus of the counternarcotics effort should be on interdiction and rural development, arguing that the latter was in line with COIN doctrine and its focus on winning the hearts and minds of the rural population.³⁰³

BENEFITING FROM MILITARY FORCES ON THE GROUND: 2009–2012

Between 2009 and 2012, the institutions and programs that had previously been put in place started to pay dividends. This was, however, not necessarily a function of specific counternarcotics interventions, but instead, a result of the wider state-building project that included efforts to improve governance,

security, and development. For example, the 2009–2011 surge of military and civilian personnel brought a significant number of resources that enabled increased counterdrug activities, including a dramatic increase in troops and air support in the key poppy-growing provinces, such as Helmand.³⁰⁴ This not only aided interdiction efforts and the movement of DEA FAST units, but also helped establish the conditions for the delivery of increased development assistance in what had been inaccessible areas.

During this period, the divisions that had plagued the counternarcotics effort subsided. Because those championing aerial spraying had departed from INL and the embassy, there was greater room for agreement within the U.S. government and with its partners on how to tackle counternarcotics. Nevertheless, after years of divisiveness, the UK began to extricate itself from counternarcotics; the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee described it as a “poisoned chalice” in 2009.³⁰⁵

Under Holbrooke’s leadership, the SRAP office took the lead on counternarcotics in Washington, meeting regularly with a renewed focus on rural development, interdiction, and the aim of significantly reducing “the support the insurgency receives from the narcotics industry.”³⁰⁶ As one SRAP official noted, “Holbrooke wanted INL to move away from eradication and move to sustainable solutions.”³⁰⁷ This approach proved popular with other U.S. government entities and officials, including senior DOD leadership. As William Wechsler, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for Counternarcotics and Global Threats, noted, “I came back into government in 2009. One of the first conversations I had was with Holbrooke. Holbrooke said, ‘I want to completely change the strategy on counternarcotics to get away from eradication.’ I wanted the same.”³⁰⁸

In line with the shift away from eradication, the Poppy Eradication Force was disbanded in 2009.³⁰⁹ This marked the end of the centrally planned, contractor-led eradication efforts that had featured so heavily in the counternarcotics effort up to that point. Ambassador Holbrooke’s appointment as SRAP also brought the end of the U.S. push for aerial eradication. The U.S. counternarcotics strategies that followed did not mention aerial spraying, and in the 2009 Appropriations Act, Congress specifically prohibited aerial spraying unless requested by the President of Afghanistan.³¹⁰ Following these changes, Governor-Led Eradication, a program which reimbursed provincial governors based on each hectare eradicated, was the sole form of U.S.-supported eradication in Afghanistan.³¹¹

While policies were being refocused in Washington and Kabul, the most notable changes in counterdrug policy implementation on the ground were occurring in

Helmand Province. In late 2008, the Helmand Food Zone (HFZ) was launched alongside major military operations that included building a permanent security presence in rural areas.³¹² The HFZ was a focused counternarcotics effort comprising eradication, public awareness, and a number of development programs that provided agricultural inputs, such as USAID's Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture (AVIPA). Other interventions sought to improve access to health care and education and to build productive infrastructure, including irrigation and roads.³¹³

In February 2010, Operation Moshtarak expanded ISAF and ANDSF presence on the ground in Marjah in Helmand Province. The increased military presence had a dramatic effect on levels of cultivation in what had been one of the major poppy-growing districts in Helmand. Between 2010 and 2011, the share of land dedicated to opium poppy cultivation fell from 60 percent to less than 5 percent of total agricultural area.³¹⁴ Overall, between 2008 and 2011, poppy cultivation in Helmand Province fell from 103,590 hectares to 63,307 hectares, due in part to the increased security force presence throughout the province.³¹⁵

While progress was being made in reducing the overall level of poppy cultivation, particularly in Helmand, the influx of personnel and resources resulted in a more complex policy and institutional environment in southern Afghanistan. For example, in spring 2010, the U.S. Marine Corps implemented a program of compensated eradication called the Marjah Accelerated Agricultural Transition Program.³¹⁶ This provoked an outcry among those in INL and the UK



U.S. Marines investigate a possible improvised explosive device while on a patrol during Operation Moshtarak. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Tommy Bellegarde)

government who viewed previous compensated eradication efforts as failures.³¹⁷ Despite these objections, U.S. military commanders were able to pursue this and other counterdrug programs in their command areas, regardless of wider strategy objectives or previous failed efforts.

According to a former UK official, in Kabul the MCN and INL championed the food zone model without fully appreciating what had contributed to poppy cultivation reductions in HFZ's target areas. Despite the lack of clear information as to what led to these reductions, MCN and INL called for eight additional provincial food zone programs to be implemented.³¹⁸

The changes in U.S. strategy, combined with the influx of security forces in southern Afghanistan, spurred a sea change in interdiction efforts in the south. Wechsler, the former DASD for Counternarcotics and Global Threats, described this period as one of increasing alignment between DEA and DOD, noting, "General McChrystal liked what DEA was doing with FAST, but General Petraeus offered the resources DEA needed. . . . DEA then realized they could ask for and get support in missions. They recognized that the military mission and the counternarcotics mission were working together."³¹⁹ The increase in the number of interdiction operations, which jumped from 204 in 2010 to 521 in 2011, exemplifies this change.³²⁰ Wechsler further reflected on the dramatic turnabout within DOD, noting that "most senior military leaders talked of integrating interdiction, law enforcement, and even development efforts into COIN."³²¹

Despite increasing alignment between DEA and DOD, progress in the Afghan judicial sector did not keep pace. Those pursuing the arrest and conviction of drug traffickers, rather than the militarized disruption that characterized DEA FAST units and TF-333, had reached an impasse. In the absence of an extradition agreement, and with little confidence in an often corrupt and still nascent Afghan judicial system, DEA agents found it difficult to advance their cases.³²² Their efforts suffered a significant setback with the arrest of Mohammed Zia Salehi, an aide to President Karzai, by the FBI-mentored Major Crimes Task Force in July 2010, and his subsequent release.³²³ Outraged by the arrest of Salehi on corruption charges, President Karzai ordered the seizure of all files related to the Salehi arrest and authorized an investigation into the handling of the case.³²⁴ The Afghan administration then began to dismantle the law enforcement infrastructure that had been established, including the wiretaps, polygraphs, and presence of DOJ personnel assigned to mentor Afghan staff.³²⁵ As a result, DEA became increasingly reluctant to invest resources in an environment where its agents could not develop cases. As one senior law enforcement official summarized, "After all of that work, all of that expense, and all of that danger, DEA's Special Operations Division said we are not going to do it anymore."³²⁶

A NEGLECTED ISSUE: 2013–2016

As with other sectors of the reconstruction effort, the drawdown of U.S. troops in Afghanistan caused uncertainty as to what counternarcotics efforts would be possible in the post-2014 environment. In fact, the 2013 U.S. Civilian-Military Strategic Framework for Afghanistan included only a passing reference to counternarcotics, with no mention of the eradication or interdiction pillars.³²⁷ Additionally, many counternarcotics institutions were retasked and directed toward COIN or CT, including TF-333, which became an effective crisis response unit under the General Command of Police Special Units and used for CT operations.³²⁸ The Air Interdiction Unit, which had become the Special Mission Wing, shared the same fate and was absorbed by Afghan Special Forces.³²⁹ Although the Special Mission Wing remained a dual counternarcotics and CT force in name, in practice, the majority of its operations supported CT.³³⁰ Additionally, the Afghan Threat Finance Cell, which had operated in Afghanistan since late 2008, was shut down in 2014.³³¹

By 2013, USAID's decision to no longer include counternarcotics indicators in its alternative development programs resulted in a shift away from interventions specifically targeting poppy reduction. In the absence of these requirements, many USAID contractors shifted their focus to strengthening the licit economy and ignored opium poppy cultivation altogether, even when conducting programs in areas where opium poppy was concentrated. As of 2013, it appeared that USAID's only program that directly targeted poppy cultivation was the Kandahar Food Zone (KFZ).³³² All four of the fully developed Regional Agricultural Development Programs (RADP), totaling approximately \$228 million through 2017, largely ignored opium poppy cultivation, including few mentions of poppy in the contracts signed with implementing partners, no risk-mitigation plans, and little distinction between areas with or without significant poppy production.³³³

The lack of engagement by other Western donors was notable during this time. The UK ambassador to Afghanistan from 2012 to 2015 saw no advantage in discussing counternarcotics given its trajectory and continued the trend away from significant programming.³³⁴ By 2013, the UK had all but abandoned its involvement in eradication planning and counternarcotics policy, limiting its investments to a small number of law enforcement and rule of law efforts through the UK National Crime Agency.³³⁵ The UK- and Denmark-funded Comprehensive Agricultural Rural Development Facility program hardly mentioned poppy cultivation in the design of its second phase in 2015, despite the return of poppy cultivation in a number of its target districts.³³⁶

Wider donor engagement on counternarcotics was also nominal. Institutions like the World Bank, an active participant in the policy discussions on alternative

development, did not include opium poppy in the initial national Agriculture Strategy Review in 2012.³³⁷ Perhaps most tellingly, there were only oblique references to counternarcotics in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework and its successor agreement, the Self-Reliance through Mutual Accountability Framework, indicating donors were reluctant to see it included.³³⁸ The fact that an agreement intended to govern donor support to Afghanistan was nearly silent on the issue illustrated the relatively low priority of counternarcotics.³³⁹

With donors disengaged, the Afghan government deemphasized counternarcotics. Even under the new president, Ashraf Ghani, who had in the early days of the reconstruction effort lamented the potential for Afghanistan to become a narco-state, counternarcotics rarely featured in his government's priorities and development plans.³⁴⁰ For example, the 2016 Afghan National Peace and Development Framework, in which anticorruption featured heavily, barely mentioned counternarcotics or the burgeoning level of opium poppy cultivation in rural areas.

The only aspect of direct counternarcotics assistance that persisted in this era was the enhanced interdiction effort, largely due to the increased military presence in the south. However, with the 2014 transition and growing insecurity restricting the movement of law enforcement staff, some of these investments also began to dwindle. By 2015, with only 33 staff in Kabul and none in the provinces, DEA found it increasingly difficult to mount interdiction operations and mentor staff. Seizures of opium fell to their lowest levels since 2008.³⁴¹ By 2016, opium poppy cultivation was once again over 200,000 hectares.³⁴² Counternarcotics had come full circle: it was rarely mentioned in policy circles either in Afghanistan or in Western capitals.

BACK IN THE SIGHTS: 2017–2018

By the spring of 2017, reports of a bumper poppy crop began to emerge from Afghanistan. Continued political fragility in the National Unity Government, a weak economy, lack of security, and neglect from senior policymakers all likely factored into record levels of Afghan drug production in 2017.

In April 2017, the U.S. Embassy and USFOR-A began reformulating their counternarcotics approach. Their internal assessment, similar to estimates provided by UNODC, stated that 50 percent of Taliban funding came from the opium trade. The assessment also highlighted the fact that USFOR-A authorities, at the time, prohibited the targeting of drug labs and traffickers.³⁴³ The embassy also put forward a strategic communications strategy that highlighted the Taliban as a “narco-terrorist organization” and emphasized the nexus between the opium trade and the Taliban.³⁴⁴



Gen. John Nicholson, the Resolute Support and USFOR-A commander, briefs reporters. (DOD photo by U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Jette Carr)

On November 15, 2017, the UN released its annual Afghan opium survey which confirmed the indications of the previous spring; opium production was at a record high.³⁴⁵ Opium poppy cultivation had increased 63 percent from the previous year to 328,000 hectares, while potential opium production increased by 87 percent to 9,000 tons.³⁴⁶

Following the release of these figures, U.S. and Afghan security forces launched a series of airstrikes using U.S. B-52 and F-22 aircraft, as well as Afghan A-29s, against “Taliban narcotics production” facilities in Helmand Province.³⁴⁷ USFOR-A commander General Nicholson stated the strikes were intended to apply pressure on the Taliban and represented a significant use of new authorities included in the South Asia strategy, announced in August 2017 by the administration of President Donald Trump. These authorities allowed USFOR-A to target Taliban “revenue streams and support infrastructure.”³⁴⁸ DOD briefings also stated that the Taliban had evolved into a “narco-insurgency” that compels farmers to grow poppy and is “fighting to defend [its] revenue streams.”³⁴⁹

Following these initial strikes, Brigadier General Lance Bunch briefed on December 13, 2017, that, to date, the bombing campaign had destroyed 25 narcotics processing labs, eliminating almost \$80 million from “the kingpins’ pockets, while denying over \$16 million of direct revenue to their Taliban partners.”³⁵⁰ By April 2018, USFOR-A had conducted as many as 75 strikes.³⁵¹

USFOR-A estimates that 20 percent of the total revenue from the domestic narcotics trade ends up in Taliban hands due to profits from direct ownership, fees for transportation and protection, licensing fees to drug traffickers, and taxation harvest.³⁵² Bunch also noted that “this is the first time we have persistently used our airpower in this interdiction role.”³⁵³ While this is true, specialized counterdrug units previously pursued similar strategies via ground-based raids.³⁵⁴

Brigadier General Bunch stated that these strikes were the beginning of “a sustained air interdiction campaign”—but also described the operations as a “counter-threat revenue campaign,” emphasizing their goal of cutting off Taliban revenue, not fighting the drug trade itself.³⁵⁵ In April 2018, the air campaign against labs was expanded into western Afghanistan and the provinces of Nimroz and Farah. It remains unclear whether the air interdiction campaign will be paired with increased activity in other areas of programming as part of a comprehensive counternarcotics effort. Nevertheless, the bombing of drug labs represents the most significant direct military action against drug-related targets over the course of the reconstruction effort to date.

However, the longer-term impact of the air interdiction campaign on drug production, insurgent financing, government corruption, and a host of other drug-related challenges remains uncertain. There is also the risk that expanded air strikes by Afghan and international forces could result in civilian deaths, alienate rural populations, and strengthen the insurgency.³⁵⁶ Civilian casualties—or public perceptions that the bombings were targeting rural communities with few viable income sources—could result in a greater long-term cost to the coalition than the short-term benefit of temporarily disrupting drug production and insurgent financing.

Finally, as of 2018, State continued to implement counternarcotics programming within the framework of a counternarcotics strategy approved in 2012. A revised strategy has been under development since 2014. According to State, the current draft strategy seeks to deny the Taliban drug revenue to pressure them to participate in peace negotiations. The draft strategy also maintains focus on building and improving Afghan counternarcotics capabilities and capacity.³⁵⁷



CHAPTER 3

STRANDS OF THE COUNTERNARCOTICS EFFORT: POLICY DEBATES AND EFFECTS ON THE GROUND

DOD photo

The U.S. government counternarcotics strategy comprised four major strands of activity which, between 2002 and 2017, absorbed approximately \$7.28 billion. The importance of counternarcotics within the overall reconstruction effort, the relative priority of the different strands within the counternarcotics strategy, and the investments in activities within each strand changed over time. These shifts in focus reflected negotiations between different elements of the U.S. government, changes in the level of cultivation, the responses of key actors, and the process of learning that came with closer engagement on the ground.

Given that each strand of the counternarcotics strategy was uniquely shaped by the agencies involved, their authorities, and the metrics by which they were judged, this section examines each strand individually. It places particular emphasis on the theory of change that underpinned counternarcotics activities and whether the results support the theory. Where available, high-resolution imagery and geospatial data are combined with analysis of programs in the three main poppy-growing provinces of Helmand, Kandahar, and Nangarhar. These data points offer insights into whether these programs had an effect on different indicators and, in particular, whether they supported enduring reductions in poppy cultivation.

INTERDICTION AND COUNTERNARCOTICS LAW ENFORCEMENT

Interdiction and counternarcotics law enforcement have been consistent features of the counternarcotics effort, but their emphasis and methods changed significantly over time. (See figure 7.) Early initiatives attempted to contain the flow of Afghan narcotics via operations based outside the country or through paramilitary-style raids on drug-processing sites. Later efforts expanded to focus on building Afghan counternarcotics institutions, targeting high-level drug traffickers, and eventually the construction of an end-to-end counternarcotics justice system. The level of engagement from both the U.S. military and international coalition partners varied widely over the course of the ISAF mission and has continued to fluctuate during Operation Resolute Support.

Operation Resolute Support

Operation Resolute Support began on January 1, 2015, and is the current NATO-led train, advise, and assist mission in Afghanistan. Resolute Support is the follow-on mission to ISAF, the NATO-led security mission established by the UN Security Council in December 2001, which concluded in December 2014.

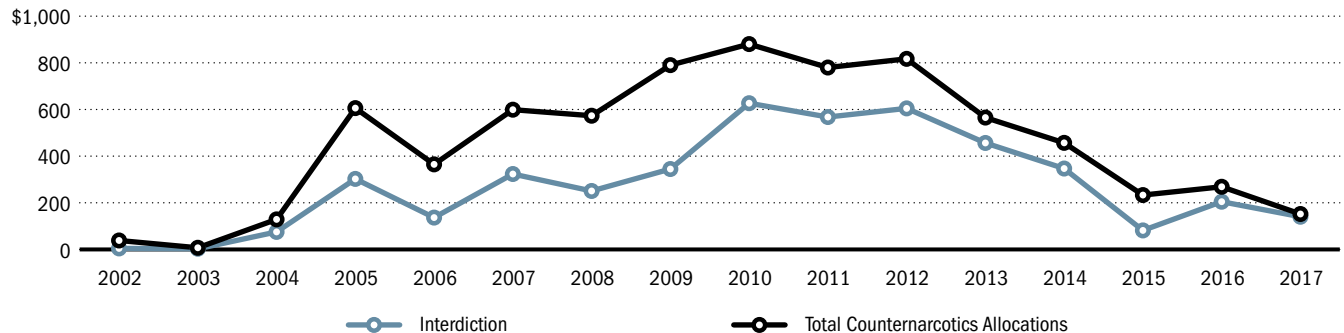
Interdiction Theory and Practice

Counternarcotics law enforcement efforts are intended to increase the risks associated with engaging in the illegal drug trade by increasing the likelihood of arrest, prosecution, and incarceration. The State Department defines interdiction as the seizure of drugs before they reach the end user to deter drug traffickers and take illegal narcotics out of circulation.³⁵⁸ In the effort to develop Afghan counternarcotics law enforcement capabilities, interdiction has long been recognized as “a step in a sequence that culminates in prosecution and penalty,” with the ultimate goal of “not just seizure but fair trial and punishment.”³⁵⁹ In the view of DEA, the only U.S. agency focused solely on drug law enforcement, the “core mission” of counterdrug law enforcement “is to disrupt and dismantle the most significant drug trafficking organizations.”³⁶⁰ Interdiction is intended to accomplish this, in part, by attempting to cause economic losses to drug trafficking organizations, with the additional intent of raising prices for drug users in the hope that higher prices will reduce use.³⁶¹ Interdiction is also intended to suppress “both final demand and producer incentives by increasing risk [premiums] and transaction costs,” as opposed to eradication, which tends to raise producer prices.³⁶² By focusing efforts on processed drugs, which are higher up the value chain and have moved off-farm, interdiction has a more direct impact on drug traffickers than farmers.

Interdiction actions are intended to disrupt the Afghan drug trade and “deny narcotics-generated funding to terrorism and the insurgency, break the nexus between the insurgency and drug trafficking, promote the rule of law, and

FIGURE 7

INTERDICTION FUNDING COMPARED TO TOTAL COUNTERNARCOTICS FUNDING, 2002–2017 (\$ MILLIONS)



Source: SIGAR analysis of agency budget documentation and budget data.

expose and reduce corruption, while diminishing the overall drug threat from Afghanistan.”³⁶³ While initial measures of success for interdiction efforts focused primarily on kilos of narcotics and precursor chemicals seized by the Afghan government, the metrics evolved to become more comprehensive in recognition of the fact that drug seizures do not represent the endgame of interdiction efforts.³⁶⁴ Although the initial indicators remain important in State’s annual evaluation of worldwide counterdrug efforts, INL’s updated metrics include an array of indicators, such as building Afghan capacity.³⁶⁵

Throughout the reconstruction effort to date, counternarcotics law enforcement efforts have included some combination of programs to develop Afghan capacity, investigations to dismantle drug trafficking networks, work to build criminal cases against drug traffickers, and raids to destroy drug-production laboratories and stockpiles.³⁶⁶ These efforts within the interdiction and law enforcement strand can be organized into two primary categories: direct operations by the U.S. government and its international partners to disrupt drug trafficking networks, and capacity-building initiatives to strengthen the Afghan institutions charged with counternarcotics law enforcement. To understand how and why the focus has shifted between these two lines of effort, it is necessary to examine the evolution of counterdrug law enforcement since 2001.

Making Do: Counternarcotics Law Enforcement at the Outset

Prior to 2002, U.S. law enforcement activities to stem drug flows originating from Afghanistan were limited to transit countries, including Turkey, Pakistan, and a number of Central Asian states.³⁶⁷ Within Afghanistan itself, there were almost no formal counternarcotics law enforcement institutions. When U.S. forces swept the Taliban from power, the sole Afghan government counterdrug entity was a small unit embedded within the police anti-smuggling

department.³⁶⁸ As the international community started arriving in Kabul in early 2002, the counternarcotics-focused stakeholders reached the consensus that the drug problem was “so chronic that it needed its own identity,” funded and administered separately from broader law enforcement efforts.³⁶⁹ A UNODC tour of provincial counternarcotics offices revealed gutted structures and a near total lack of personnel to staff them. UN officials believed that a complete rebuilding of Afghanistan’s counternarcotics law enforcement capacity was needed.³⁷⁰

In addition to rebuilt Afghan counterdrug law enforcement institutions, UNODC officials came to the conclusion that a new framework of narcotics laws—along with new legal and judiciary systems to administer those laws—was necessary.³⁷¹ UNODC had already begun preliminary planning on interdiction and judicial capacity building when the April 2002 SSR framework established the UK as the lead nation for counternarcotics.³⁷²

Under the SSR framework, the UK was in charge of counternarcotics, but its mandate was vaguely defined—and other nations had the lead for sectors and institutions with counterdrug roles that had previously been consolidated under the UNODC effort.³⁷³ For example, at an April 2002 donor meeting, Italian and French officials revealed judiciary reform proposals for the Afghan Interim Administration that included significant overlap with UNODC’s earlier efforts.³⁷⁴ A similar situation developed between Germany, the lead nation for police reform, and UNODC, which had already begun some programs to develop interdiction capacity.³⁷⁵ The formalization of counternarcotics as a distinct line of the reconstruction effort, separate from larger police and judicial reforms that inherently touched on counternarcotics, further increased the number of stakeholders involved.

Separating counternarcotics law enforcement from other sectors, while potentially problematic, did have precedent in other U.S. counterdrug assistance efforts. In order to address concerns about corruption and political pressure in host countries, counterdrug law enforcement agencies often push for the creation of specialized, vetted units.³⁷⁶ Due, in part, to requests from the United States and its coalition partners, the Afghan government agreed to place counternarcotics law enforcement units under the MOI, but to try to keep them financially and geographically separate from the rest of the Afghan police.³⁷⁷ These measures to establish independent counternarcotics units were helpful in insulating them from the corruption that plagued larger police and justice institutions, but also injected a degree of confusion into counternarcotics law enforcement programming.

This situation—where multiple actors were dedicated to establishing specialized counterdrug capabilities—was further complicated by the attempt to establish basic police and judicial institutions simultaneously. Typically,

existing police units would provide the building blocks for specialized drug units, but in Afghanistan, both had to be built from scratch. For international counternarcotics law enforcement officials accustomed to working cases with existing host country units and providing on-the-job guidance, the task in Afghanistan represented a new and daunting challenge. Adding to this challenge was the piecemeal management of the institutions responsible for counterdrug law enforcement. While all police units legally fell under the control of the MOI, in reality, a number of foreign partners were administering and mentoring the different units necessary for a coherent counterdrug effort.³⁷⁸ As one U.S. official working on counterdrug law enforcement described the situation, “The closest analogy was Colombia, but there were so many differences. Afghanistan was such a large undertaking that no rule books existed.”³⁷⁹

Given the need to build the overall judicial system, the UK initially emphasized interdiction efforts as a way to achieve immediate results. In late 2002, ISAF requested a checkpoint program to better control entry into Kabul. The UK responded by training Afghan police officers, drawn from the CNPA, to patrol the city’s five major entry points in what became known as the Kabul Gates Team.³⁸⁰ The Kabul Gates unit patrolled the city’s entry points and ran intelligence-led counternarcotics operations throughout the capital. The UK also created a paramilitary-style unit known as the Afghan Special Narcotics Force, or TF-333, to operate outside of Kabul. Once trained and equipped, TF-333 conducted raids to destroy drug-processing labs and stockpiles in more remote areas of the country.³⁸¹ The unit’s focus on raids, rather than arrests, was forced by the uneven progress of drug law enforcement in Afghanistan and the lack of functioning judicial institutions to prosecute drug traffickers.

In July 2003, UK officials developed a preliminary plan to clarify the roles of each counternarcotics law enforcement stakeholder and address the existing divisions. This plan envisioned a force that would cover three basic counterdrug law enforcement functions: intelligence, operations, and investigations units, first based in Kabul and later replicated in the provinces.³⁸² The UK aimed to set up Afghan intelligence and operations units, with German and UNODC assistance, to be followed by more specialized units to tackle issues like money laundering and chemical precursors. UK officials hoped that this larger counternarcotics force would eventually be made into a separate, independent entity reporting directly to the president.³⁸³

Given the number of actors already involved in the counterdrug effort and its own counterterrorism priorities, the United States played only a supporting role in counternarcotics law enforcement in the years immediately after the Taliban’s fall. INL, for example, paid UNODC to lead an interdiction unit and focused on efforts that were complementary to German-led counterdrug policing initiatives,

rather than creating the large, U.S.-led programs that would characterize subsequent years.³⁸⁴ At this time, there were also strong differences of opinion about how involved the U.S. government should be in the counterdrug effort. Within DOD, for example, there was serious disagreement about whether the department should have a role in the counterdrug effort. According to a then-senior DOD official, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had even considered closing the Office of Counternarcotics and Global Threats.³⁸⁵ Until FY 2004, DOD was not explicitly authorized by Congress to provide counterdrug capacity building, transportation, and equipment support to the government of Afghanistan and refrained from any significant counternarcotics programming.³⁸⁶

Early DEA plans also were limited, with no significant Afghan capacity-building programming. U.S. officials who assessed the situation in 2002 were convinced that little immediate progress was possible given the absence of Afghan partners.³⁸⁷ DEA's limited presence in Afghanistan was influenced by three other key factors: (1) DEA prioritized countering drugs trafficked into the United States, rather than Afghan narcotics, which made up a small percentage of the U.S. market; (2) the agency feared that poor access to transportation, especially in an environment where CT was prioritized, would mean heavy constraints on operations outside of Kabul; and (3) DEA viewed its primary overseas mission as conducting investigations and supporting interdiction operations rather than extensive capacity building for entire counterdrug or police units.³⁸⁸

DEA's early Afghan training efforts consisted primarily of courses for high-level drug unit commanders conducted outside of Afghanistan and advising sensitive investigative units inside the country. DEA envisioned that State and DOD would provide the extensive support required to build and equip the institutions and framework on which the specialized counterdrug units would eventually rely.³⁸⁹ This meant that the absence of a basic counternarcotics interdiction capacity in Afghanistan was a poor match for DEA agents' traditional role as specialist advisors.

By 2005, the CNPA consisted of approximately 350 "marginally trained" officers in seven provinces, far short of the 2007 target that called for 1,800 personnel spread across 14 regional offices, and eventually all 34 provinces.³⁹⁰ Coordination between intelligence and operations units was hampered by a confused command structure where the CNPA commander directed the intelligence unit, while the CNPA operations commander reported to the head of intelligence.³⁹¹

Other units with significant drug interdiction roles, such as the Afghan Highway Police and Afghan Border Police, were also undergoing training and being deployed to the field, with mixed results.³⁹² While these police agencies were legally required to report drug offenses to the CNPA, communication and

coordination between the CNPA and other police units was problematic in practice.³⁹³ Furthermore, organizational deficiencies were exacerbated by pervasive corruption. State's 2005 reporting on counternarcotics in Afghanistan highlighted corruption at the provincial and district levels, stating that officials' "involvement ranges from direct participation in the criminal enterprise, to benefiting financially from taxation or other revenue streams generated by the drug trade."³⁹⁴

In 2005, the passage of the Afghan Police Law spurred tensions because it did not differentiate between the roles and organizational positioning of the CNPA versus other police units.³⁹⁵ Article Five of the law included fighting opium cultivation, drug trafficking, and organized crime among the 21 duties and obligations of all police, but the division of labor assigning responsibility for the different parts of this mission were unclear.

While tensions related to the funding and organization of counternarcotics law enforcement units were not unique to Afghanistan, the muddled command structure posed significant challenges. For example, while all CNPA personnel were legally under the control of the MOI, practical control fell to ANP provincial chiefs when the CNPA was operating outside of Kabul. As a result, once foreign mentors were withdrawn, CNPA personnel in the provinces were routinely retasked to conduct non-drug-related operations.³⁹⁶ This tiered arrangement also exposed counterdrug police to increased levels of corruption and political influence that undermined the CNPA's institutional design. These deficiencies were apparent to at least some U.S. and ISAF officials at this stage. However, ambitious police-strength targets created pressure on ISAF to field counterdrug law enforcement units, limiting ISAF's ability to hold corrupt actors accountable and push for wholesale reforms within Afghan institutions.³⁹⁷

U.S. Interdiction and Law Enforcement Efforts Ramp Up

As early as 2003, the increase in poppy cultivation raised alarms with officials in the Bush administration and members of Congress. In response, Congress passed a supplemental appropriations bill that included \$73 million for DOD to provide intelligence, logistics, training, and equipment support to U.S. and foreign counternarcotics law enforcement officials operating in Afghanistan.³⁹⁸ The additional funding was soon accompanied by a National Defense Authorization Act that explicitly authorized DOD counterdrug assistance to Afghanistan.³⁹⁹ This legislative package allowed DOD to increase its support to counternarcotics law enforcement, despite widespread reluctance to do so within the department. Some senior policymakers were concerned that resources would be drawn away from the CT mission against military targets toward counternarcotics efforts, which were seen as a law enforcement issue to be tackled by civilian agencies.⁴⁰⁰



A member of the NIU burns narcotics and other items seized during a raid on a suspected opium production facility. (ISAF photo)

DOD addressed its new counternarcotics charge, in part, by issuing guidelines for how to deal with narcotics found during operations; however, some accounts noted these orders were not strictly enforced and were largely ignored by units in the field.⁴⁰¹ Around the same time, some entities within DOD sought to take on a more active counternarcotics role. One of these was OSD/CNGT, which was trying to find ways to spend \$73 million within two years on the kind of counternarcotics-related training, infrastructure, intelligence, operations, and maintenance support it was authorized to provide to Afghanistan.⁴⁰²

In 2004, DEA stated it “did not have evidence capable of sustaining an indictment of direct links between terrorism and narcotics trafficking groups within Afghanistan.”⁴⁰³ Despite this admission, some members of Congress were adamant about the need to address the perceived drug-terrorism nexus in Afghanistan. Representative Henry Hyde, chairman of the House Committee on International Relations, pushed the issue with comparisons to Colombia, stating, “I’m reminded of the long and debilitating internal debate of an appropriate U.S. response to Colombia. . . . For too long, we focused U.S. resources separately on Colombia’s drug trade and ignored the political insurgency. In Afghanistan, we may make the same mistake, fighting pieces of the problem rather than the whole problem. In President Karzai’s words, we’re dealing with narco-terrorism in Afghanistan just as we faced it in Colombia.”⁴⁰⁴

Congress responded to this concern with a significant bump in funding for counterdrug law enforcement and interdiction operations in Afghanistan. The total counternarcotics law enforcement and interdiction budget for Afghanistan

grew to \$325 million in 2005, before peaking at nearly \$627 million in 2010.⁴⁰⁵ The UK's total budget for counternarcotics also rose significantly, with a three-year commitment of £270 million, or roughly \$486 million, announced in September 2005; however, even this larger amount was dwarfed by U.S. spending.⁴⁰⁶ The significant increase in U.S. funding meant U.S. officials could now drive the counternarcotics strategy in Afghanistan.

This injection of funds resulted in a push to train and equip Afghan police units that could assist with drug interdiction. A significant portion of these funds went toward the Afghan Highway Police, Afghan Border Police, and ANP.⁴⁰⁷ While these units had counterdrug roles, the expenditures were also justified by their potential counterterrorism, revenue, and rule of law benefits, illustrating the fact that counterdrug law enforcement was not pursued in isolation from other security and governance objectives.⁴⁰⁸ Additional funds went to support counternarcotics-specific institutions, most notably the new National Interdiction Unit charged with conducting interdiction operations across the country.⁴⁰⁹ OSD/CNGT began to support and equip the NIU, while DEA provided on-the-job training and mentoring.⁴¹⁰ (See table 4.)

In keeping with its prioritization of interdiction efforts, in March 2005 DEA launched a program to deploy its agents with military forces to take a more active operational role.⁴¹¹ This initiative, the Foreign-Deployed Advisory and Support Teams, consisted of DEA agents with specialized tactical training who could operate alongside NIU law enforcement officials, as well military forces, in interdiction operations.⁴¹²

The NIU and FAST teams were intended to destroy drug labs and stockpiles, missions that required greater mobility than was available. INL's Air Wing had supported some DEA-led operations, but was focused on eradication and not ideally equipped to support interdiction operations.⁴¹³ To address this gap, the U.S. government contracted for airlift capacity and OSD/CNGT began to put in place the building blocks for a helicopter unit to provide air support dedicated to interdiction missions. Initially called the Air Interdiction Unit, this group would later become the Special Mission Wing.⁴¹⁴

TABLE 4

SPECIALIZED UNITS WITHIN THE COUNTER NARCOTICS POLICE OF AFGHANISTAN	
Unit	Description
National Interdiction Unit	Tactically trained sub-unit of the CNPA charged with executing search warrants, conducting raids, interdiction operations, and seizures based on SIU and TIU investigations.
Sensitive Investigative Unit	Kabul-based vetted unit responsible for investigating high-value, drug-trafficking targets. Subject to background, polygraph, drug testing, and Leahy law vetting.
Technical Investigative Unit	Kabul-based vetted unit responsible for electronic surveillance. Conducts judicial-approved intercepts of electronic communications.

Source: State, INL, "Afghanistan Program Overview," December 2008, accessed May 3, 2018.

The United States led efforts to stand up specialized units in addition to the NIU to try to increase the effectiveness of interdiction operations. With significant assistance from both State and DOD, in 2006 DEA began training a Sensitive Investigative Unit that investigated significant Afghan drug-trafficking organizations and a Technical Investigative Unit to gather electronic evidence. Teams from these units worked closely with DEA officials to monitor authorized wiretaps, as well as to gather and analyze sensitive intelligence on drug-trafficking networks.⁴¹⁵

The U.S. government also increased its collaboration with the UK to improve upon the counternarcotics law enforcement initiatives already in place. In 2005, the United States and UK began bilateral talks on counternarcotics to exchange information on their respective activities. Around this time, the Joint Narcotics Analysis Centre was established in London to provide strategic analysis of the Afghan drug trade. The JNAC was a UK-led group consisting of staff from the UK's Serious and Organized Crime Agency and other UK agencies, and representatives from the U.S. government led by the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA).⁴¹⁶ DEA's notable absence from the JNAC reflected the tendency to closely hold intelligence and tactical resources at the operational level that resulted in a fragmented interdiction effort on the ground.⁴¹⁷

To address this, INL and the British Foreign Office created the International Operations Coordinating Center in Kabul as a more operationally focused sister unit to the JNAC.⁴¹⁸ The IOCC was less limited by the turf battles and lack of buy-in that impeded the JNAC and was able to play a more effective coordinating role.⁴¹⁹ Yet, problems remained because of different objectives: U.S. agencies, particularly DEA, traditionally conducted interdictions with a strong focus on gathering evidence that would be admissible in court, while UK interdictions were largely for intelligence or immediate impact.⁴²⁰ These challenges were indicative of how differences in strategy affected counternarcotics law enforcement in Afghanistan.

The United States and UK sought to strengthen judicial reform efforts with a specific focus on building the capacity to try major narcotics cases in Afghan courts.

During this period of law enforcement institution building, there was a strategic emphasis on linking interdictions, particularly the arrest or elimination of high-value targets (HVT), to prosecutions in the Afghan judicial system. This focus on HVTs depended heavily on arrests and prosecutions, rather than just elimination. As one former senior DEA official noted, "In the terror model you kill the leader because he is against the government. In the CN model you can't kill the leader because he is part of the government patronage system."⁴²¹ As part of this effort, the United States and UK sought to strengthen judicial reform

efforts with a specific focus on building the capacity to try major narcotics cases in Afghan courts. The pace of the reforms led by Italy, the lead nation for judicial reform, had been slow and the legal system was still rife with corruption, which led to tensions with other donors focused on drug control.⁴²² The Afghan attorney general's admission in 2005 that "all my prosecutors are corrupt in some way" clearly indicated the challenges that remained.⁴²³ Given the lack of an extradition treaty, an honest, capable Afghan court system was critical to ensuring U.S. investments in counterdrug law enforcement could lead to prosecutions and convictions of high-value drug traffickers.

The solution identified by stakeholders on the ground was to bypass the existing corrupt system and create trustworthy institutions to deal specifically with drug cases. Afghanistan's 2005 Narcotics Law established the Central Narcotics Tribunal, a panel of Afghan judges who would hear cases involving more than 2 kilograms of processed opiates or 10 kilograms of opium.⁴²⁴ To assist with the enforcement of these laws, the United States, UK, and other donors mentored and assisted a Criminal Justice Task Force, with vetted counternarcotics prosecutors, to prosecute cases in front of the tribunal.⁴²⁵ These programs were complemented by the construction of a Counter Narcotics Justice Center (CNJC) to serve as the consolidated hub for prosecuting serious drug crimes, which was scheduled to be completed in 2007 but was actually finished in 2009.⁴²⁶

These intensive efforts resulted in what came to be regarded as the most capable, least corrupt justice system in Afghanistan.⁴²⁷ Despite this progress, due in no small part to close working relationships with international mentors, the Afghan judicial system still faced challenges when pursuing high-ranking or well-connected traffickers. In 2006, just three major traffickers were convicted, and political interference continued to impede the prosecution of high-value targets.⁴²⁸

The influx of resources enhanced Afghan counternarcotics law enforcement and judicial capabilities, but progress toward a strategic reduction or impact on the Afghan drug trade remained elusive. In 2008, a former DEA officer and advisor to the NIU commander assessed that, after three years of training, the NIU was at the "advanced crawling phase" of the crawl-walk-run continuum.⁴²⁹ As with other institution- and capacity-building initiatives, poor baseline capacity, lack of infrastructure, high attrition rates, corruption, and insecurity made for slow progress.⁴³⁰

Militarize and Surge, Then Transition

Up until 2008, drug interdiction and law enforcement efforts in Afghanistan were marked by the minimal involvement of coalition military forces. While OSD/CNGT made significant funding contributions to counternarcotics units,

ISAF military forces generally avoided counterdrug operations.⁴³¹ DEA, as well as State and CNGT officials, had the Sisyphean task of convincing battlespace commanders, who often had to balance competing CT and COIN priorities, to provide security and logistics support for counternarcotics operations.⁴³² This was true across the coalition, due in part to the legal restrictions some ISAF nations had on military involvement in counternarcotics missions.⁴³³ There were also non-legal barriers to overcome, as evidenced by one ISAF officer's comment that "I don't want my soldiers to die for the sake of a drug addict."⁴³⁴

Military policy engagement with counternarcotics changed at the October 2008 Budapest summit, where NATO agreed to allow ISAF troops to conduct operations with Afghan forces against counternarcotics targets that could be tied to the insurgency.⁴³⁵ Soon after, DOD specified military personnel could accompany "U.S. drug law enforcement agents or host national law enforcement and security forces on actual counternarcotics field operations" within presidentially declared combat zones.⁴³⁶ This policy emphasized that deployments "must be planned and executed as counter-narcoterrorism (CNT) deployments that support the War on Terrorism."⁴³⁷

These changes helped policies keep pace with operational trends on the ground. In its 2007 supplemental budget request for drug interdiction and counterdrug activities, DOD highlighted its focus on the border with Pakistan because of the confluence of narcotics, terrorist, and insurgent activities there.⁴³⁸ The overlap of counternarcotics and COIN efforts had also grown significantly, in part because counternarcotics intelligence collection was increasingly focused on targets involved with both the insurgency and the drug trade.⁴³⁹

In 2008, the NSC established the Afghan Threat Finance Cell, a Kabul-based interagency unit whose mission was to identify and disrupt finance networks, particularly those related to drug trafficking, that were supporting terrorist and insurgent organizations.⁴⁴⁰ The creation of the unit grew out of the success of a similar threat finance cell in Iraq.⁴⁴¹ The establishment of the ATFC also reflected increasing concern about the links between the insurgency and drug trade, and an expansion of the U.S. effort to sever those links.

ATFC investigators soon found that threat finance networks in Afghanistan consisted of "mutually beneficial relationships between the insurgency, narcotics traffickers, unscrupulous members of the financial and commercial sectors, and corrupt public officials."⁴⁴² Although the unit's mandate did not initially include anticorruption efforts, its analyses quickly shed light on the role of corrupt officials.⁴⁴³ ATFC operations fostered a deeper and more holistic understanding among U.S. agencies—both in Washington and Afghanistan—of the complex web of illicit financial relationships in Afghanistan.

THE AFGHAN THREAT FINANCE CELL, 2008–2014

The Afghan Threat Finance Cell, formed to “identify and disrupt financial networks related to terrorism, the Taliban, narcotics trafficking, and corruption,” was an example of tactical success that did not translate into strategic success.⁴⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the unit’s tactical success provides important lessons about structuring and staffing an interagency unit in a contingency environment, conducting threat finance investigations, partnering with Afghan entities, and encouraging legal and political action against illicit financial networks.⁴⁴⁵

The ATFC reported to both the U.S. ambassador and ISAF commander.⁴⁴⁶ The unit was led by a DEA special agent, with one DOD deputy from U.S. Central Command and another deputy from Treasury’s Office of Intelligence Analysis facilitating interagency cooperation. Eventually, the ATFC included personnel from DEA, Treasury, the Internal Revenue Service, the Department of Homeland Security, FBI, DIA, the Joint Warfare Analysis Center, and all branches of the U.S. military, as well as threat finance contractors and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.⁴⁴⁷

A critical element of the ATFC was its connectivity both up the chain to the NSC and down to the operational and tactical levels in Afghanistan. The NSC designated Treasury and DOD co-chair the Terrorist and Insurgent Finance Working Group, which met monthly with senior leaders in Washington to provide guidance and support to the ATFC via secure video conference. These meetings helped ensure a coordinated, interagency decision-making process on countering threat finance. They also facilitated a direct line to President Obama and his staff regarding high-level ATFC investigations.⁴⁴⁸ On the operational side, ATFC staff were “embedded with military commands across Afghanistan to improve the targeting of the insurgents’ financial structure.”⁴⁴⁹ This collocation provided the battlespace commander with ATFC information and analysis.⁴⁵⁰

The ATFC built target packages and provided information for U.S. financial sanctions designations, pursuant to the counterterrorism authority of Executive Order 13224 and the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act.⁴⁵¹ Treasury personnel also served as liaisons and mentors to the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Center for Afghanistan (FinTRACA) at Afghanistan’s central bank. FinTRACA and ATFC investigators identified needed financial community reforms in Afghanistan, for example, the need for *hawala* dealers to register and comply with Afghan law by reporting money transfers.⁴⁵² A *hawala* is an informal money exchange system.



U.S. personnel from the Afghan Threat Finance Cell conduct a field investigation. (Former director of the Afghan Threat Finance Cell photo)

ATFC investigators also mentored and worked with the Afghan-led Financial Investigative Unit (FIU), one component of the DEA-mentored SIU. Through a judicial wire intercept program, the ATFC, SIU, and FIU collected tens of thousands of financial documents (including those of drug trafficking organizations); interviewed drug traffickers, hawala operators, insurgents, and corrupt officials; and developed high-level corruption investigations. A robust training program developed a cadre of capable Afghan financial investigators.⁴⁵³

One ATFC success was the targeting of a major hawala, the New Ansari Money Exchange. New Ansari was heavily involved in laundering proceeds from the drug trade and had links to the Taliban and corrupt government figures.⁴⁵⁴ According to Treasury, this hawala operated across Afghanistan, transferring billions of dollars in and out of the country. Its Dubai subsidiaries then transferred money through the U.S. and international financial systems. Between 2007 and 2010, New Ansari used these money transfers to conceal illicit narcotics proceeds. In February 2011, Treasury designated New Ansari, as well as 15 affiliated individuals and entities, a “major money laundering vehicle for Afghan narcotics trafficking organizations” under the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act. The effect of the designation was to bar U.S. persons or companies from conducting financial or commercial transactions with New Ansari and the other designees, and to freeze their U.S. assets.⁴⁵⁵

The ATFC achieved important successes in collecting, analyzing, and disseminating financial intelligence, conducting high-level investigations, and disrupting illicit financial networks, including those connected to the drug trade. And yet, its long-term, strategic impact is uncertain. Former ATFC director Kirk Meyer believed the ATFC and SIU suffered from a lack of consistent U.S. political commitment to pursuing corruption cases against politically-connected individuals. He wrote, “We were asked to identify high-profile targets that the Administration could then push President Karzai to take action against. . . . In each instance, once President Karzai resisted, our leadership folded.”⁴⁵⁶ The ATFC thus illustrates a recurring theme in U.S. anticorruption and counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan: In practice, when faced with a choice to enforce the rule of law but incur high political costs, U.S. policymakers often prioritized political stability. These difficult judgment calls may have undermined the long-term U.S. goal of establishing a culture of rule of law and accountability, which were ultimately necessary for lasting security and stability in Afghanistan.

By February 2010, the Obama administration's Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy stated that one core goal was to "counter the insurgency-narcotics nexus," and another core goal was to "alleviate the corruption-narcotics nexus."⁴⁵⁷ The focus on these new strategic priorities, often referred to as the nexus policy, in concert with the decision to stop centrally planned eradication in 2010, resulted in a significant funding increase for interdiction initiatives. (See page 61.)

In December 2009, President Obama announced the military and civilian surge, which further increased attention on the interdiction of nexus targets and significantly boosted the pace of operations. Interdiction operations more than doubled over the next two years, from approximately 263 in 2010 to over 624 in 2011.⁴⁵⁸ Additionally, when ISAF created the Combined Joint Interagency Task Force (CJIATF) Shafafiyat in August 2010 to address corruption, it included a specialized sub-unit, CJIATF-Nexus, to coordinate military and civilian efforts against drug traffickers linked to insurgents and corrupt powerbrokers.⁴⁵⁹ The combination of the surge and the policy changes that allowed greater military involvement in counternarcotics law enforcement resulted in a significant increase in drug seizures. Total kilograms of opium seized jumped to 79,110 in 2009, dipped in 2010, and rose again to 98,327 in 2011, before beginning to decline in 2012.⁴⁶⁰

While policy changes and the surge brought increased resources for and attention to counternarcotics, the effects were short-lived.

While policy changes and the surge brought increased resources for and attention to drug law enforcement and interdiction, the effects were short-lived. By 2012, the new U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan emphasized the transfer of responsibilities to the Afghan government and the transition to a regional approach to the Afghan drug trade.⁴⁶¹ This posed new challenges, particularly because the interdiction build-up from 2009 onward had relied heavily on U.S. military and ISAF resources. The militarized approach to counternarcotics law enforcement had worked while coalition forces were available to provide airlift and security, but became less viable as these resources began to decline. In the eyes of some officials, the more militarized approach had also undermined the broader rule of law effort by diverting resources away from supporting judicial institutions and prosecutions.⁴⁶² Finally, deploying DEA agents on FAST teams or in other roles that emphasized the capture or killing of HVTs meant there were fewer agents available for building cases against traffickers or training and mentoring Afghan counterdrug units, raising questions about the best use of the limited number of DEA billets in Afghanistan.⁴⁶³

Like all sectors of the reconstruction effort, counternarcotics initiatives faced new constraints as resources began to decline. However, the failure to plan for these reductions limited the long-term effectiveness of some counterdrug law enforcement programs, which had achieved short-term success.

Tactical Successes, Strategic Failures

Interdiction and counterdrug law enforcement programs conducted in Afghanistan were marked by a number of tactical successes, but the programs were unable to achieve that same level of success at the strategic or national level. Put simply, interdiction efforts failed to fundamentally alter the Afghan drug trade or reduce drug-related threats to Afghan stability in a meaningful way. From 2008 through March 20, 2018, over 3,520 interdiction operations resulted in the seizure of 463,342 kilograms of opium. However, the sum of these seizures accounts for about 5 percent of the opium produced in Afghanistan in 2017 alone.⁴⁶⁴ Given the scale of the drug trade, pervasive insecurity, and fledgling Afghan police and judicial systems, it is fair to question whether counternarcotics law enforcement programs could have achieved a strategic impact. However, there were a number of factors within the counterdrug law enforcement and interdiction line of effort that contributed to the effort's shortcomings. A close examination of these shortcomings, as well as the small-scale successes that were achieved, yields important lessons from the drug interdiction initiatives within the reconstruction effort to date.

The amount of opium seized from 2008 to 2018 accounts for about 5 percent of the opium produced in Afghanistan in 2017 alone.

One reason for the failings of counterdrug law enforcement initiatives was lack of coordination and agreed-upon objectives among both Afghan and coalition entities.⁴⁶⁵ These problems were compounded by the misalignment of strategic objectives, program implementation, and assessments of those programs. One example was the failure to connect the strategic focus on cutting drug revenue to the insurgency with assessments that tracked progress toward this goal. By at least 2007, U.S. strategy called for interdiction “with a particular emphasis on integrating drug interdiction into the counterinsurgency mission.”⁴⁶⁶ Despite this focus, however, relatively few Taliban-linked traffickers were successfully convicted or otherwise removed from the drug trade. Additionally, it was not until the lab bombing campaign that began in 2017 that interdiction efforts were characterized and measured in terms of revenue denied to the insurgency.⁴⁶⁷ Though this reporting has been plagued by methodological problems and inaccuracies, it does represent an attempt to clearly measure drug interdiction success by its contribution to larger objectives.

USFOR-A AND ANDSF AIR INTERDICTION CAMPAIGN, 2017–2018

Aerial Bombardment of Opium-Processing Labs

In Pentagon press briefings in late November 2017, USFOR-A commander General Nicholson announced a series of airstrikes against “Taliban narcotics production” facilities in Helmand Province, carried out by both U.S. and Afghan forces.⁴⁶⁹ Nicholson stated the strikes were one part of applying pressure to the Taliban, in line with the Trump administration’s 2017 South Asia strategy and the goal of a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan. Nicholson also noted the strikes represented a significant use of new authorities granted under the strategy, including the authority for USFOR-A to target Taliban “revenue streams and support infrastructure.”⁴⁷⁰ By April 2018, USFOR-A had conducted as many as 75 strikes.⁴⁷¹

Background on Drug Labs

A 2005 DEA intelligence assessment of Afghanistan-based drug production and trafficking asserted that “clandestine processing laboratory activity is perhaps the most vulnerable aspect of the drug trade.” It stated labs “are generally stationary and established facilities that must be accessible to operators, chemists, workers, water supply, and chemical suppliers—although they may only be periodically active.” The assessment described lab owners as providing chemicals, equipment, food, and sleeping quarters, while “cooks” perform the actual processing and depart upon completion. The production process can be “compartmentalized,” meaning cooks may not know the customer or the origin of the chemicals.⁴⁷²

In terms of assessing revenue, a joint UNODC and World Bank report found that clandestine laboratory owners and shop owners in regional opium bazaars appeared to accrue a relatively small portion of domestic trade revenue (defined as “drug export value minus farm



Metal drums, some filled with morphine solution, under a canopy of vegetation.
(Resolute Support photo)

gate value”). The greater share of domestic trade revenue went instead to “a limited number of bulk buyers and large-scale specialist traders.”⁴⁷³

Afghan drug-processing labs are acknowledged to have pervasive links to corrupt government officials. According to the DEA assessment, “UK and U.S. law enforcement and intelligence agencies have widely reported that police chiefs, police officers, warlords, governors, the Afghan military, and district administrators play an enormous role in permitting laboratory operations to continue.” That role ranges from providing security and even owning labs to accepting bribes.⁴⁷⁴

Lack of Clarity in Numbers and Taliban Involvement in Drug Trade

In a December 2017 briefing, Brigadier General Bunch reported that, to date, the bombing campaign had destroyed 25 narcotics processing labs, eliminating almost \$80 million from “the kingpins’ pockets, while denying over \$16 million of direct revenue to their Taliban partners.”⁴⁷⁵ By April 2018, Colonel Lisa Garcia stated that “these efforts have deprived the Taliban of an estimated \$200 million in revenue.”⁴⁷⁶ How DOD, USFOR-A, and DEA calculated these financial losses remains unclear and the size of these estimates, combined with available information on narcotics prices, raises questions about their accuracy. According to price data on opium in Afghanistan, the strikes would have had to destroy roughly 73 to 80 metric tons of heroin, or more than 516 metric tons of opium, in order to eliminate \$80 million dollars’ worth of drugs.⁴⁷⁷ This is unlikely, as 80 metric tons of heroin would equate to between 15 and 25 percent of Afghanistan’s estimated total export quality heroin production in 2017.⁴⁷⁸

If USFOR-A estimates of lost revenue are based on the projected street value of heroin (in consumer markets in Europe and Russia), then the numbers are also misleading. Such an estimate would imply the Taliban are profiting throughout the entire opium value chain, from cultivation, refining, and trade in Afghanistan through distribution and sale in other countries. Yet, the extent to which the Taliban participate in the trade of narcotics is debated.⁴⁷⁹ While the Taliban are believed to collect payments from those involved at each stage of the value chain in Afghanistan, the extent of their control over the processing, sale, and distribution of opiates is less clear.⁴⁸⁰ A U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) report highlighted that “there is little concrete detail available to the public and policymakers on how the insurgents interact with drug traders and profit from opium.”⁴⁸¹ Law enforcement sources also suggest the Taliban only profit from the drug trade until the product is sold to drug trafficking organizations outside Afghanistan.⁴⁸² Therefore, estimating revenue denied to the insurgency based on wholesale or retail prices in foreign consumer markets would result in inaccurate estimates.

The November 2017 DOD briefings stated the Taliban have evolved into a narco-insurgency that compels farmers to grow poppy and is “fighting to defend [its] revenue streams.”⁴⁸³ While there is no doubt the Taliban benefit from, are complicit in, and support the narcotics trade, there is some dispute about the extent to which Taliban involvement in the narcotics trade is altering Taliban motivations and ideology. A recent International Crisis Group report emphasized that “it would be naive to say the Taliban [are] fighting because conflict helps [them] gain control over the profits of the drug trade, or that Afghanistan’s drug production boom is because of the Taliban.”⁴⁸⁴ Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest farmers are coerced into growing poppy; rather, cultivating poppy is one of the only livelihoods

available to many rural populations.⁴⁸⁵ As early as 2008, State acknowledged the idea of Afghan farmers being coerced into planting poppy was a myth.⁴⁸⁶ A robust analysis of poppy cultivation would ask why farmers would need to be forced to do something that already works.

Finally, given the extent of government corruption, estimates of how much revenue the Taliban receive from the drug trade should be paired with estimates of how much money Afghan police, customs, district government, and other officials receive through involvement in the opium economy.

Overestimating the Taliban's reliance on the narcotics trade could produce inaccurate assessments of how badly Taliban finances may suffer due to the destruction of labs. As Afghan counternarcotics experts have pointed out, insurgents are funded through a wide array of activities beyond taxing the drug trade.⁴⁸⁷ Robust intelligence estimates, though hampered by the current security environment, are necessary to ensure the aerial bombardment of labs does not incur greater costs—both financially and in increased antipathy or hostility among rural populations—than the costs imposed on the Taliban.

New Tactic, Similar Goals

In the December briefing, Bunch described the strikes as the beginning of a new, “sustained air interdiction campaign” to disrupt Taliban financial networks. Bunch stated that “this is the first time we have persistently used our airpower in this interdiction role.” While this is true, Bunch then incorrectly stated that “the Taliban have never had to face a sustained targeting campaign focused on disrupting their illicit revenue activities.”⁴⁸⁸ In fact, cutting off Taliban financing was a key goal of the U.S. interagency Afghan Threat Finance Cell from 2008 to 2014, and this focus on threat finance is being reinvigorated today.⁴⁸⁹ More broadly, while U.S. interdiction efforts in Afghanistan did not previously rely on airstrikes, they centered on destroying drug-processing labs, seizing narcotics, arresting and prosecuting those who trafficked in them, and tracing, freezing, or confiscating proceeds.

Further, the United States and UK both invested in and provided military support to Afghan interdiction units. The Afghan Special Narcotics Force, also known as TF-333, a specialized paramilitary unit, was trained and equipped by the UK and tasked with conducting raids and destroying heroin laboratories.⁴⁹⁰ (See page 41.) It operated in a counternarcotics-focused capacity from roughly 2003 to 2008 and destroyed a number of labs.⁴⁹¹ In addition, DEA used its Foreign-Deployed Advisory and Support Teams to operate in military-style raids with Afghan or U.S. Special Forces, and to train and mentor Afghan units from 2005 until 2015.⁴⁹²

This report assesses that those interdiction efforts achieved short-term tactical successes, but had only limited impact on longer-term efforts to dismantle drug trafficking networks and cut off funding for the insurgency. For example, 248 labs were destroyed in 2006, compared to only 26 the year before.⁴⁹³ However, according to UNODC, “in 2007, the number of heroin laboratories in Afghanistan increased.”⁴⁹⁴

In Afghanistan, drug-processing facilities are rudimentary and notoriously dynamic, easy to build and operate. A 2006 DEA assessment concluded that, in response to raids on drug labs, many laboratory operators altered their activities by “placing labs in urban areas, varying the locations of their labs, and operating from smaller mobile labs that process on



Four U.S. Navy F/A-18 Hornet aircraft fly over mountains in Afghanistan. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Andy M. Kin)

demand, rather than from larger fixed labs.”⁴⁹⁵ The report further observed that, following successful raids of clandestine labs, processors often rebuilt laboratories and resumed production after law enforcement departed an area.⁴⁹⁶ During an interview regarding lab destruction in October 2017, just prior to the bombing campaign, the Afghan Deputy Interior Minister in charge of the Counternarcotics Police of Afghanistan stated traffickers “can build a lab like this in one day.”⁴⁹⁷

Uncertain Benefits

Ultimately, it is unclear whether targeting drug labs through an aerial bombing campaign is cost-effective or strategically wise. The strikes have included ANDSF and U.S. forces, using U.S. B-52 and F-22 aircraft and Afghan A-29s. Additional support came in the form of high-mobility artillery rocket systems, aircraft carrier-based F/A-18s, aircraft for inflight refueling, and joint surveillance radar systems.⁴⁹⁸ Operating these aircraft costs DOD anywhere from \$9,798 per hour for an F/A-18 to \$35,294 per hour for an F-22.⁴⁹⁹ Destroyed labs, on the other hand, are quickly and easily replaced with minimal cost.⁵⁰⁰

There is also the risk that expanded air strikes by Afghan and international forces could alienate rural populations and strengthen the insurgency. While USFOR-A spokeswoman Garcia stated that no civilian casualties resulted from the campaign in April 2018, reports from the ground suggested otherwise.⁵⁰¹ Civilian casualties—or public perceptions that the bombings are targeting rural communities with few viable income sources—could result in a greater long-term cost to the coalition than the short-term benefit of temporarily disrupting drug production and trade.

U.S. counternarcotics policy has long acknowledged that even the most successful interdiction efforts would never seize all illegal drugs, but measuring the amount seized against the amount produced remained one of the most commonly cited metrics for interdiction success or failure.⁴⁶⁸ Reporting on kilograms of opium or heroin seized did not distinguish between drugs funding the insurgency or corrupt officials and those linked to ordinary traffickers. These figures also served as a poor indicator of successful counterdrug law enforcement, particularly long-term, capacity-building efforts. In recognition of this problem, INL developed a Performance Management Plan in 2014 that accounted for more than just seizure numbers to better measure how programs increased interdiction capacity.⁵⁰² This demonstration of U.S. institutional learning could serve as an example of how to better align program design with strategic goals.

Like the Afghan Threat Finance Cell, the Counter Narcotics Justice Center was an example of a tactical and capacity-building success, but not a strategic one.⁵⁰³ Through intensive interagency efforts, the United States succeeded in building what is regarded by many officials as the most capable, least corrupt judicial institution in Afghanistan.⁵⁰⁴ Once established, the CNJC investigated and prosecuted a few hundred cases a year. Yet, despite a reported conviction rate of over 90 percent, there was little discernible impact on overall levels of drug production and trafficking.⁵⁰⁵ The high conviction rate, combined with low narcotics possession thresholds for trial, resulted in large numbers of minor traffickers flooding the Afghan prison system, particularly those institutions supposed to be reserved for the worst violators.⁵⁰⁶ Between 2005 and 2008, CNJC convicted approximately 1,550 traffickers, but most were low-level offenders.⁵⁰⁷ According to some U.S. officials, the CNJC served largely as a capacity-building exercise because major traffickers, often connected with the Afghan political elite, were considered untouchable.⁵⁰⁸

The case of Haji Lal Jan Ishaqzai is illustrative. A U.S.-designated drug kingpin, Haji Lal Jan was arrested by Afghan counternarcotics authorities in 2012, successfully prosecuted at the CNJC, and sentenced to 15 years in prison for opium trafficking.⁵⁰⁹ Unfortunately, he was subsequently able to bribe a number of actors in the Afghan judicial system to arrange his transfer to a prison in Kandahar and his release, after which he absconded to Pakistan.⁵¹⁰ A tactical success in this case illustrated the strategic failures of the counterdrug law enforcement effort by demonstrating that well-connected traffickers could still escape justice.

While Haji Lal Jan's case is a recent example, the targeting of HVTs yielded disappointing results almost from the outset. In April 2005, drug trafficker Haji Bashir Noorzai was lured to New York to make a deal with U.S. officials, where he was convicted and sentenced.⁵¹¹ Another Afghan trafficker, Khan Mohammad, was transferred to the United States after waiving his right to an extradition

hearing in Afghanistan and became the first person to be convicted under the newly enacted narco-terrorism statute.⁵¹² However, these cases proved to be the exception, rather than the rule. Between 2004 and 2009, only five major Afghan traffickers were convicted in the United States.⁵¹³ Despite the fact that all of these drug traffickers were closely aligned with the Taliban, President Karzai only approved one extradition, that of Haji Baz Mohammed.⁵¹⁴ The remainder were arrested in the United States or other countries which were willing to extradite those traffickers to the United States. This experience demonstrated the limitations of pursuing HVTs without an extradition treaty or competent Afghan judicial and penal institutions; yet State's 2007 counternarcotics strategy called for an increased focus on HVTs and allocated an additional \$343 million to do so.⁵¹⁵

The sometimes-conflicting approaches U.S. government agencies took toward certain HVTs further complicated the issue. As one former coalition official noted, a number of HVTs were powerbrokers who were often employed by one coalition agency or another, as illustrated by the case of Haji Juma Khan.⁵¹⁶ Despite his known drug-trafficking activities, Khan reportedly supplied information to and received payments from a number of U.S. agencies, including CIA, DEA, and the U.S. military. He is reported to have even visited the United States to meet with agency representatives before being arrested in Indonesia and transferred to the United States for prosecution.⁵¹⁷ Working with an HVT while at the same time expending resources to build a case against him exemplified the conflicting U.S. approaches to this interdiction strategy.

These conflicting approaches to HVTs, combined with limited Afghan judicial capacity, widespread corruption, and high-level resistance to prosecuting certain HVTs meant resources spent building cases against these targets were at a significant risk of going to waste. If these resources were made contingent upon specific indicators of Afghan judicial progress or increased commitment to extradition, then investments in interdiction and investigative capacity might have yielded greater returns. As one former senior DEA official stated, "The biggest failure was not to get extradition. . . . Once we had to hand over information and informants to the Afghans, it wasn't worth it."⁵¹⁸ While there were serious challenges to an extradition treaty with Afghanistan, including concerns about reciprocity and the nature of the Afghan justice system, U.S. mentors were working to reach extradition and legal assistance agreements with the Afghan government in 2008.⁵¹⁹ As the case of Haji Baz Mohammed indicates, the lack of an extradition treaty does not preclude the Afghan government from sending suspected drug traffickers to the United States for trial.

Without a formal extradition treaty or greater willingness from the Afghan government to extradite drug traffickers, the chances of U.S. investments yielding meaningful convictions against HVTs were greatly reduced. The U.S. focus on HVTs identified support for drug HVT extraditions as a critical element of improved investigations and operations, but this support never materialized.⁵²⁰ Despite this lack of support, U.S. agencies continued to expend resources in building investigative and operational capacity. Had investments in investigating, capturing, and prosecuting HVTs been conditioned on further HVT extraditions, the risks of these investments going to waste could have been better mitigated. In the absence of extradition, building the Afghan judicial institutions necessary to prosecute and jail HVTs prior to implementing a strategy that focused on them could have increased the chances of that strategy succeeding.

Counternarcotics law enforcement efforts succeeded in building some of the most proficient police units in the country. The National Interdiction Unit, Sensitive Investigative Unit, and Technical Investigative Unit were regarded as three of the most honest, capable units in Afghan law enforcement, as evidenced by the fact they were sometimes retasked to higher-priority missions within the counterinsurgency and reconstruction effort. While their retasking is illustrative of a successful capacity-building effort, it also makes clear the systemic limitation that counterdrug law enforcement was not, and indeed could not be, the Afghan government's top priority.

Resources did shift toward counterdrug law enforcement to match the increased strategic focus on interdiction after 2009, but the success of these efforts was limited by increasing insecurity across the country.⁵²¹ Similar limitations imposed by corruption within the Afghan government meant the Counter Narcotics Justice Center, while highly-regarded and capable, was unable to achieve consistent, meaningful convictions of high-level traffickers.⁵²²

Aside from disagreements about whether to focus on disrupting the opium industry through military-style raids or investigative efforts working through the judicial process, interdiction and law enforcement efforts did not experience the kind of divisions that impeded other strands of the counternarcotics effort. Instead, the wider security and political environment imposed the primary obstacles to fully empowering the capable police and judicial institutions that were built. It remains to be seen whether the CNJC, NIU, and other capable units can serve as centers of excellence that improve larger ministries, or if they will be overtaken by the corruption and insecurity that plague the larger Afghan institutional framework.

ERADICATION: THE WAR ON THE CROP

Eradication was a particularly divisive element, not just in the counternarcotics strategy in Afghanistan, but also in the overall reconstruction effort. This section covers the UK's compensated eradication campaign of 2002, followed by the U.S. government's efforts in crop destruction, including the Poppy Eradication Force, and the U.S. and UK's joint efforts in Governor-Led Eradication. To fully understand these sometimes overlapping eradication campaigns, it is also necessary to understand some of the individuals who drove the agenda, as well as the institutional reasons for INL's preference for eradication. For example, former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Ronald Neumann described INL's "strong ideology for eradication" that could manifest in a stubborn adherence to crop destruction, regardless of evidence or circumstances.⁵²³

While it is generally accepted that crop destruction can reduce the amount of opiates available for distribution, sale, and final consumption in a given year, its long-term effects are disputed.

While it is generally accepted that crop destruction can reduce the amount of opiates available for distribution, sale, and final consumption in a given year, its long-term effects are disputed. Does eradication deter future planting by changing the cost-benefit ratio to farmers, as is sometimes claimed? Or, as opponents have argued, does it in fact lead to rising opium prices and higher levels of cultivation in subsequent years? Finally, does eradication "enhance the credibility and effectiveness of all Afghan government counternarcotics efforts," as the U.S. Embassy claimed in 2003?⁵²⁴ The empirical evidence behind these claims will be reviewed in the final part of this section and in chapter 4, using geospatial analysis commissioned by SIGAR specifically for this purpose.

Muddying the Water: The British Campaign of Compensated Eradication

The first foray into eradication after the fall of the Taliban in late 2001 was at the behest of the UK government.⁵²⁵ Determined to act against the opium crop that would be ready for harvest in the spring of 2002, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair agreed to Operation Drown, a \$30 million compensated eradication program designed to offer a one-time payment of \$1,750 per hectare, or \$350 per jerib (about 1/5 of a hectare) to farmers whose crop was destroyed.⁵²⁶ This campaign was initially carried out in the provinces of Nangarhar and Helmand in April 2002, and ultimately expanded to include Badakhshan, Uruzgan, Kunar, and Laghman.⁵²⁷ The leader of the Transitional Administration, Hamid Karzai, supported the plan, and local Afghan commanders were involved in its implementation.⁵²⁸



Afghan police eradicate a poppy field near the city of Qalat, Zabul Province. (Resolute Support photo by 1st Lt. Brian Wagner)

Operation Drown was beset by difficulties from the outset. Reports of rising cultivation were directly attributed to the campaign amid accusations that some farmers were growing opium poppy in order to attract compensation.⁵²⁹ Farmers in Helmand and Nangarhar claimed they had not received their promised compensation, and there were reports farmers were harvesting the opium gum before eradication teams arrived to destroy the crop. Further, the scale of eradication was reported to have been exaggerated.⁵³⁰

Operation Drown was widely seen as a strategic misstep. While the UK reported that 16,500 hectares of opium poppy were destroyed in Operation Drown, others expressed doubts about the validity of this number.⁵³¹ Mohammed Ehsan Zia, former Minister of MRRD, suggested, “The first mistake was . . . compensated eradication. It didn’t send a message of a serious nature. Buying the crop was the wrong way. It was the equivalent of emergency relief, which tends to be associated with corruption, misuse of money, and no checks and balances.”⁵³² One former deputy minister argued that compensated eradication was “the beginning of corruption in counternarcotics.”⁵³³ According to scholar Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown, “Local commanders thus benefited in three ways from compensated eradication: by pocketing vast sums intended for compensation, by collecting bribes to forego eradication, and by strengthening their political capital with the landlords and farmers whose fields they spared.”⁵³⁴ The former deputy minister also argued that Operation Drown led to higher levels of cultivation in 2003.⁵³⁵ A senior agriculturalist with over 30 years’ experience working in rural Afghanistan went so far as to describe the campaign as “an appalling piece of complete raw naiveté.”⁵³⁶ Several of those involved in the day-to-day planning of eradication in later years believed they were “haunted by Drown . . . and people’s perspectives of the program.”⁵³⁷

Despite the perceived failure of Operation Drown, Karzai remained a vocal proponent of this sort of eradication campaign and even suggested in 2004 that the opium crop could be eliminated from Afghanistan within a two-year time period.⁵³⁸ Rising levels of planting in late 2002 and the prospect of even higher levels of cultivation in 2003 prompted Karzai to call for further UK support for eradication.⁵³⁹

Given the UK's role as lead nation for counternarcotics, one senior UK official believed he had little choice but to support Karzai's request.⁵⁴⁰ The Blair administration, on the other hand, was bruised from criticisms of Operation Drown. It argued that the payments to farmers for eradicated crops were a one-time payment, so there was little basis to repeat the campaign. At the same time, there was, as one former senior UK official recalled, a sense that the UK had to act to prevent poppy cultivation from rising.⁵⁴¹

In response to Karzai's demand and pressure from Prime Minister Blair and Foreign Office Minister Mike O'Brien, the UK's Foreign Office advocated creating a 100-soldier eradication force. In late December 2002, UK officials in Kabul pressed the U.S. military and Karzai for their support. A letter was also sent from Blair to President Bush requesting support for the eradication force. Inquiries by the UK confirmed Bush would respond positively and send a letter agreeing to the plan. While President Bush did respond positively, there is no indication that he issued a directive regarding such a force. The plan was ultimately rejected in January 2003 by Lieutenant General Dan McNeill, the commander of coalition forces at the time.⁵⁴² One British official recalled McNeill "described President Bush's letter to Blair as a mistake."⁵⁴³ Another former UK official noted McNeill thought "the Afghans were not ready and eradication was not part of the U.S. Army's responsibility."⁵⁴⁴

Ultimately, UK officials agreed the UK would only eradicate opium poppy where viable alternatives existed, a position that led to consistent disagreements with parts of the U.S. government, in particular, INL.

In light of the U.S. rejection and the failed compensated eradication campaign, the UK began to look more closely at the efficacy of eradication and what role it could play. UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw commissioned a global review of eradication, which concluded that "premature eradication damages the environment in which alternative livelihood initiatives operate and undermines the development of long-term solutions to the causes of drug production."⁵⁴⁵ It suggested that "eradication works where preceded by comprehensive development programs to promote alternative, licit livelihoods."⁵⁴⁶ Ultimately, the UK Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the UK Secretary of State for

International Development, and the UK Secretary of State for Defense agreed the UK would only eradicate opium poppy where viable alternatives existed, a position that led to consistent disagreements with parts of the U.S. government, in particular, INL, which would soon advocate for destroying as much of the opium crop as possible, regardless of the conditions.⁵⁴⁷

A Change in INL Leadership and the Push for Eradication

By mid-2003, Congress was increasingly concerned about the burgeoning opium crop.⁵⁴⁸ However, DOD remained opposed to getting involved and the Bush administration as a whole was largely agnostic, content to leave counternarcotics to the UK. In the spring of 2003, without direct UK support for eradication, crop destruction was done at the behest of provincial governors.⁵⁴⁹ While the Afghan authorities claimed that 21,430 hectares of poppy were destroyed, there was no independent verification of the numbers' authenticity.⁵⁵⁰ Moreover, by October 2003, significant cultivation had spread to 28 provinces, from 24 in 2002 and only one in 2001.⁵⁵¹ While this was on par with cultivation levels before the Taliban ban, it was significantly more than the 8,000 hectares recorded in 2001, while the ban was in effect. Although that drastic drop in cultivation was viewed as an unsustainable outlier, many continued to use the 2001 cultivation figure as a benchmark by which to judge the counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan.⁵⁵²

Amid these rising numbers, UNODC Executive Director Costa emphasized “the risk that Afghanistan would turn into a failed state,” a statement that was also invoked by parts of the Afghan administration at the time.⁵⁵³ This sense of imminent failure coincided with an increasing frustration within the U.S. government regarding the SSR process and the lack of vision and action by several of the lead nations.⁵⁵⁴ As the Italians and Germans would later be criticized for their work on justice and police reform, respectively, so would the UK's counternarcotics efforts. U.S. Ambassador Khalilzad referred to the UK counternarcotics effort as “underpowered, under-resourced, and conceptually misguided.”⁵⁵⁵

In October 2003, Robert Charles was tapped to replace Rand Beers as Assistant Secretary of State for INL. In contrast to Beers, who, according to one embassy official, saw widespread eradication as “bringing a country on its knees down even further,” Charles was adamant that a far more robust campaign of crop eradication was required.⁵⁵⁶

In April 2004, Charles testified before the House Subcommittee on Government Reform on the status of counterdrug efforts in Afghanistan. Throughout the testimony, provocatively titled “Afghanistan: Are the British Counternarcotics Efforts Going Wobbly?,” Charles critiqued the UK's drug control efforts, specifically its position on targeted eradication.⁵⁵⁷ Charles also used the hearing

to advance a revised eradication target of 25,000 to 35,000 hectares for 2004.⁵⁵⁸ Such targets were unrealistic; nevertheless, Charles continued to press this and even higher targets. Indeed, by October 2004, Charles and INL sought to revise the 20,000 to 30,000 hectares eradication target recommended by the Kabul Counter Narcotics Task Force and increase it to 60,000 hectares, even raising the specter of a further 30,000-hectare increase, to a target of 90,000 hectares.⁵⁵⁹ By doing so, Charles influenced congressional expectations of the scale of eradication that could be achieved and denigrated the UK's efforts as lead nation.

The Creation of an Eradication Force

In December 2003, the director of Afghanistan's Counter Narcotics Directorate, Mirwais Yasini, requested support for an Afghan-led eradication force. He suggested this force would operate "for at least two growing seasons," somewhat ambitiously claiming "after which, the law enforcement institutions will be sufficiently developed to deter and control opium poppy cultivation."⁵⁶⁰ The initial CND proposal called for three teams of 225 specially trained MOI police and a protective security force of 300 men "recruited from a Muslim nation sympathetic to Afghanistan, but also victimized by opium products from Afghanistan."⁵⁶¹ It was estimated that the cost of this force would be "between \$34 and \$45 million for two years."⁵⁶²

The CND proposal recommended a trust fund be established to support the formation of this eradication force, a move that was supported by both the INL coordinator in Kabul and the UK.⁵⁶³ The UK even offered to make a "significant contribution" to the cost.⁵⁶⁴ The UK, however, did "not want a program that looks like the eradication is being done by the UK or the [United States]" and therefore did "not want to do [eradication] by contracting with any large UK or U.S. logistics companies that are too often closely associated in the minds of the public with their respective governments."⁵⁶⁵ CND Director Yasini made clear the Afghan government wanted to run its own eradication program "without intervening grantees or contractors."⁵⁶⁶ INL in Kabul agreed, stating the Afghan government "needs to be seen as the owner of any eradication program. . . . The [U.S. government] needs such an arrangement to avoid any perception that it, not the UK, is in the lead, or that the eradication plan is basically the [U.S. government] carrying out eradication."⁵⁶⁷

Despite this consensus, in 2004 INL created an eradication force composed of Afghans, with Western advisors, called the Central Poppy Eradication Force. It was subsequently renamed the Afghan Eradication Force and then the Poppy Eradication Force. To create the force, INL awarded a multi-million dollar contract to DynCorp, a major U.S. defense contractor.⁵⁶⁸ This was in direct contravention of what had been requested by the Afghan authorities and the U.S. and UK embassies.⁵⁶⁹

Progress on getting the eradication force into the fields to eradicate was slow. In 2005, as few as 210 hectares were destroyed by the force.⁵⁷⁰ In the Maiwand district of Kandahar, the force found itself blockaded for a week in April 2005 by a demonstration of farmers armed with stones.⁵⁷¹

By late 2005, after its second lackluster season of eradication, the eradication force was seen by some as a “broken program.” Officially, it consisted of a 1,000-person force, while in reality, many workers did not show up. Those who did only did so at the early stage of the season and were absent when it came time to deploy. Furthermore, many of the men recruited for the eradication force were ethnic Tajiks, which caused friction when they deployed into the poppy-growing areas of the Pashtun south.⁵⁷²

As the eradication force prepared for its third eradication season at the end of 2005, its staff were still not registered with the MOI and were therefore not considered ministry employees. The Ministry of Finance saw the staff as “troops for a special project funded by a foreign donor.”⁵⁷³ The INL office in Kabul had to pay the force’s salaries until December 2004, when UK assumed that responsibility until September 2005. When the United States once again took over paying salaries in October 2005, the force faced what it saw as a 75 percent reduction in salaries due to previous overpayment by the UK.⁵⁷⁴ Finally, because the Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan (CSTC-A) did not recognize the eradication force, it was not providing training or uniforms. According to one former eradication contractor, “No one considered them a real police unit.”⁵⁷⁵ These administrative challenges adversely affected the development of a professional, cohesive force.

Starting in 2006, INL and DynCorp invested considerable effort to regularize the eradication force. The force was restructured into smaller, more mobile units and renamed the Afghan Eradication Force. A program of intensive training was developed and the command structure was streamlined. Significant progress was made to integrate the AEF into the ANP and formalize it as a functional unit.⁵⁷⁶ By 2008, the entire force was enrolled in an electronic payment system and was recognized by CSTC-A.⁵⁷⁷

The sheer size of the eradication force at this point demonstrated the organizational progress that had been made. One AEF commander recalled that, when deployed to Helmand from Kabul in 2006, the eradication force consisted of 200 trucks and an accompanying military convoy stretching more than five miles.⁵⁷⁸ By 2006, the AEF also had the support of eight UH-1 helicopters from INL’s Air Wing that were intended to enhance mobility and support plans for a more vigorous eradication effort in subsequent years.⁵⁷⁹

Despite these gains, the AEF still had to manage the realities of the security situation in Afghanistan, as well as the significant influence provincial governors, local powerbrokers, and the international community—particularly Western military forces—had on where they could go to destroy the opium crop. A 2006 embassy review of the PEF observed that “it [had] been subjugated to provincial governors and their staff, some of whom [were] disingenuous in their efforts to direct the AEF away from priority one targeted areas and in fact, on occasion, completely out of targeted areas.”⁵⁸⁰ A former UN official noted, “In Helmand and Uruzgan, eradication [was] subject to political manipulation and corruption. It [was] virtually impossible to conduct in districts where the Taliban [were] relatively strong, thereby inevitably penalizing farmers in pro-government districts.”⁵⁸¹

Even in late 2006, INL Assistant Secretary Anne Patterson recognized the AEF wasn’t “very successful so far” and talked of “hoping to improve it next year very dramatically.”⁵⁸² She offered a candid description of the logistics and security problems in Afghanistan, highlighting the contrasts with Colombia:

This is much more complex. We pay an American pilot three times [more] to fly in Afghanistan [than] we pay in Colombia. Unlike Colombia, where there were military bases we could deploy to, [eradication] requires air support, because helicopters have to go in there and reconnoiter the crop. They have to see if the security situation is proper.⁵⁸³

While considerable progress was made in institutionalizing the eradication force, which was renamed the Poppy Eradication Force in 2007, the unit never met INL’s expectations with regard to the rate of crop destruction that could be achieved. This was largely due to INL’s faulty expectations of how much crop the PEF could actually destroy given the terrain, insecurity, and political realities of the areas they worked in. An interagency assessment by the State and DOD Inspectors General stated, “Embassy Kabul’s tentative eradication goals for 2007 were very optimistic, lacking methodological planning processes to develop eradication plans with realistic targets and appropriate resources to achieve them.”⁵⁸⁴

The divide between targets and capabilities was most pronounced in 2007, when the PEF was told by INL that it needed to destroy 10,000 hectares.⁵⁸⁵ One contractor closely involved with the PEF referred to the target as “an operational nightmare,” emphasizing that “there was no physical way to meet this target. . . . Even if everything went right—all the tractors worked, there were no physical threats, and the weather was right—we could only do so much. We had 32 tractors and their operational rate was only ever 43 percent, depending on the stage of cultivation. The best that could be done was somewhere around 7,000 hectares.”⁵⁸⁶

INL’s views, however, were shaped by the desire to destroy as much of the crop as possible. The same contractor who worked closely with the PEF noted, “10,000 hectares became the answer. INL was focusing on quantitative metrics,

but needed to focus on qualitative aspects of eradication and integrate a crop-reduction program which offered viable alternatives, public information, and access to markets.⁵⁸⁷ INL continued to press for a “credible threat,” the level of crop destruction required, in its view, to achieve the strategic effect of deterring cultivation in subsequent growing seasons. The notion of a credible threat had arisen in 2004 when UNODC Executive Director Costa said eradication had to “reach a threshold of credibility,” or 25 percent of the crop.⁵⁸⁸ (See pages 31–33.)

Ultimately, the effort failed. Under acute pressure to perform, the 2007 campaign was beset by over-reporting.⁵⁸⁹ The PEF was still self-reporting and submitting flawed GPS coordinates to mark eradicated fields.⁵⁹⁰ Imagery collected by the UK revealed gross over-reporting.⁵⁹¹ Researchers at Cranfield University who were doing imagery analysis concluded that some areas eradicated by the PEF were “considerably over-estimated.”⁵⁹² A former UK contractor recalled that the researchers discovered “the numbers were not stacking up and there was systematic over-reporting.”⁵⁹³ As in 2006, according to the UK contractor, INL again disputed these claims, causing a further review of the data.⁵⁹⁴ A joint U.S. and UK review ultimately supported Cranfield’s analysis, finding that where the PEF had reported 7,000 hectares destroyed, “not more than 3,000 hectares” had actually been eradicated.⁵⁹⁵

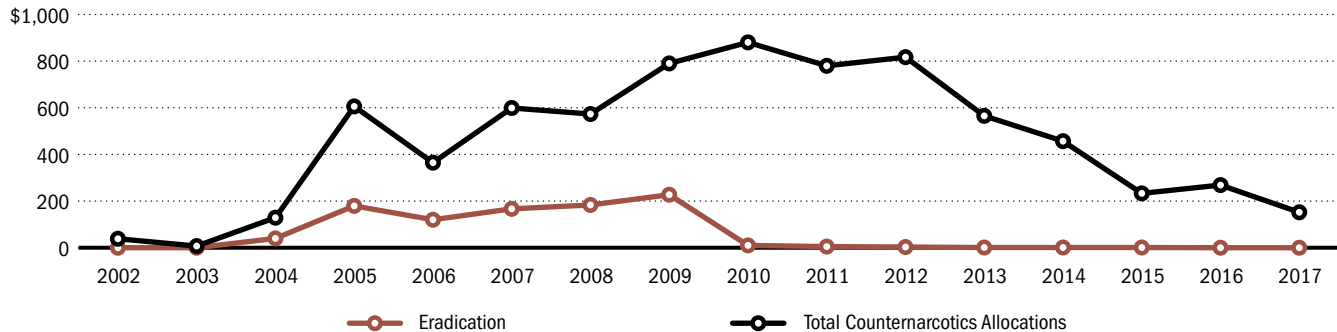
The disputed 2007 eradication numbers, as well as continued disagreement over which areas should be eradicated, strained the working relationship between UK and U.S. counternarcotics officials.⁵⁹⁶ Despite concerns over the actual amount of eradication carried out and some counterdrug officials’ doubts about the PEF’s effectiveness, the PEF continued for two more seasons. In 2008, the force encountered significant armed resistance, with its members subject to frequent attacks while in the field.⁵⁹⁷

The PEF’s last year of operations was 2009. With the change in the U.S. administration, President Obama and SRAP Holbrooke took an eradication-led approach to counternarcotics off the table. (See figure 8.) Previously, in a 2008 op-ed, Holbrooke asserted that the forced eradication effort might be “the single most ineffective program in the history of American foreign policy.”⁵⁹⁸ Several U.S. government officials recalled that Holbrooke thought if eradication was to take place at all, it should be led and implemented by Afghans, and Afghans alone.⁵⁹⁹ Ultimately, the PEF was disbanded and U.S. government support was redirected to Governor-Led Eradication.

Over six years, \$294.6 million was budgeted for the contracted eradication force, which destroyed a total of 9,446 hectares over those years.⁶⁰⁰ This total was far short of the 10,000 hectares per year envisioned by senior policymakers at INL.

FIGURE 8

ERADICATION FUNDING COMPARED TO TOTAL COUNTERNARCOTICS FUNDING, 2002-2017 (\$ MILLIONS)



Source: SIGAR analysis of agency budget documentation and budget data.

Governor-Led Eradication

In addition to the PEF, the United States supported a program called Governor-Led Eradication. To encourage GLE, the United States and UK reimbursed governors for the “actual expenses incurred in eradicating poppy fields.”⁶⁰¹ This payment initially started at \$120 per hectare in 2006, rising to \$135 per hectare in 2009, before almost doubling—after the disbanding of the PEF—to \$250 per hectare in 2011.⁶⁰² Payments for GLE were made through the Ministry of Counter Narcotics, which subsequently disbursed funds to governors based on UNODC verification of the amount of crop destroyed.⁶⁰³

Building both the intent and the capacity to deliver effective crop destruction at the provincial level was no easy task. Allegations of corruption beleaguered the program. In the 2002 and 2003 growing seasons, Helmand governor Sher Mohammad Akhundzada was accused of circumventing areas selected by the MOI for eradication, instead targeting fields of political opponents and vulnerable farmers.⁶⁰⁴ As with the PEF, there were also allegations of over-reporting the scale of eradication that occurred under GLE.⁶⁰⁵

In an attempt to align eradication policy with the Afghan National Drug Control Strategy, the UK established a Central Poppy Eradication Cell in the MCN to assist in identifying target areas in which the governors would conduct eradication within their provinces.⁶⁰⁶ The basis for these targets were areas where “the most advantaged farmers” could be found.⁶⁰⁷ A former UK contractor who was involved in the Eradication Cell summed up the targeted eradication policy as “the need to target for effect. If a province grows 5,000 hectares, and can’t destroy it all, you can only eradicate something, so let’s destroy the crop of the most advantaged farmers. Therefore, look at access to roads, markets, insecurity, and freedom of movement. Map rural livelihoods, risks, and

vulnerability, and recognize that some farmers have opportunities while others do not, and target those with opportunities.”⁶⁰⁸

In the early years of GLE, prior to each poppy-growing season, UK and U.S. officials arranged a governors’ conference with the MCN. At the conference, provincial leaders were encouraged to act against the crop, both before and after planting, and target maps developed by the Central Eradication Planning Cell were shared with each governor and the scale of expected eradication was announced.⁶⁰⁹ Negotiations over the type of assistance to be provided by the UK and the United States—typically the provision of tractors—also took place.⁶¹⁰

By 2005, the UK and the United States began pressing UNODC to develop its capacity to verify the hectarage of eradication undertaken by the provincial governments, as well as the quality of the crops eradicated (such as whether the crop had already been harvested).⁶¹¹ Prior to 2005, there was no independent verification of the eradication data reported by the Afghan authorities. In the 2002–2003 growing season, the Afghan authorities reported that 21,430 hectares of poppy were eradicated.⁶¹² While UNODC cited these figures in its annual survey, it also acknowledged that “the present survey neither monitored, nor assessed, the effectiveness of the eradication campaign.”⁶¹³ The UNODC annual survey for 2004 did not report any eradication figures at all.⁶¹⁴

Despite its initial reluctance, UNODC ultimately agreed to develop its capacity to accurately verify eradication. It took some time for UNODC to build the capability to do this, leading to concerns over the accuracy of eradication reporting until at least 2008. Until 2007, UNODC over-relied on surveyors visiting rural areas after the eradication campaign had been completed, making accurate verification difficult because many fields were already cleared. Both the UK and the United States provided funds for the verification process. In total, the State Department reported allocating \$13 million for efforts that included verification between 2010 and 2012.⁶¹⁵

Despite investments in verification, there were enduring concerns regarding GLE over-reporting. A 2006 cable from Embassy Kabul acknowledged that “UNODC is officially quite skeptical of the [GLE] numbers.”⁶¹⁶ An April 2006 UNODC report referenced in the 2006 cable noted GLE’s “figure is considered to be a gross overestimate of the true area eradicated.”⁶¹⁷

There were pervasive disagreements between the UK and the United States over the scale of eradication and where it would be conducted. The UK’s targeted eradication policy was often seen as problematic by INL—even described as “arcane”—and was blamed for the limited amount of eradication achieved by the eradication force. In order to maintain their working relationship with the

United States, the UK, at times, pursued an eradication campaign that was contrary to its own principle of targeted eradication in places where viable alternatives existed.⁶¹⁸ Ultimately, despite the Central Eradication Planning Cell's attempts to establish a rigorous set of constraints on what areas could be targeted for eradication, U.S. insistence, coupled with the political realities of working through Afghan interlocutors in the provinces, resulted in an ineffective system of targeting.

At times, criticisms of GLE seemed unfairly biased, given that many of the same problems that beset GLE also beleaguered the eradication efforts of the PEF. Yet, the scale of the over-reporting by the eradication force in 2006 was largely ignored by U.S. officials, as well as by a British Embassy Drugs Team, which was eager to maintain cordial relations with its main ally in Kabul and to report a successful eradication campaign.⁶¹⁹

Ambassador Neumann described the situation as “eradicate enough to keep Washington happy while buying time for other elements of the strategy to begin taking hold.”⁶²⁰ A former UK government contractor noted the challenges of being heard under such overtly political conditions:

In 2005, we were seeing imagery that suggested the amount destroyed was less than 50 percent of what was claimed. The result was a clash with the head of the British Embassy Drugs Team. There was triumphant reporting from PEF and GLE saying a lot of crop had been destroyed. Yet, we had annotated imagery showing actual figures and showed them to the head of the British Embassy Drugs Team. We were told, ‘Your figures are wrong. They are not right. The guys in the field reporting these figures are right.’ I was insistent, I am providing you with analysis, imagery, and scientific-based accounts. But the head of the British Embassy Drugs Team wanted to promote big numbers, as did the United States and the UN.⁶²¹

Despite concerns about over-reporting, at the end of the 2006 growing season, UNODC reported 15,300 hectares had been destroyed.⁶²²

By 2008, many of the problems with eradication verification had been resolved. Satellite imagery was more prevalent, and after the problems in 2006 and 2007, there was less political pressure to reach unachievable targets. GLE eradication verification was strengthened by the implementation of a Tractor Tracking Project, which was further improved by placing a GPS device on each tractor to track its movements.⁶²³

While eradication verification improved, disagreements continued over where eradication should be conducted. INL continued to favor eradication, regardless of conditions, in order to meet political demands and the 25 percent “credible threat” threshold. INL agreed to compensate the governors, regardless of whether the crop was in the MCN target area, undermining attempts to promote a targeted

campaign. One former UK official claimed, “Some in INL accepted the UK position on targeted eradication, but many did not. I do not believe INL ever got the idea that farmers could replant the next year after the crop was destroyed.”⁶²⁴

It was not until the 2009–2010 eradication seasons that INL aligned its policy with that of the UK and the Afghan National Drug Strategy and only made payments for eradication within the target areas identified by the MCN.⁶²⁵ This alignment proved short-lived when, in April 2014, the United States reverted back to the position it had held prior to 2009, agreeing to “payment for all UNODC verified hectares.”⁶²⁶

Ultimately, INL’s adamant pursuit of spraying was a key factor preventing the United States, UK, and Afghanistan from establishing a shared eradication policy.

After eradicating 9,672 hectares in 2012, GLE declined.⁶²⁷ Increasing levels of insecurity, direct attacks on the eradication teams, and the departure of international military forces made GLE more difficult to sustain. There were 143 eradication related fatalities in 2013, compared to 20 in 2011.⁶²⁸ The Afghan presidential elections in the midst of the spring eradication campaign of 2014 made crop destruction particularly challenging, from both the perspective of security and winning electoral support in rural areas.⁶²⁹ There were also growing concerns over the accuracy of the reporting after the withdrawal of foreign forces and the loss of oversight that imagery and GPS tracking devices had brought. Eradication in Badakhshan, for example, had come to represent a significant proportion of total GLE between 2013 and 2015, claiming to destroy from one-quarter to one-half of the crop planted each year.⁶³⁰ According to one report, these numbers represented “an almost inconceivable level of eradication in the province.”⁶³¹ In 2016, GLE destroyed as few as 355 hectares.⁶³²

INL’s Pursuit of Spraying

INL’s repeated push to coerce the Afghan government to allow aerial and ground-based spraying was, by far, the most divisive position within the eradication effort, particularly given the widespread opposition to the use of herbicides within Afghanistan and among NATO allies. INL’s pursuit of spraying also generated impassioned opposition from many U.S. government agencies, most notably DOD, whose counterinsurgency strategy depended on the assistance of the rural population. For the UK government, the diplomatic battles over spraying consistently undermined its authority as lead nation on counternarcotics and often led to broader disunity with the Afghan government and other allies.⁶³³ Ultimately, INL’s adamant pursuit of spraying was a key factor preventing the United States, UK, and Afghanistan from establishing a shared eradication policy.

Aerial Spraying

The first proposal for aerial spraying was in 2004, when the U.S. Embassy Interagency Planning Group developed a “Short Term Counternarcotics Implementation Action Plan” for September 2004 to September 2005. The action plan referred to a need to decide on the means to eradicate 20,000 to 30,000 hectares, with Badakhshan and Helmand Provinces as targets for “aerial eradication.”⁶³⁴ The plan estimated the cost of the aerial campaign at \$25 to \$30 million and anticipated a decision on eradication by October 2004, with deployment of an aerial eradication team between March and May 2005. While the plan did not address the pros and cons of aerial eradication, the inclusion of aerial spraying appeared to reflect an impulse to employ any means available to eradicate the crop and described great urgency on counternarcotics, stating “Time running out to create necessary impact to reverse situation—everything threatened.”⁶³⁵

In December 2004, news agencies reported on an incident in Nangarhar in which a number of Afghan villagers and tribal leaders alleged that an unidentified plane sprayed opium poppy fields with a toxic chemical.⁶³⁶ An international senior agriculturalist working in the Rodat district of Nangarhar at the time of the incident also reported collecting “small dark grey pellets . . . scattered on the concrete in the [school] yard.”⁶³⁷ While U.S. officials adamantly denied any involvement, U.S. Ambassador Khalilzad ultimately acknowledged that “accusations [of spraying] were not without foundation.”⁶³⁸

Assistant Secretary of State for INL Charles championed the Interagency Planning Group’s Action Plan, which was then briefed to President Bush by Secretary of State Colin Powell.⁶³⁹ However, opposition to the plan’s proposed use of aerial spraying was extensive.⁶⁴⁰ A senior DOD official argued the initiative was opposed by many, most importantly Ambassador Khalilzad and President Karzai, stating, “Karzai and Khalilzad said no. It couldn’t be forced down their throats and no PRT wanted it in their region.”⁶⁴¹ A former senior military official noted, “The U.S. military was violently against aerial spraying. No one in the U.S. military or OSD supported aerial spraying.” The same official recalled that INL’s persistence had resulted in the staging of sprayers in Pakistan, at which point “it took a lot of effort to stop it.”⁶⁴² The opposition to aerial spraying was so great, some in Congress suggested Robert Charles be removed as Assistant Secretary of State for INL because of his support for the idea.⁶⁴³ Due in part to this opposition, the staged sprayers never made it into Afghanistan, and the plan to introduce aerial spraying in the 2004 to 2005 growing season was ultimately rejected.⁶⁴⁴

A number of sources indicate INL remained intent on aerial spraying. The systematic way in which levels of crop destruction were over-promised

to senior officials and Congress led some people who were most actively engaged in eradication to argue that INL's intention was to present ground-based eradication as a failure in order to justify the move to aerial spraying.⁶⁴⁵ A 2006 GAO report stated, "The United States originally planned to use crop dusting airplanes to spray herbicides on the opium poppy before it could be harvested."⁶⁴⁶ A subsequent 2010 GAO report also noted that "State originally intended a central eradication force comprised of Afghan Counternarcotics Police to be augmented by aerial herbicide spraying."⁶⁴⁷ The arrival of the INL Air Wing in 2006 was also described by one former UK government contractor as the "vanguard of the planned spray program in Afghanistan—the gunships to protect the spray planes."⁶⁴⁸ Discussions between INL's Patterson and UNODC's Costa in mid-2006 also indicate that aerial eradication was not yet off the agenda.⁶⁴⁹

Ground-Based Spraying

Recognizing the strength of the opposition to aerial spraying, INL turned its attention to a ground-based spraying campaign. By mid-2006, there was a major diplomatic effort underway to get approval for this from both the Afghan authorities and the UK.⁶⁵⁰ A July 2006 embassy cable underscored the fact that, "Although the [government of Afghanistan] did not agree to aerial spraying last year, the [U.S. government] was discussing with the UK ways to gain [Afghan] agreement for ground spraying of opium fields. This would be less expensive and perhaps meet less [Afghan] opposition."⁶⁵¹

A 2006 Embassy Kabul report estimated the costs of augmenting the PEF to support ground-based spraying.⁶⁵² President Karzai indicated that he would support ground-based spraying that same year.⁶⁵³ An environmental impact assessment of herbicide eradication was also released.⁶⁵⁴ Elements of Congress publicly called for INL to press Karzai on ground-based spraying.⁶⁵⁵ Once these initial actions were complete and interagency agreement was reached, the embassy was charged with convincing others that, "with the Principals' November 6 [2006] decision to endorse ground-based spray in Afghanistan, combined with strong backing of Secretary Rice, ONDCP Director Walters, Under Secretary Burns, Assistant Secretary Patterson, and many others, there should be no doubt . . . about the [U.S. government] commitment to operationalizing ground-based spray as part of a forceful [government of Afghanistan] eradication campaign."⁶⁵⁶

U.S. officials were so confident that a manual spraying campaign would be approved that they moved the equipment and glyphosate required for ground-based spraying into Kabul, with processes in place to "procure more [herbicide] if necessary."⁶⁵⁷ Preparations were so advanced that the PEF reported it was ready to deploy in 24 hours—and, according to a Western advisor on the ground

at the time, would have done so if the operation had not been called off by President Karzai.⁶⁵⁸

Despite the endorsement of senior U.S. government officials, the UK was reluctant to support ground-based spraying. Officials challenged the efficiency of the method given that the environmental impact statement indicated “backpack [rather than all-terrain vehicle or tractor-mounted] sprayers would be the herbicide application equipment of choice for poppy eradication within 100 meters of other crops, particularly wheat,” which was the norm in areas where poppy was cultivated.⁶⁵⁹ There were also concerns that the water requirements for ground-based spraying—between 100 and 400 liters of fresh water required per hectare—could pose difficulties, particularly in drought-prone areas of the country where water would need to be transported in.⁶⁶⁰

Most of all, there were concerns over whether ground-based spraying would be subject to exactly the same security, political, and logistics problems that other eradication campaigns had faced. The review of the PEF published by Embassy Kabul in 2006 acknowledged that ground-based spraying was “not a magic bullet,” further adding:

Hectares or acres per day are affected much more by influences outside the physical capability of the eradicator. If the eradication teams are released to select fields in heavily concentrated areas of poppy cultivation, they can then eradicate to their maximum capacity. If, however, they are led by Governor Representatives . . . to small, undersized fields which are widely dispersed and may have been previously harvested, then the overall work rate goes down.⁶⁶¹

The same report noted, “More importantly, [ground-based spraying] is designed as an icebreaker to get acceptance for other than mechanical and manual means,” implying that ground-based spraying was designed to create a precedent for aerial spraying.⁶⁶²

Despite significant reservations, the UK eventually acquiesced and joined the United States in its efforts to persuade the Afghan government to permit a very limited ground-based spraying operation.⁶⁶³ Karzai had already indicated he would support ground-based spraying, but required “international consensus.”⁶⁶⁴ With UK support, the issue was put to the Afghan cabinet in January 2007; the cabinet promptly rejected the request.⁶⁶⁵

A senior British official in Kabul described the event as “the only occasion when the Afghan cabinet met and discussed an issue on their own terms.”⁶⁶⁶ It was clear there were a number of Afghan ministers who “were overwhelmingly and vocally against the ground-spraying proposal.”⁶⁶⁷ Doug Wankel, a former director of the Kabul Counter Narcotics Task Force at Embassy Kabul, reported that, prior to the cabinet meeting, the Deputy Minister of Health, Faizullah Kakar,

said, “We cannot afford to go down this path.”⁶⁶⁸ With a PhD in toxicology, Kakar was one of the most outspoken critics of the proposal in the cabinet meeting. Ambassador Neumann later wrote, “I have never seen the cabinet so eloquent, outspoken, and firm in their views.”⁶⁶⁹

“It wasn’t until the Afghan cabinet meeting that I realized there was no space for spraying at all. The cabinet were all against it. I thought we needed to give this one up. If we can’t persuade these educated people this is feasible, then we cannot persuade rural Afghans.”

—Ambassador Ronald Neumann

Following the Afghan cabinet’s rejection of this ground-based spraying operation, Ambassador Neumann became convinced that the U.S. government should abandon the attempt to cajole the Afghan authorities to adopt spraying. He later stated, “It wasn’t until the Afghan cabinet meeting that I realized there was no space for spraying at all. The cabinet were all against it. I thought we needed to give this one up. If we can’t persuade these educated people this is feasible, then we cannot persuade rural Afghans.”⁶⁷⁰ Neumann also described spraying as “one of the stupidest ideas for Afghan drug control.”⁶⁷¹

The rejection of ground-based spraying by the Afghan cabinet, however, did not end the U.S. push for spraying. In Steve Coll’s account, the issue rose to the highest levels in the Bush administration, with many senior officials, including the president, convinced of the need to adopt a Colombian-style aerial eradication campaign:

Bush’s adaptation of Plan Colombia for Afghanistan constituted the most significant change in U.S. policy in the war since 2002. . . . In late 2006 and early 2007, for Afghanistan, Bush advocated strongly for spraying poppy crops from airplanes in the heart of Taliban country.⁶⁷²

The administration doubled down on the pursuit of spraying with the appointment of William Wood as the U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan in April 2007.⁶⁷³ Ambassador Wood had previously served as the ambassador to Colombia and held firm convictions on the efficacy of aerial spraying.

The End of the Spraying Debate

In 2007, poppy cultivation hit a new record of 193,000 hectares, further invigorating Ambassador Wood and Counternarcotics Coordinator Schweich. At a Policy Advisory Group meeting in August 2007, Wood advocated for a campaign of “ground-based glyphosate spray,” arguing that, “If ground-based eradication does not succeed in these fields, the [United States] will be prepared

to consider even more aggressive techniques.”⁶⁷⁴ Wood also referred to the unsubstantiated credible threat figure, noting, “UNODC Director Costa has said many times that, to be a deterrent to cultivation, eradication must reach at least 25 percent of the crop. . . . We will advocate a clear target for the 2008 harvest year, in line with DG Costa’s recommendation: 25 percent of this year’s 200,000 hectares, or 50,000 hectares.”⁶⁷⁵ Schweich wrote in the *New York Times* that Wood sent him an email advocating “a massive aerial-eradication program that would wipe out 80,000 hectares of poppies in Helmand Province, delivering a fatal blow to the root of the narcotics problem.”⁶⁷⁶

Based on a visit to Washington in the summer of 2007, a former UK counterdrug official described Schweich as “bullish” and convinced that aerial spraying “would happen. He thought he had everything lined up.” The official further noted, “People in the U.S. government had moved from opposing to being neutral, but I didn’t believe conditions had changed, just the hectarage.”⁶⁷⁷

In the fall of 2007, UNODC’s Costa joined Ambassador Wood and Schweich in advocating for aerial spraying, including at a NATO meeting in Brussels.⁶⁷⁸ Privately, Costa told U.S. officials that “he had reached the conclusion that in future years, aerial eradication may provide the only tool for reversing the poppy cultivation trend.”⁶⁷⁹

Those advocating spraying asserted that ground-based eradication was “inefficient, costly, dangerous, and more subject to corrupt dealings among local officials than aerial eradication.”⁶⁸⁰ An essential element of the proposed aerial spraying campaign was what Schweich referred to as “narco-farms” and “industrial-size poppy farms” owned by “pro-government opportunists” and “Taliban sympathizers.”⁶⁸¹ According to the 2007 counternarcotics strategy, “Many of Helmand’s poppy growers are wealthy land-owners, corrupt officials, and other opportunists.”⁶⁸² The strategy emphasized that in Helmand, “at least 75 percent of the poppy is not being grown by poor farmers who lack licit economic alternatives.”⁶⁸³ By this reasoning, spraying would only be targeting “wealthy” farmers who had access to alternative livelihoods.

Some questioned the availability and veracity of such data. Ambassador Neumann recalled that trying to target big producers for eradication in 2006 and 2007 turned out to be much more difficult than anticipated:

In practice, largely because so much of the land is share-cropped or has been seized without documentation, or the confusion of land ownership caused by the war years, we found out that we often couldn’t tell who had what land. There were lots of statements before we started about how the big owners were well-known, but when we tried to target them, the certainty dissolved into confusion.⁶⁸⁴

A former eradication contractor said, “In principle, eradication targeting was a great idea, but in reality, the information didn’t exist, for example, the data on landholdings. It was built on information that wasn’t there and didn’t reflect what was on the ground.”⁶⁸⁵

There were also concerns about the impact spraying could have on licit crops and the population. Licit crops were commonly grown in close proximity to poppy, and houses and villages were often in close proximity to crops. This increased the chances of aerial spraying unintentionally harming licit crops, counteracting the expansion of alternative livelihoods.⁶⁸⁶ Even if the chemicals used were not harmful to humans or livestock, there could be false public perceptions. Any unrelated deaths or illnesses (of humans or livestock) could be falsely blamed on spraying, and the Taliban would likely use this as a tool to expand recruitment and support.⁶⁸⁷

Despite these uncertainties, by November 2007 it became apparent that the U.S. plan was to test aerial spraying in Nangarhar.⁶⁸⁸ The United States had a significant presence in the province and the support of Governor Gul Agha Shirzai. The plan was to destroy 4,000 to 5,000 hectares in Nangarhar, then roll out the program across Afghanistan.⁶⁸⁹ For some in the Afghan government, “pilot spray programs” were ill-advised given the fragility of the country. As a former Afghan minister described, “Aerial spraying was informed by strange ideologies. It was like testing in a lab, but Afghanistan is not a lab, it is a tense situation.”⁶⁹⁰

The UK maintained the view that aerial eradication would have a malign effect on security and would only lead to short-term reductions in opium poppy cultivation. UK Foreign Affairs Secretary David Miliband told officials the UK would not support aerial spraying and that he would inform U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice of the UK’s decision.⁶⁹¹ UK Ambassador Cowper-Coles also informed President Karzai the UK government was opposed to aerial spraying and would back him in his continued opposition.⁶⁹² Finally, the newly appointed UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown also telephoned President Bush to request he not press Karzai on the matter.⁶⁹³

President Karzai was vehemently opposed to aerial spraying, telling Khalilzad in 2004 that, if he agreed to it, “he would be seen as a foreign agent—no better than Babrak Kamal, the puppet dictator the Soviets had imposed when they invaded Afghanistan.”⁶⁹⁴ A former senior NSC official later acknowledged it was a “strategic mistake” to continue to push spraying with Karzai, arguing that it “eroded” the relationship between Karzai and Bush.⁶⁹⁵ Moreover, when pressing Karzai on the matter for the final time in November 2007, one official recalled that President Bush said he had “gone as far with spraying as he could go” and that “the case was now closed.” In saying he would not press the matter further

with Karzai, President Bush declared, “There can only be one president in Afghanistan.”⁶⁹⁶ At the end of November 2007, President Karzai told Secretary Rice he would not allow spraying to take place.⁶⁹⁷

Eradication: Theory versus Reality

As noted earlier, three reasons were typically used to justify eradication in Afghanistan:

1. It destroys some of the opium crop, thereby reducing the amount of opiates available for distribution, sale, and final consumption.
2. It extends the writ of the Afghan state into rural areas where traditionally the government had little presence.
3. It changes the risk-benefit calculus for farmers and deters planting in future seasons.

However, evidence to support these arguments was thin and problematic. U.S. eradication efforts never destroyed enough poppy to achieve a meaningful reduction in the total amount of opium available for distribution, sale, and final consumption. Reports of eradication reached an all-time high in 2007, when it was claimed that 19,047 hectares of poppy were destroyed by the PEF and GLE. However, this had little impact on the country’s opium production, which increased to what was, at the time, a new high of 8,200 tons the same year—a 100 percent increase from 2005.⁶⁹⁸ Eradication in 2012, when reports were more accurate, destroyed 9,672 hectares of poppy.⁶⁹⁹ By 2014, opium production rose 73 percent over 2012 levels, to an estimated 6,400 tons.⁷⁰⁰

The argument that eradication extended the writ of the state is far from evident when viewed against the complaints of corruption and the targeting of vulnerable communities that accompanied crop destruction. A May 2006 embassy cable recognized these very risks, stating, “The government did extend its reach; however, some of this extension may have reaffirmed the long-held beliefs among Helmand’s citizens of the rampant corruption typical of the provincial and district governments.”⁷⁰¹ As an NGO worker in southern Afghanistan noted, the “predatory and sneering face of the eradication team” was “not the face that should be seen in rural areas.”⁷⁰² Afghan farmers referred to eradication operations as acting “like a thief stealing in the night” when not accompanied by a state presence delivering physical and social infrastructure and improved security.⁷⁰³ In many cases, farmers appeared to be angered by a government that placed greater priority on destroying their crop than protecting their welfare.

The evidence to support the third argument used to justify eradication—that it deters future planting—is also limited. INL Assistant Secretary Patterson’s references to “the threat of eradication [being] the single largest deterrent to

growing poppy” had little basis in fact.⁷⁰⁴ Moreover, there is no evidence to support UNODC’s claim that eradicating 25 percent of the total standing crop would establish “a credible threat” and deter farmers from cultivating opium poppy in subsequent years.⁷⁰⁵ Events in one district in Afghanistan often had little bearing on the behavior of the population in neighboring areas, let alone other provinces. For example, the destruction of poppy in the districts of Nad Ali and Nahre-i-Saraj in central Helmand—responsible for an estimated 29,000 hectares of opium poppy in 2015—would not necessarily have had any impact on farmers’ decisions in Nawzad or Baghran in northern Helmand, where quite different socioeconomic, political, and environmental conditions prevailed, on whether to grow opium poppy.⁷⁰⁶

The evidence INL draws on to support the deterrent effect of eradication is “geospatial analysis [that] indicates that 90 percent less poppy was planted for the 2011 crop on land within a half kilometer radius of poppy fields that were eradicated in 2010 in the Helmand Food Zone.”⁷⁰⁷ On the surface, this analysis appears to have merit, however, it does not account for other variables that were shaping the planting decisions of farmers at the time, particularly the significant influx of international and Afghan military forces, the establishment of security infrastructure, such as checkpoints and Forward Operating Bases, and the uptick in development spending, all of which were associated with the 2009–2011 surge.

In Marjah, located in the opium poppy heartland of Helmand Province, the share of agricultural land dedicated to poppy was almost 60 percent prior to the major influx of U.S. and Afghan forces. After Operation Moshtarak, in which 15,000 U.S. Marines and the ANDSF occupied the district in February 2010, the amount of land dedicated to poppy fell to less than 5 percent in the spring of 2011.⁷⁰⁸ Farmers in central Helmand referred to the prevalence of government and international forces within rural communities at the time—concurring with reports of “an ISAF base on every road junction”—and how this deterred cultivation.⁷⁰⁹

In contrast, longitudinal research conducted in Helmand Province found, “where the state has not been able to establish a more permanent presence in an area due to the prevailing security conditions, eradication has been seen by farmers as a random act that can be managed through patronage and corruption, a perception that has led to increasing resentment.”⁷¹⁰ These findings are supported by GAO’s analysis of U.S. counternarcotics efforts in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia, and its conclusion that “government control of drug-growing areas . . . is essential to counternarcotics success.”⁷¹¹

Geospatial analysis conducted for SIGAR indicates eradication played a less significant role in reducing opium poppy cultivation than INL and UNODC

repeatedly argued. In some research sites, cultivation fell even before the area was targeted for intensive and repeated eradication, suggesting that variables other than eradication, such as security presence, can influence reductions in cultivation. For example, figure 9 shows that at the time of the troop surge between 2010 and 2011, cultivation in Nad Ali dropped by 75 percent, from

FIGURE 9

CROP MAPPING FOR NAD ALI IN HELMAND PROVINCE



Note: Poppy cultivation in this research site in Nad Ali fell before the area was targeted for eradication, suggesting that other variables, such as security presence, influenced the reductions in cultivation. GIS data of this area of Nad Ali from 2002 to 2016 show opium poppy cultivation dropping by 75 percent—from 39.6 hectares to 10.1 hectares—between 2010 and 2011 during the influx of military forces and before any eradication took place. More marginal reductions in poppy cultivation occurred between 2011 and 2014, with a decrease from 10.1 hectares to 4.9 hectares after repeated years of eradication in the area.

39.6 hectares to 10.1 hectares. No eradication had taken place. However, over the course of repeated eradication in the area between 2011 and 2014, poppy cultivation decreased by only about four hectares between 2011 and 2015.

In a number of the areas in central Helmand where eradication was conducted intensively over consecutive years, cultivation levels did not change. Figure A.2



Source: SIGAR visualization of imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC. For the original imagery, see figure A.1 in appendix A.

in appendix A shows a resistance to two years of significant eradication in Nad Ali, maintaining levels of opium poppy cultivation at around 30 hectares between 2008 and 2010. A reduction in cultivation in 2011 by 66 percent to 10.2 hectares suggested that the post-2009 surge in U.S. and Afghan military presence, rather than the limited eradication that occurred in 2010, was a key factor in the reduction. Significant eradication efforts between 2011 and 2014 did not reduce overall opium poppy cultivation and, by 2015, cultivation still stood at roughly 11.1 hectares.

Why GIS?

GIS analysis allows program activities and outputs to be mapped and the geographic distribution of programs and investments to be examined. The use of high-resolution imagery over multiple years supports a detailed, more tangible examination of program outputs and outcomes. In particular, it is possible to examine whether the resources provided for development, such as fertilizer, saplings, and greenhouses, as well as larger infrastructure projects, are used at all and, if they are, whether they are sustained for the duration of a program and beyond.

Geospatial analysis can confirm whether an activity took place, as well as detect second- and third-order effects. For example, in the case of an irrigation system, it is possible, using measures of the vegetative index, to establish whether the irrigation system led to an increase in the amount of land under irrigation and whether that land was producing better yields in both winter and summer seasons. Using crop mapping, it is possible to examine what crops are grown and whether households have shifted to higher-value horticulture, such as orchards and vineyards, are cultivating wheat, or are producing opium poppy and obtaining higher yields.

Ultimately, GIS analysis offers an assessment of the extent to which the different strands of the counternarcotics strategy were sequenced and coordinated in the same geographic areas and assists in determining the impact interventions had on poppy cultivation. GIS also supports a deeper understanding of the factors that have led to shifts in poppy cultivation and whether reductions in cultivation are likely to be enduring.

See appendix B for a detailed discussion of the GIS methodology.

Eradication: The Biggest Obstacle to a Coherent Counternarcotics Policy

Eradication, in particular aerial spraying, proved one of the most divisive aspects of the counternarcotics strategy in Afghanistan. It undermined efforts to reach a common understanding of the drug problem and how to counter it, divided U.S. government agencies, and alienated many U.S. allies, including the Afghan government. There was a fundamental disagreement over the logic behind crop destruction and the manner in which it should be carried out. The most contentious aspect of eradication was the proposal to use herbicides. Aerial spraying was a red line for all outside the U.S. government, except UNODC. Even

ground-based spraying had a significant number of opponents, as highlighted by the Afghan cabinet's unanimous rejection of the proposal in January 2007.

INL and, during periods of heightened cultivation, other parts of the U.S. government believed it was important to destroy as much of the crop as possible, wherever it was located and regardless of the economic and political conditions. The Afghan government, the British government, ISAF, and others argued eradication needed to be more strategic, targeting those who could most afford to lose their opium crop and in locations where other economic options were available. Senior military officials were reluctant to take on counternarcotics, in part because they wanted nothing to do with eradication.⁷¹² These underlying disagreements had lasting effects on the deployment of both governor-led and centrally planned eradication efforts. The lack of consensus on targeted eradication had serious ramifications on perceptions of success and failure, military initiatives, stabilization efforts, and major rural development programs.

In the autumn of 2006, the commander of ISAF, British Army General David Richards, told President Karzai spraying was “absolutely not the right thing to do.”⁷¹³ The push for spraying strained the U.S.-UK bilateral relationship and undermined the UK's role as lead and then partner nation. According to a UK government official, the eradication debate “took up so much air time we couldn't get on with the other strands of the strategy.”⁷¹⁴

In February 2007, U.S. Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, wrote, “Our anti-narcotics policy has long been hobbled by conflicting views and bureaucratic battles between various players, including the Departments of Defense and State, the [DEA] and other U.S. agencies, along with our NATO allies, especially the British. There is little prospect these long-entrenched divisions will be reconciled by themselves.”⁷¹⁵ At the heart of this division was eradication, a policy that many—including some within the U.S. government—believed was driven by INL.⁷¹⁶ As one former DOD official explained, “It was because INL had eradication themselves; it was their responsibility. It was driven by metrics; they were given money for something they wanted to deliver. Counternarcotics became synonymous with aerial eradication.”⁷¹⁷

A final estimate of the amount obligated by the U.S. for eradication is \$937 million from 2002 to 2017, or an average of \$11,772 per hectare of poppy destroyed. Each hectare of poppy eradicated by Governor-Led Eradication cost an average of \$70 and each hectare eradicated by Poppy Eradication Force cost an average of \$44,000.⁷¹⁸ Far from proving to be effective in destroying the crop, extending the writ of the Afghan state, or deterring future cultivation, eradication became perhaps the biggest obstacle to developing a coherent counternarcotics policy in Afghanistan.

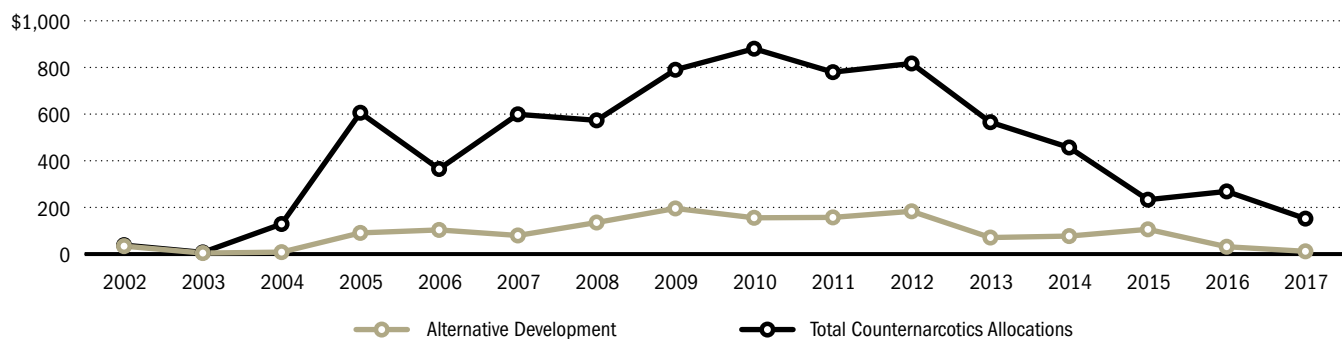
ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT: ADVANCING THE LEGAL ECONOMY

Between 2002 and 2017, the U.S. government allocated \$1.46 billion on what it termed alternative development: aid projects designed to reduce poppy cultivation by increasing licit economic alternatives. (See figure 10.) While INL was responsible for directing the overall counternarcotics strategy, which included alternative development, USAID took the lead on the delivery of development programs intended to address poppy cultivation. In theory, alternative development projects were meant to incorporate all-encompassing, multi-sector programs to strengthen agribusinesses, promote agricultural value chains, and expand credit and financial services to rural areas.⁷¹⁹ However, despite the inclusion of some of these programs, in practice, the bulk of USAID's alternative development programming focused on large-scale, short-term interventions designed to find a replacement crop for poppy.⁷²⁰ This line of programming, commonly referred to as "crop substitution," assumed that when farmers had greater opportunities in the licit economy, they would be less dependent on cultivating opium poppy.⁷²¹ Other elements of alternative development included rehabilitating agricultural infrastructure and providing cash-for-work programs.⁷²²

One of the biggest challenges within this strand of counternarcotics activity was the disagreement and misunderstanding within the drug control and development communities as to what interventions would have the greatest impact on farmers and their decision to cultivate illicit drug crops, and how these interventions should be delivered and sequenced. Major strategic and operational errors of alternative development programming included a lack of long-term programmatic focus, an overreliance on short-term crop substitution objectives, and an inadequate consideration of how, in some cases, alternative development projects may have inadvertently supported a rise in opium poppy cultivation.⁷²³ USAID and INL also failed to adequately integrate

FIGURE 10

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT FUNDING COMPARED TO TOTAL COUNTERNARCOTICS FUNDING, 2002-2017 (\$ MILLIONS)



Source: SIGAR analysis of agency budget documentation and budget data.



A U.S. Marine and a farmer place a bag of fertilizer in a wheelbarrow at the Civil-Military Operations Center at Camp Hansen near Marjah. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)

counternarcotics objectives and indicators into wider development policies and programs being implemented in poppy-growing areas. Ultimately, USAID's alternative development efforts were piecemeal and unfocused, and had marginal and at times counterproductive impacts on poppy cultivation.⁷²⁴ This does not detract from the positive development impact these efforts may have had, but rather highlights that alternative development programming often failed to meet its counternarcotics goals.

Initial Reticence and the Push for Conditionality

Like some other agencies at the time, USAID was reluctant to be drawn into counternarcotics efforts in 2002. USAID's immediate priority in Afghanistan was humanitarian work, particularly given the scale of the drought and conflict that had befallen the country in the 1990s.⁷²⁵ Funds for USAID were limited, and officials were reluctant to engage in a policy area where they had no comparative advantage.⁷²⁶ One former USAID official referred to USAID's relationship with counternarcotics as "a forced marriage," and another spoke of poppy as being considered "beyond USAID's management interest."⁷²⁷ Early alternative development efforts were further constrained by the fact that successful implementation and oversight of development programs were largely dependent upon adequate security and governance, neither of which was present in most poppy-producing areas at the time.

CONDITIONALITY

Conditionality was a way to link the provision of assistance to reductions in poppy growth. Despite USAID's own analysis that conditionality was "self-defeating," several USAID interventions required agreements from farmers and communities to abandon opium poppy cultivation in return for project benefits.⁷²⁸ However, conditionality proved to be an unworkable tool at an operational level in Afghanistan, for several reasons. First, USAID was often unable or unwilling to withhold assistance if conditions were not met.⁷²⁹ As a former senior official at USAID commented, "At the end of the day, USAID usually finds a way around conditionality."⁷³⁰ Those implementing the projects also recognized the futility of conditionality, with one contractor noting that projects "had conditionality. We got everyone to sign a piece of paper in Pashto saying they would not use fertilizer to grow poppy. . . . But without 100 percent participation in the donor program and an overall local-level agreement to not grow, while access to direct benefits such as fertilizer may be limited for that minority of non-compliant individuals, the compliance of the majority together with a donor-funded public good like a road or a school does not stop the non-compliant minority [from] benefiting, albeit indirectly."⁷³¹

Conditionality also failed to take into account the fact that rural communities had different histories and dependencies on opium poppy cultivation. Conditionality expected all farmers to reduce opium poppy at the same pace, regardless of how dependent they were on the crop for their livelihood.⁷³² As noted by a 2005 European Commission report, "Too often



Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Affairs Ambassador Earl Anthony Wayne, Minister of Counter Narcotics Khudiadad, and Helmand Governor Mohammad Gulab Mangal sign a pledge for an additional \$38.7 million to the MCN to reward provinces for reducing poppy cultivation under GPI. (U.S. Embassy Kabul photo)

conditionality has been attached to short-term single sector initiatives that have neither shown the duration of commitment from implementing organisations nor delivered the lasting change in lives and livelihoods that households require to make a permanent shift to licit livelihoods.”⁷³³ Furthermore, development programs tended to benefit wealthier members of the community, particularly land owners, who were often the least reliant on opium poppy for their overall welfare. As a consequence, conditionality often had the most deleterious effect on the more marginal members of the community, who experienced the loss in opium production, but saw few project benefits.⁷³⁴

The push for conditionality created a rift between development practitioners and the drug control community. UNODC Executive Director Costa endorsed conditionality, but few in the development community or the Afghan government supported it.⁷³⁵ There was consensus among development practitioners that conditionality did not work and could even prove counterproductive.⁷³⁶ A 2004 Embassy Kabul cable noted that “the international donor community, and the UK in particular, have remained opposed to meshing development and [counternarcotics] goals, i.e., instituting conditionality and ‘mainstreaming.’ Until now, the [government of Afghanistan] has also generally resisted direct linkage of counternarcotics conditions to rural development.”⁷³⁷

UNODC’s own experience with conditionality in Afghanistan in the 1990s highlighted the overall weakness of the approach.⁷³⁸ The international Alternative Livelihoods Advisor to the Afghan Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Anthony Fitzherbert, an agriculturalist with over two decades of experience in Afghanistan, concluded:

To provide aid and development assistance on condition of abandoning poppy cultivation, even assuming voluntary agreement at all levels, is not realistic. Nominal agreement will be given by both authorities and local communities as it has in the past, but without the rule of law to back it up, this will remain nominal and worthless. In short, the conditions for conditionality do not exist.⁷³⁹

Mohammed Ehsan Zia, former Minister of MRRD, agreed, claiming, “Conditionality was not effective, as there was no implementation mechanism or monitoring system; it never worked. It sent the wrong message to rural communities that they could trade inputs and agreements. Communities put signatures on a piece of paper, but there was no way to implement it.”⁷⁴⁰

INL was most active in alternative development in the early years of the reconstruction effort, allocating over \$30 million for alternative development in 2002 alone.⁷⁴¹ This early support focused on providing assistance to poppy-producing areas targeted for eradication.⁷⁴² Yet, INL's initial focus on directing and funding alternative development yielded to USAID for the majority of the reconstruction period.

The first major USAID effort to include projects with counternarcotics objectives was the Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program, which ran from March 2003 to September 2006 at a cost of \$143.7 million.⁷⁴³ RAMP was a wide-ranging development effort that focused on three main sectors: infrastructure reconstruction, rural financial services, and agricultural technology and market development.⁷⁴⁴ The project was backed by Ambassador Khalilzad, who requested that initiatives like RAMP be refocused on alternative development and brought in USAID officers from Latin America who were more familiar with the concept.⁷⁴⁵

In the 2004–2005 growing season, RAMP funded a \$17.9 million Alternative Income Program meant to provide “alternative employment opportunities to those who are dependent on or susceptible to deriving income from the illicit production of opium poppy.”⁷⁴⁶ RAMP also supported the provision of 40,000 metric tons of fertilizer to an estimated 537,000 farmers, along with wheat seeds, largely in response to the Afghan government's demands that international donors mitigate the “economic hardship resulting from a reduction in poppy cultivation” and “encourage the farmers not to revert to poppy planting during the 2005–2006 growing season.”⁷⁴⁷ But these initiatives could have only limited impact, as they were not designed as interventions to support farmers over the multi-year period needed to transition sustainably from poppy to licit crops.

In many ways, RAMP illustrated the flawed strategy of alternative development projects yet to come. RAMP projects directed toward poppy-producing areas were piecemeal, short-term, and failed to provide sustainable livelihood options for farmers attempting to transition away from poppy cultivation. Furthermore, despite the risk that fertilizer and rehabilitated irrigation systems could be used to support poppy cultivation, there was little to no mention of poppy in the final evaluation of RAMP.⁷⁴⁸ Thus, the evaluation did not seek to determine how RAMP had affected poppy cultivation or drug production in the areas supported by the program.

Mainstreaming Counternarcotics Within Development

The period between 2004 and 2008 saw many of the largest development donors in Afghanistan attempt to integrate an understanding of drug-crop cultivation and the multi-functional role it played in rural livelihoods into broader development planning. (See figure 11.) This mainstreaming concept recognized

that helping farmers transition to licit livelihoods would require not only crop or income replacement, but also support to social safety nets and greater on-farm and off-farm income opportunities.⁷⁴⁹ Advocates of the mainstreaming model asserted that a counternarcotics perspective should be integrated into all rural development program design, implementation, and monitoring. As a result, projects would be better equipped to recognize and understand the potential counternarcotics impacts of their interventions and take steps to ensure projects did not inadvertently encourage poppy production.⁷⁵⁰

Much of the assistance to support the mainstreaming concept was directed through DFID, as part of the UK lead on counternarcotics, and the World Bank. These organizations, plus the Asian Development Bank and the European Union, embraced efforts to mainstream counternarcotics into development programming, as outlined in a CND working group session of the Alternative Livelihoods Technical Working Group in June 2004.⁷⁵¹ These institutions recognized the challenges posed by opium production and went on to produce guidelines for integrating counternarcotics into the design and implementation of their programs.

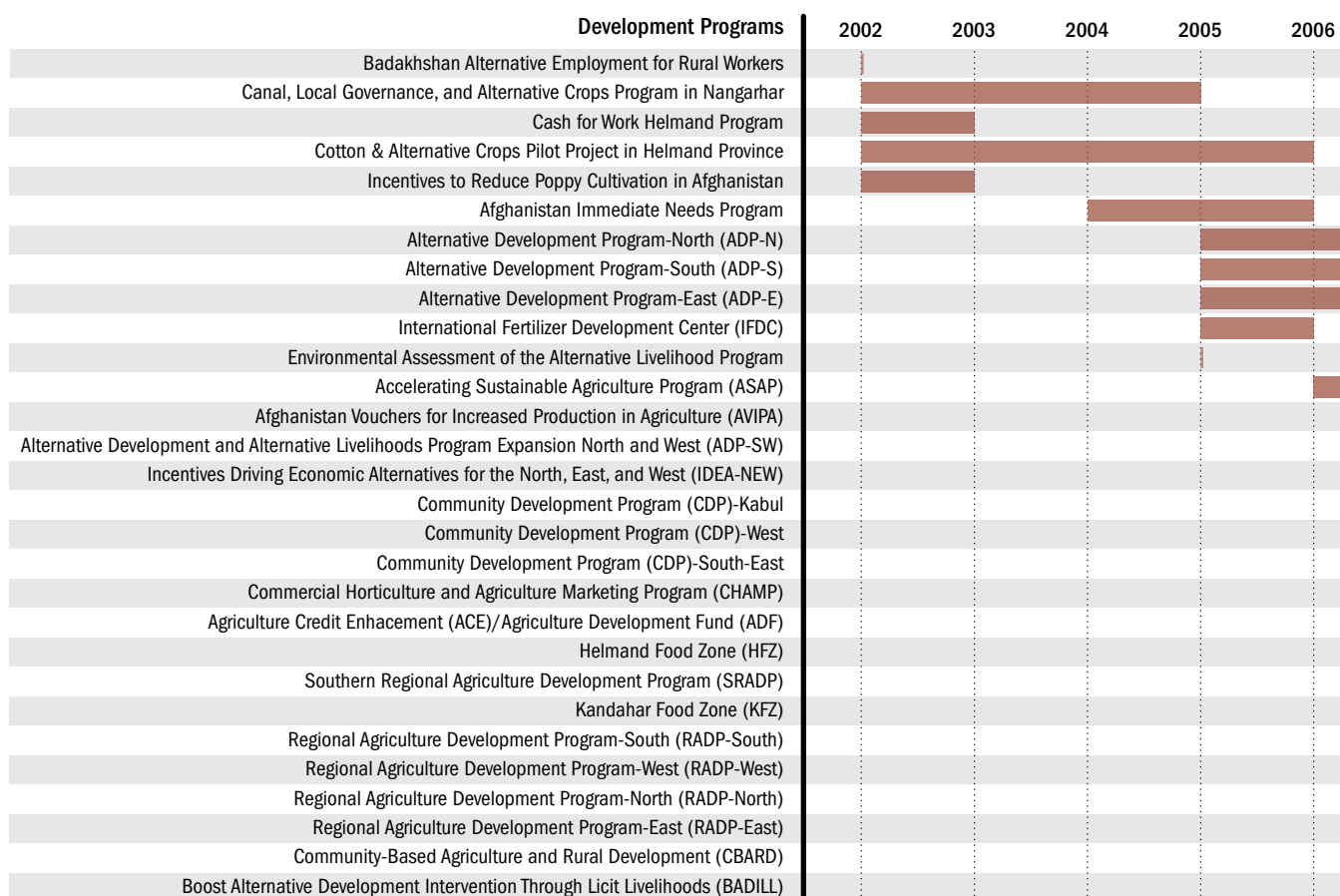
The World Bank took the lead in donor engagement on the National Priority Programs and the administration of the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, from which donor funds were pooled and prioritized. A number of NPPs were reviewed during design and implementation to assess whether their activities addressed the causes of poppy cultivation or, at a minimum, did not make matters worse, and to provide recommendations for improvements. These included programs such as the National Emergency Rural Access Project, the Emergency Horticulture and Livestock Project, and the Emergency Irrigation Rehabilitation Project.⁷⁵²

The Afghan government also took action to bring counterdrug objectives into its wider development strategies. The 2006 Afghan National Drug Control Strategy called for counternarcotics to be integrated into national and provincial development plans and strategies.⁷⁵³ The Afghanistan National Development Strategy of 2008 designated counternarcotics a cross-cutting issue, alongside gender equality, environmental management, anticorruption, and regional cooperation.⁷⁵⁴ These changes were meant to move alternative development away from a focus on specific area-based projects targeting poppy reduction toward consideration of opium-related impacts in all high-level policies and sector programming.

These mainstreaming initiatives were accompanied by USAID's first and only dedicated Alternative Livelihoods Program (ALP).⁷⁵⁵ The inclusion of the term "livelihoods" was meant to reflect a commitment analogous to the mainstreaming model, in which rural development was the objective

FIGURE 11

SELECT ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS, 2002-2018

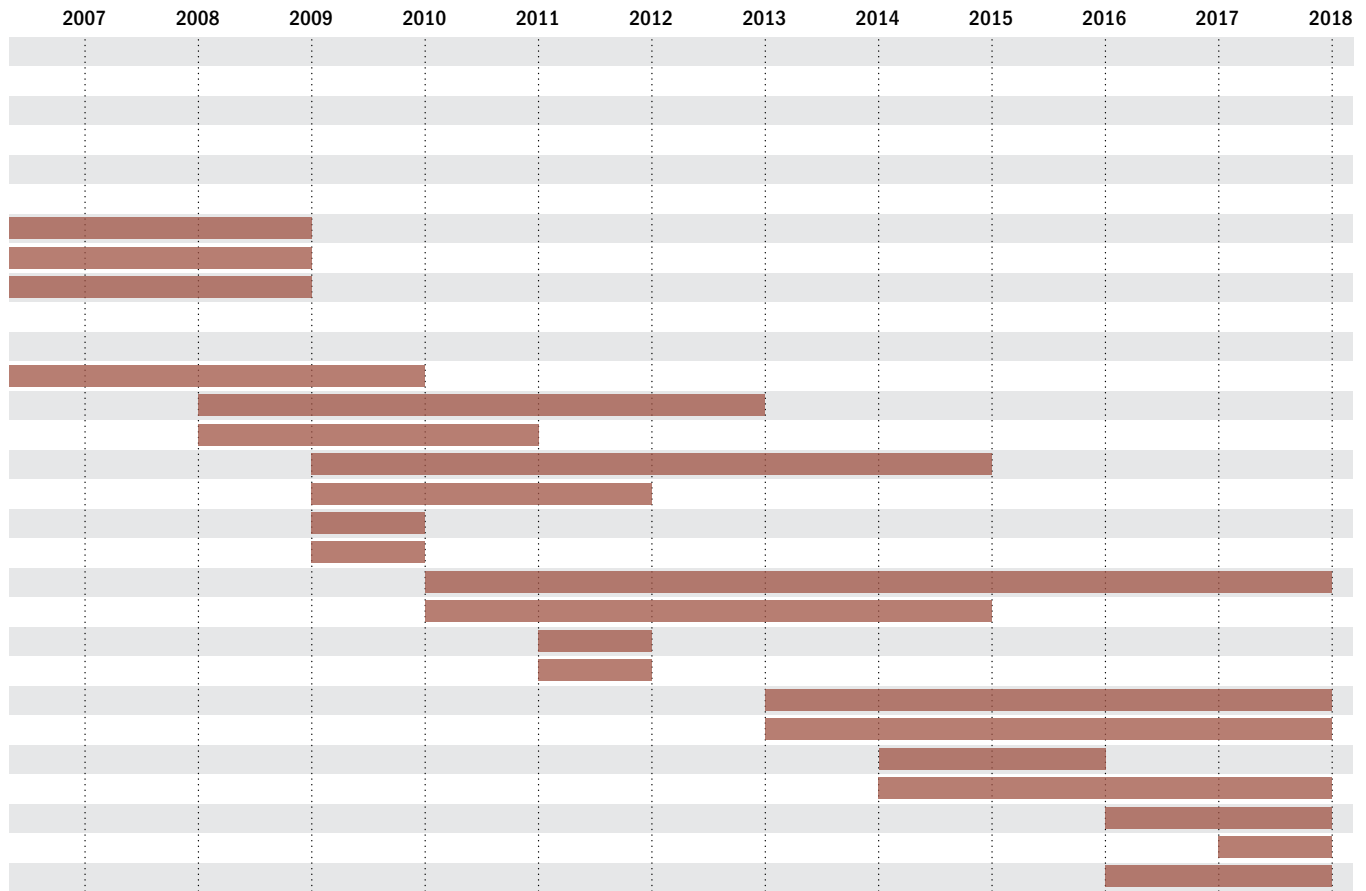


Note: Badakhshan Alternative Employment for Rural Workers started and ended in 2002. Environmental Assessment of the Alternative Livelihood Program started and ended in 2005. Projects listed as ending in 2018 may be ongoing.

Source: SIGAR analysis of USAID quarterly Pipeline data, September 30, 2017; USAID/Afghanistan, *Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5: Poppy Cultivation and USAID Alternative Development Efforts in Afghanistan*, draft report, February 24, 2016, pp. 61–62; UNODC, "UNODC Alternative Development Programme Launched," press release, 2017; UN Development Programme Afghanistan, "CBARD Factsheet," February 14, 2018; SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, April 30, 2018, p. 188.

and reductions in poppy cultivation an externality or side effect of that objective.⁷⁵⁶ The program began in February 2005 and had projects in the north (\$50.9 million), east (\$115.48 million), and south (\$166.4 million), with a subsequent expansion into the southwest (\$75.1 million).⁷⁵⁷

ALP funded cash-for-work initiatives that increased agricultural income and provided much needed infrastructure investments, including the rehabilitation of roads and canals.⁷⁵⁸ Agricultural efforts focused on increasing the total area under annual and perennial horticulture, support to staples such as wheat and mung beans, and improvements in the livestock sector. The investment in infrastructure was significant. ALP-East alone reported investing over \$13 million in the rehabilitation of irrigation canals, benefiting 24,308 hectares,



approximately 15 percent of the region's total irrigable land.⁷⁵⁹ In the south, similar efforts claimed to have rehabilitated 89,500 hectares of land and also supported a number of major infrastructure efforts, including an airport runway (\$11.8 million), the upgrade of an electricity substation, and the development of the Bolan agricultural center (\$3.5 million).⁷⁶⁰ Some of these programs made assistance contingent on reductions in poppy cultivation.⁷⁶¹ However, a 2010 evaluation report of ALP-South noted, "It is doubtful that the project's conditionality agreements had any effect on the growing of opium." The same report concluded that "there is no evidence that [ALP] had an impact on the production of opium."⁷⁶²

Crop Substitution and Expansion of the Legal Economy

Despite these early mainstreaming efforts, the bulk of USAID's alternative development programming focused on large-scale, short-term interventions

designed to expand licit agricultural opportunities to compete directly with poppy production.⁷⁶³ This line of programming, commonly referred to as “crop substitution,” was informed by the assumption that an expansion of the licit agricultural economy would be sufficient to reduce levels of opium poppy cultivation.⁷⁶⁴ While many of these projects had a measurable development impact, their effect on poppy cultivation was less clear. A 2016 draft USAID Agriculture Assistance Strategy concluded that:

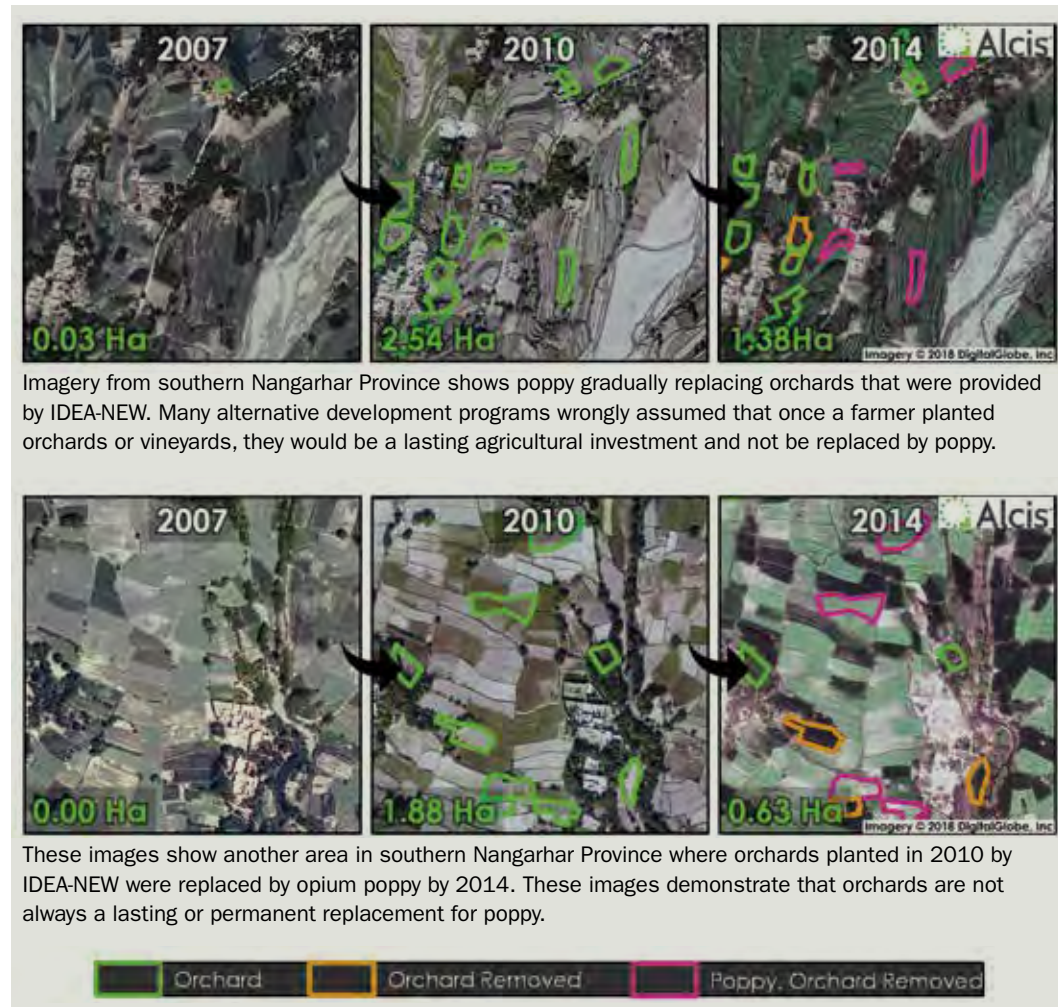
USAID’s general approach with respect to [alternative development] funding, therefore, has been to assume that investments to increase high value crop production would, as a matter of course, discourage poppy production. However, there has been little effort given to examining the impact of our programs on poppy cultivation, or, as importantly, the impact of poppy production on the implementation of USAID programs. This has left USAID’s [alternative development] efforts relatively diffused and unfocused, and, it is argued, led to marginal or unsustainable impacts on poppy cultivation.⁷⁶⁵

The Regional Agricultural Development Programs (RADP), the Commercial Horticulture and Agriculture Program (CHAMP), and Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives for the North, East, and West (IDEA-NEW) were key examples of such programming. Many of these programs were based on the assumption that once alternative high-value and economically competitive crops produced income, rural households would be more willing to accept programs aimed at stopping poppy production.⁷⁶⁶ For example, it was often assumed that once a farmer planted orchards or vineyards, these crops would result in a lasting shift away from opium poppy in the future.⁷⁶⁷ High-resolution imagery shows, however, that this assumption was not always valid; opium poppy replaced orchards that were provided by IDEA-NEW in parts of southern Nangarhar.⁷⁶⁸ (See figure 12.) These programs did not directly measure changes in poppy cultivation, which raised questions as to how USAID assessed the validity of its assumption that growth in the legal economy would dissuade poppy cultivation. USAID’s Office of the Inspector General raised this point in its audit of IDEA-NEW in 2012.⁷⁶⁹

USAID appears to have underestimated the amount of time and investment required to establish crops that could compete with poppy. As observed in USAID’s 2016 draft Agriculture Assistance Strategy, “Perennial crops (vineyards and orchards) and off-season vegetable production (i.e., using greenhouses and hoop-houses to extend the summer horticultural season), represent the only viable agricultural alternatives to poppy cultivation.”⁷⁷⁰ However, perennial crops are a long-term investment that many farmers are unable to make.⁷⁷¹ The draft strategy further noted that, regarding orchards, the households making such an investment must either “(1) have enough land to cover household income and consumption requirements during the establishment period, (2) have access to long-term credit, or (3) have sources of non-farm income on which to rely while the tree crop matures.”⁷⁷² Furthermore, perennial crops take four to five years

FIGURE 12

IDEA-NEW PROJECT EVALUATION: POPPY REPLACING ORCHARDS



Note: For errors or more information, contact info@alcis.org.

Source: Copyright © 2018 Alcis Holdings Ltd.

to reach their full production potential, whereas most alternative development projects lasted an average of three and one-half years.⁷⁷³ As a result, according to a 2016 Alternative Development Options Assessment published by USAID, many alternative development projects were “clearly inadequate to the task of fomenting sustainable stakeholder commitment to transitioning permanently away from engagement in illicit activities.”⁷⁷⁴

An overemphasis on crop substitution prevented USAID from committing sufficient resources to off-farm and non-agricultural income opportunities for rural populations.⁷⁷⁵ Reducing farmers’ dependency on opium as a livelihood option is not simply a matter of crop substitution. Opium poppy is just one crop in a larger, complex livelihood framework of agricultural commodities,

Flawed Comparisons Between Poppy and Wheat

UNODC statistics on the profitability of opium poppy versus wheat, a comparison often made to explain cultivation decisions and the difficulty of persuading farmers to give up poppy, were misleading.⁷⁷⁹ Opium poppy has significant labor requirements, while wheat is a less labor-intensive crop; therefore, making direct comparisons between the gross profit margins of poppy and wheat overstated the profitability of opium production. Furthermore, poppy and wheat are grown for different reasons—opium for cash, credit, or access to land, and wheat for household consumption—further distorting the comparison.⁷⁸⁰ In addition, wheat requires little long-term investment and has limited economic value. In many areas, wheat was easily replaced with poppy and, barring significant improvement in a farmer's economic status or security situation, poppy also replaced wheat in abundance.⁷⁸¹

The comparison of wheat and poppy ignored the wide range of other crops farmers could cultivate, including specialized horticulture, and the possibility of multiple crops on a single unit of land. It also failed to recognize the importance of non-agricultural income for rural households and the fact that the net returns on opium varied significantly according to the land tenure arrangements and resources of Afghan farmers. For example, a landowner growing poppy could earn up to four times what a sharecropper growing poppy on a similar piece of land could earn.⁷⁸²

Flawed UNODC data and analysis distilled the reasons why households cultivated opium poppy into a single profit motive, thereby ignoring the multifunctional role of the crop in rural livelihoods.⁷⁸³ In reality, poppy had a “multifaceted role in rural livelihoods, including providing access to land and housing for the landless and land-poor and access to liquidity,” that could not be accurately captured solely by examining the cash value of a poppy crop.⁷⁸⁴

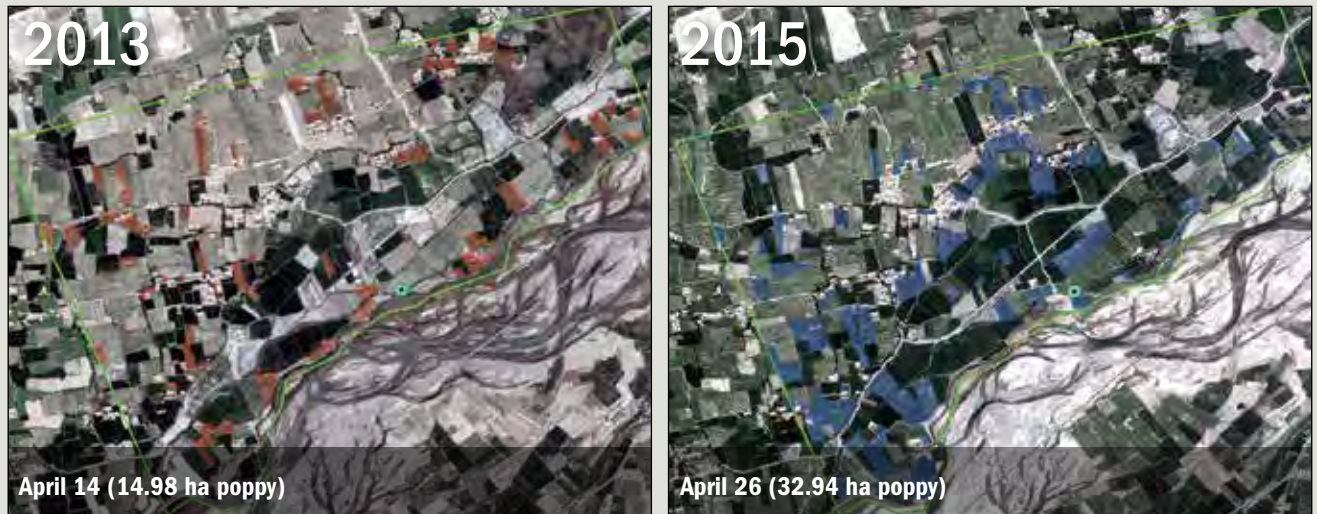
Nevertheless, the perceived profitability of the opium crop shaped the policy on eradication and alternative development, and informed operational responses on the ground. Despite data that challenged UNODC's notions of agricultural economics and poverty, senior policy makers continued to cite the high price of opium compared to alternatives as evidence of the uphill challenge faced by the development effort and the need for more aggressive eradication to counter opium production.⁷⁸⁵

livestock, and off-farm income opportunities.⁷⁷⁶ Increased opportunities for off-farm employment can raise the opportunity costs of growing opium poppy, and help to draw labor away from it.⁷⁷⁷ Off-farm employment can also help subsidize longer-term investments in high-value perennial crops, such as orchards or vineyards.

In some areas, development programs inadvertently supported poppy production.⁷⁷⁸ One example of this was the rehabilitation and development of irrigation systems. USAID reported that ADP East and South rehabilitated

FIGURE 13

TOLUKAN CANAL, CHANGE IN POPPY CULTIVATION, 2013 AND 2015



The areas shaded red (2013) and blue (2015) show poppy cultivation near the Tolukan Canal in 2013 and 2015. Crop analysis indicates a 119 percent increase in poppy cultivation from 2013 to 2015, following the canal's rehabilitation. This increase suggests the KFZ's primary focus on irrigation repair and construction contributed to rising levels of poppy cultivation.

Source: Imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC.

canals that increased the productivity of 113,808 hectares of land.⁷⁸⁶ Many more tens of thousands of hectares were supported by USAID's other agricultural programs, as well as partner nation efforts and the National Priority Programs. Analysis of high-resolution imagery for KFZ and GPI shows that rehabilitated irrigation systems inadvertently contributed to an increase in poppy cultivation. (See figure 13 above and figure 17 on page 136.) This analysis illustrates the risks of improving irrigation systems without providing adequate support for agricultural diversification in the same areas. In a similar way, well-intentioned programs to increase wheat yields also risked freeing up land and labor for poppy cultivation.

This is not to say there should be no improvements in irrigation, wheat yields, or other development programs in poppy-growing areas. Rather, program designers need to consider both the intended and unintended development and counternarcotics outcomes. In those cases where interventions might lead to an increase in the production and trade of opiates, mitigating actions must be pursued. For example, if a project plans to reduce poppy cultivation by increasing wheat production, then an assessment should be included in the project design that accounts for the potential displacement of sharecroppers and itinerant workers. Subsequent program evaluations should note how these groups responded to the loss of land and income, and, if necessary, propose

programming to mitigate the risk of these groups returning to poppy cultivation in areas beyond the project's zone of influence. Otherwise, as one former USAID staff member put it, "USAID's efforts could make the poppy situation worse."⁷⁸⁷

Alternative Development Programming, but Little Counternarcotics Effect

Between 2005 and 2008, 75 percent of USAID's total expenditure on agriculture projects in Afghanistan was categorized as alternative development.⁷⁸⁸ However, a review of program documents from USAID alternative development projects found that few actually considered opium poppy cultivation in their design or during implementation, despite being funded as alternative development. Many programs did not incorporate opium poppy cultivation in their baseline studies, needs assessments, or dialogue with communities where the programs were implemented. Consequently, most alternative development projects failed to provide a clear assessment of how program activities contributed to reductions in opium production, or mitigated against the risk of encouraging poppy cultivation. Furthermore, few alternative development projects included area-specific indicators for monitoring the counternarcotics and alternative livelihoods impact of a project.⁷⁸⁹

The Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture Program (ASAP), funded at \$132.6 million, ran from November 2006 until November 2010 and was designed to "revitalize and improve the regional competitiveness of Afghanistan's agricultural sector."⁷⁹⁰ The initiative focused specifically on increasing the production and export of the country's high-value agricultural products, such as fruits, nuts, and cashmere. ASAP received \$46.78 million in alternative development funds, or 35 percent of total project funding, yet made no explicit mention of opium poppy, those cultivating it, or of tailoring interventions to have a strategic effect on levels of cultivation or the opium economy.⁷⁹¹

Other programs that drew on alternative development money included the Community Development Programs (CDP) West, South, East, and Kabul, formerly the Food Insecurity Response to Urban Populations program, which ran from March 2009 to January 2012. With a total budget of \$334 million, CDP drew \$39.5 million from alternative development funds.⁷⁹² These programs were designed to construct or repair local infrastructure in urban areas and provided cash-for-work programs for vulnerable populations. Once again, however, USAID made no explicit mention of opium poppy cultivation in the program objectives, other than to cite the challenge of hiring workers during the opium harvest season.⁷⁹³

Another USAID program was the \$469 million Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture, which ran from September 2008 until April 2013. This, too, was funded from alternative development money, at a cost of \$323 million, or 68.7 percent of the total program costs.⁷⁹⁴ AVIPA focused on wheat seed and

fertilizer distribution, with the primary objective of aiding stabilization. However, in the southern region where an additional \$300 million was focused on the poppy-growing provinces of Helmand and Kandahar, AVIPA Plus, as it came to be known, was closely entwined with efforts to reduce opium poppy cultivation. While DFID largely funded the wheat seeds and fertilizer distributed in the Helmand Food Zone, AVIPA Plus provided grape vines, saplings, vegetable seeds, fertilizer, and poly-tunnels (semi-circular greenhouses) to an estimated 74,000 farmers in Helmand and a further 184,000 farmers in Kandahar.⁷⁹⁵ USAID reported that these non-wheat voucher packages supported 47,000 hectares of cultivation in Helmand and 106,000 hectares in Kandahar.⁷⁹⁶

Due, in part, to these efforts, the level of investment in poppy-growing areas was significant. Even before AVIPA was launched, the U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan reported the United States had provided more than \$270 million for Helmand Province alone, noting that, “If Helmand were a country, it would be the fifth largest recipient of FY 2007 USAID funding in the world.”⁷⁹⁷ Ambassador Wood later claimed that Helmand had received “more economic assistance than any other province in Afghanistan for the past five years.”⁷⁹⁸ What was less clear was how these interventions actually addressed the causes of opium poppy cultivation.

In 2010, several USAID rural development projects drew on alternative development funds and operated in poppy-growing areas, but their focus was on stabilization objectives and short-term income generation efforts.⁷⁹⁹ In 2011, the Post Performance Monitoring Plan, a tool USAID used to plan and manage the process of “assessing and reporting progress toward assistance/foreign policy objectives,” made only a nominal mention of “combating the Afghan narcotics trade” and did not tie this objective into any of its planning, which was a shift from earlier plans.⁸⁰⁰ USAID’s transition plan for 2015–2018 was similarly vague, providing few details on how its development programming would reduce poppy cultivation.⁸⁰¹

The IDEA-NEW program was initially an extension of ALP-East, created in 2009 and designed to increase access to legal, commercially viable sources of income. However, by late 2010, USAID had dropped any requirement for IDEA-NEW to report on its contribution to reducing opium poppy and only required data on its role in expanding the licit economy.⁸⁰²

By 2010, programs like the Commercial Horticulture and Agriculture Program, a \$40 million development program, received 40 percent of its funding from alternative development funds.⁸⁰³ However, even though CHAMP was operating in a number of poppy-growing provinces, including Helmand, Kandahar, Badakhshan, and Nangarhar, the program’s mid-term evaluation made no mention of opium production.⁸⁰⁴



A Marjah farmer wheels bags of fertilizer and crop seeds at the Civil-Military Operations Center at Camp Hansen near Marjah. (U.S. Marine Corps photo)

The Regional Agricultural Development Programs were launched in 2013 and 2014 with a “significant degree of funding from the [alternative development] account.”⁸⁰⁵ None of the four programs—RADP South (\$125.1 million), RADP West (\$69.9 million), RADP North (\$78.4 million), or RADP East (\$28.1 million)—was specifically targeted to address opium poppy cultivation. In fact, the design of these programs not only ignored opium poppy, but failed to consider how the programs might negatively affect counternarcotics goals. The lessons of some previous endeavors, including the displacement of people and poppy to the desert as a result of the Helmand Food Zone, did not appear to inform RADP’s design and implementation.⁸⁰⁶ (See pages 15, 121–124.)

As with many previous programs funded by USAID, the RADPs focused primarily on wheat. Over 70 percent of the funding for each RADP was allocated to wheat and only 20 percent for non-wheat horticulture.⁸⁰⁷ A former USAID staff member commented on the design of RADPs, noting they lacked a “clear understanding of the socioeconomic context, and land tenure. The program was not . . . poppy-relevant because of the emphasis on wheat.”⁸⁰⁸ An assessment funded by USAID in 2016 challenged the RADPs’ effect on poppy cultivation, arguing, “It has been amply demonstrated that wheat does not compete directly or effectively against poppy, [and] the prospective effectiveness of such an approach is clearly open to question.”⁸⁰⁹ Despite concerns over the impact these programs were likely to have on opium poppy cultivation, the RADPs formed the bulwark of USAID’s contribution to alternative development in recent years.⁸¹⁰

Food Zones

USAID supported two counternarcotics food zone initiatives after 2010; however, its involvement in both was more a function of politics than development priorities. The first initiative was USAID's funding of the wheat seed and fertilizer component of the Helmand Food Zone. The HFZ was a comprehensive counternarcotics effort led by the provincial governor and supported by the UK, United States, and Denmark. It was designed to combine alternative development programs, a public information campaign, and eradication efforts to reduce opium production in the well-irrigated parts of Helmand Province.⁸¹¹ USAID's involvement was a direct consequence of a budgetary problem between the UK-led PRT and the provincial governor in Helmand. In July 2010, Helmand Governor Mangal declared he would no longer be looking for support for wheat seeds and fertilizer in the 2010–2011 opium poppy-growing season. The UK subsequently cut its budget for HFZ from \$12 million to \$1 million. Despite some reluctance within USAID, when the governor changed his mind and again asked for support for wheat seeds and fertilizer, USAID provided \$4.21 million to fill the gap in funding.⁸¹²

The alternative development projects implemented as part of the HFZ largely consisted of providing improved wheat seed and fertilizer packages to land-holding farmers.⁸¹³ Subsequent development efforts offered vegetable seeds for spring and summer crops.⁸¹⁴ Local communities that received subsidized agricultural inputs signed conditionality agreements with the provincial government stating they would not grow opium poppy.⁸¹⁵ The HFZ coincided with a reduction in opium poppy cultivation within the main canal-irrigated area of central Helmand between 2008 and 2011, with cultivation falling from 103,590 hectares to 63,307 hectares in the province as a whole.⁸¹⁶

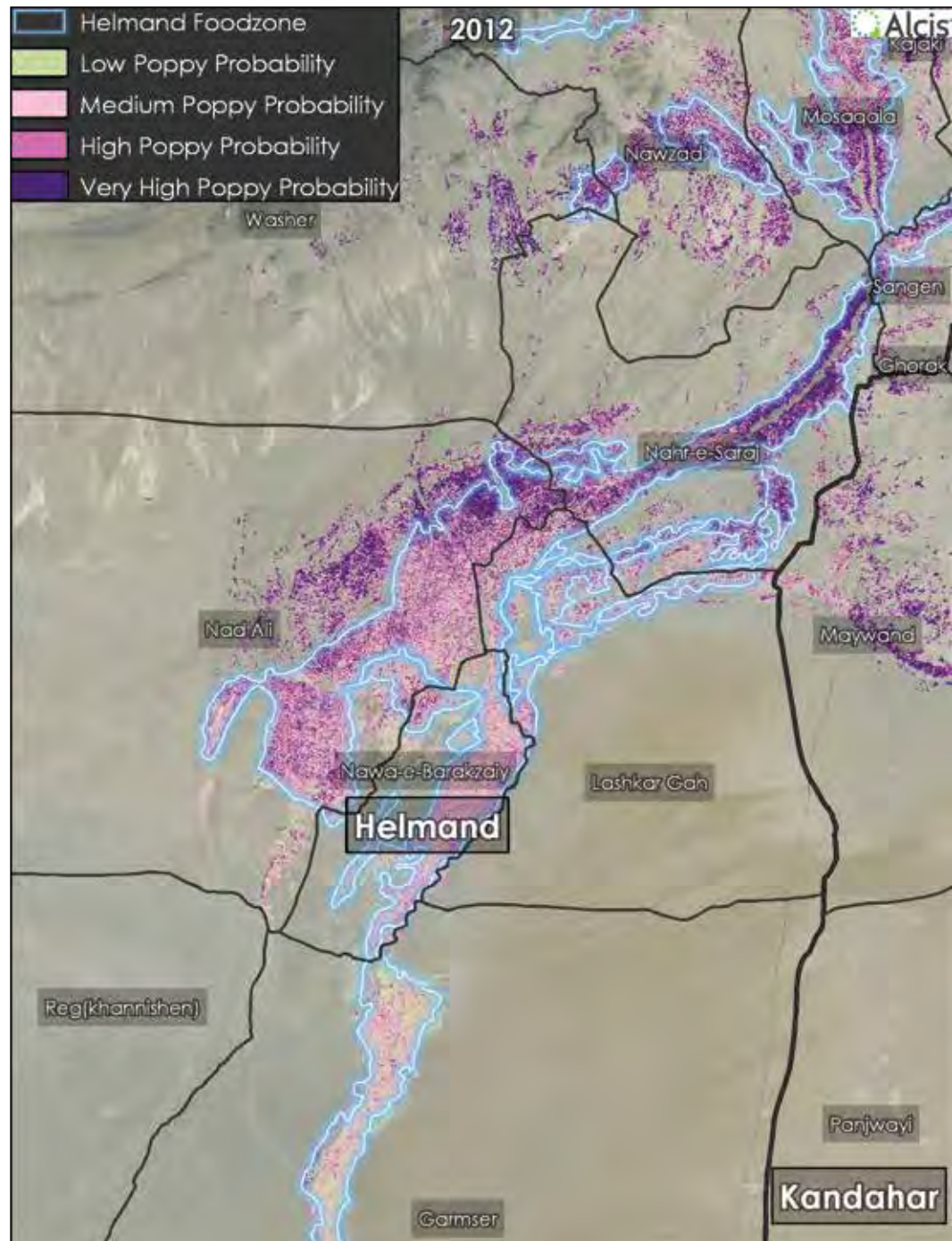
However, despite these short-term reductions in cultivation, the distribution of wheat seed and fertilizer proved counterproductive. According to USAID's 2016 draft Agriculture Assistance Strategy:

Poppy is seven times more labor intensive than wheat. So, when landowners [in HFZ] switched from poppy to wheat, they didn't need to hire labor and could forego sharecropping or rental agreements. This left vulnerable landless and land poor households without work, and unable to rent or sharecrop land. Many also lost their homes in the process, since they were tied to rental or sharecropping arrangements.⁸¹⁷

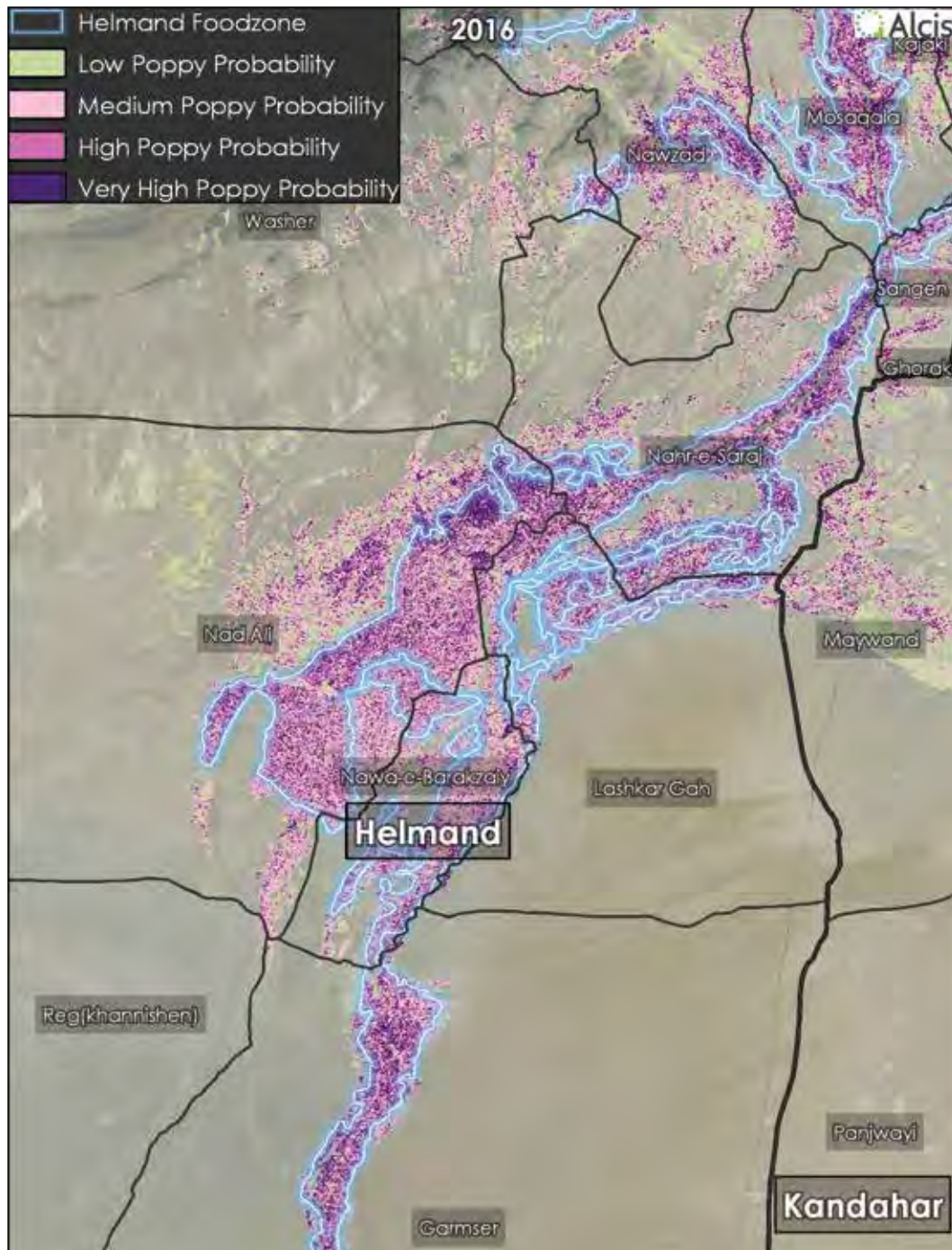
It is now widely accepted that the HFZ focus on the provision of wheat led to the land-poor being dispossessed and moving into the former desert areas north of the Boghra canal, as well as into Bakwa in Farah Province, where they dramatically expanded the amount of land under cultivation, much of it in opium poppy.⁸¹⁸ Furthermore, imagery analysis showed a resurgence in opium poppy cultivation in the main canal area within the HFZ, highlighting

FIGURE 14

POPPY PROBABILITY MAPS, 2012 AND 2016



2012 Poppy Probability Map: This map shows the probability of opium poppy cultivation in Helmand Province, with the boundaries of the HFZ program outlined in blue. Probabilities are based on robust statistical analysis of areas known to grow poppy. They represent the probability of an area being under cultivation; the data do not represent actual locations of poppy fields. The map indicates that where opium poppy was substituted with wheat—through the seeds distributed by the HFZ program in 2009—the substitution was not sustained over time. The map also highlights the higher probability of poppy cultivation in areas to the west of the HFZ, suggesting that poppy cultivation relocated from the prime HFZ agricultural areas targeted by the HFZ to other areas outside the HFZ.



2016 Poppy Probability Map: This map shows poppy's sustained resurgence in the main canal area of the Helmand Food Zone, particularly in the districts of Lashkar Gah, Nad Ali, and Nawa-i-Barakzai. (Probabilities are based on robust statistical analysis of areas known to grow poppy. They represent the probability of an area being under cultivation; the data do not represent actual locations of poppy fields.)

Note: For errors or more information, contact info@alcis.org.

Source: Copyright © 2018 Alcis Holdings Ltd.

that where opium poppy was substituted with wheat, the substitution was not sustained over time. (See figure 14 on pages 122–123.) The HFZ was also beset by accusations of corruption. According to one former UK official, “Wholesale fraud was uncovered under HFZ. Good seed was siphoned off and rubbish seed distributed. Also, threats were made. Helmand MPs [members of Parliament] traveled to London and met with Ministers, who said the program helped institute corrupt practices.”⁸¹⁹

The second food zone effort USAID funded during this period was the Kandahar Food Zone. With the purported success of the HFZ, and absent a major push on eradication, INL sought to line up additional support for the food zone concept. During a visit to Washington in 2012, Afghan Minister for Counter Narcotics Zarar Ahmed Osmani pitched the idea of launching food zones in five of the other major poppy-growing provinces.⁸²⁰ U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein supported the effort and wrote to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton calling for funding for Osmani’s initiative.⁸²¹ Numerous officials stated USAID was reluctant to get involved.⁸²² As a former USAID staff member recalled, in reviewing the HFZ, it became clear to staff in USAID’s Office of Agriculture that the project had had a major negative and unforeseen impact: the displacement of people and poppy to the desert. They concluded USAID was clearly not doing enough analysis of the impact of poppy on programs and of the impact of programs on poppy.”⁸²³

Despite these concerns, there was little choice after U.S. Ambassador Stephen McFarland insisted.⁸²⁴ KFZ was an \$18.7 million program designed to identify and address the drivers of opium poppy cultivation in the Kandahar provincial districts of Arghistan, Kandahar, Maiwand, Panjwai, Shahwali Kot, Zahre, and the sub district of Takhta Pul.⁸²⁵ The initial design of the KFZ further highlighted the challenges of single sector, short-term development initiatives conditioned on reductions in poppy cultivation in areas where Afghan government authority was tenuous. As one USAID official in Afghanistan at the time reflected, “We had to figure things out as we went along. No one looked at opium from a livelihoods perspective in USAID. It was about economics and value chains, not livelihoods. . . . We wanted direction from Washington, but got nothing.”⁸²⁶

Much of the project resources were spent on improvements to the canal system in the districts of Zahre and Panjwai on the assumption that this, alongside community commitments to reduce opium poppy cultivation, would lead to an increase in the amount of land allocated to legal crops.⁸²⁷ Improvements in the canal were made on the basis of a “social contract” between farmers, the program, and the local government, whereby farmers agreed to grow less opium poppy.⁸²⁸ According to USAID, these social contract were designed to “get local buy-in” and were “the result of a year-long interaction and communication.”⁸²⁹

While some investments were made in greenhouses, agricultural training, and inputs for high-value horticulture, this was only a small part of the operational budget. Geospatial data derived from satellite imagery shows that, in some areas, the KFZ's focus on irrigation facilitated an increase in the amount of land dedicated to agriculture under the improved canal systems, but also contributed to rising levels of opium poppy cultivation. (See on figure 13 on page 117.)

Lessons Observed, Not Implemented: 2014 to the Present

In January 2014, following public criticism by SIGAR suggesting USAID lacked a strategy for dealing with poppy, USAID undertook a detailed analysis on alternative development as part of an Afghanistan Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy.⁸³⁰ The analysis developed a constructive critique of USAID's portfolio of programs and their impact on opium poppy cultivation, and acknowledged:

The way USAID 'does its thing' can have a greater or lesser impact on broader counternarcotics efforts. Indeed, the approach taken can be counterproductive in terms of helping rural communities and households reduce their dependency on opium as a livelihood option.⁸³¹

The draft strategy reviewed the RADPs and challenged the efficacy of their focus on wheat. It also questioned the value of making assistance conditional on reductions in opium poppy, arguing that "the burden of such agreements would most likely fall on landless and land-poor subsistence producers, who would be the least likely to benefit directly from the assistance provided as a result of the negotiations."⁸³² The assessment remained in draft form and did not gain a formal status within the agency due, in part, to changes in Kabul staff and disagreements over how USAID could effectively engage on efforts to counter poppy cultivation.

While INL funded alternative development programs throughout the reconstruction effort, it recently ramped up these efforts with a \$37.8 million transfer to UNODC and the UN Development Program (UNDP) for two alternative development projects.⁸³³ The first project, titled Boost Alternative Development Intervention through Licit Livelihoods (BADILL), is intended to strengthen and diversify licit livelihoods and ensure economic growth that is sustainable in the long term.⁸³⁴ UNODC claims the "proposed activities are based on the lessons learned and best practices identified through earlier projects" and "have demonstrated a sustainable improvement in the quality of life of the target communities and have been proven to have an impact on counternarcotics at the community level."⁸³⁵ The program includes a return to conditionality through "social contracts," or documents that are signed by "the beneficiary and community representatives to ensure that the beneficiaries do not resume poppy cultivation or related activities."⁸³⁶ A close examination of this proposal, however, shows it relies on the same kind of single-sector, short-term

interventions and conditionality agreements that previously failed to reduce poppy cultivation and opium production.

The second program, titled Community-Based Agriculture and Rural Development (CBARD), aims to improve household income while reducing dependency on illicit poppy cultivation for selected communities in Farah and Badghis Provinces.⁸³⁷ Past experience combined with current security challenges give little reason to assume that these efforts, whatever their development impact, will have lasting effects on poppy cultivation.

The Role of Alternative Development in Counternarcotics Outcomes

There are a number challenges in assessing USAID's alternative development programming in relation to counternarcotics outcomes. Some of these challenges are due to USAID's overall performance measurement systems, which tend to emphasize outputs, rather than outcomes and impacts. This is not USAID-specific, but reflects a wider problem of measuring program outcomes across donor assistance to Afghanistan, where the tendency has been to report on program outputs, rather than impacts. Where impact was measured, it was largely through attitudinal surveys in more secure areas, rather than measuring how programs affected behavioral change in rural areas.⁸³⁸ There was also a reliance on the reports of implementing partners, rather than independent evaluations or research, making these reports vulnerable to bias.⁸³⁹

Despite the level of investment USAID and other development donors made in extending the production of licit crops—in large part, in the hope they would crowd out opium poppy cultivation—there are still no meaningful assessments of changing cropping patterns. USAID's mid-term evaluation of CHAMP, for example, reported over 3,073 hectares of new orchards and vineyards planted by 2011, but did not include verification of this in the form of crop mapping or evidence that the crops planted were not subsequently replaced with poppy.⁸⁴⁰ Similarly, AVIPA Plus claimed it provided the seeds for the equivalent of 153,000 hectares of non-wheat voucher packages, yet provided no evidence these seeds were used to cultivate 153,000 hectares of land.⁸⁴¹

The lack of granularity of the poppy cultivation data produced by UNODC and the limits of that data negatively affected USAID's reporting on its counternarcotics impact. Typically, USAID drew on UNODC's district- and province-level data in an attempt to associate its interventions in a specific area with changes in opium poppy cultivation. This was done with limited understanding of (1) the veracity of the data, and (2) how the distribution of opium poppy cultivation might have changed within a given geographic area, even if overall levels of cultivation did not change. Furthermore, USAID repeatedly drew on UNODC's data on why households cultivate opium poppy,

despite the data's questionable accuracy and flawed methodology. (See page 116.)

Moreover, many of the reviews and evaluations of development programs implemented in poppy-growing areas lacked solid empirical backing and relied on conjecture and speculation. For example, the final evaluation of ADP South published in April 2010 came to the conclusion that ADP South “had no verifiable impact on opium producing areas,” even arguing that “opium and wheat production do not have an inverse correlation. So, one is not affecting the other.”⁸⁴² This was despite the availability of geospatial data derived from satellite imagery at the time that showed opium poppy had been replaced by wheat in many of the central irrigated valleys of Helmand.⁸⁴³ The 2016 USAID Afghanistan Alternative Development Options Assessment appeared to attribute a more central role to AVIPA Plus and RADP South in the “abrupt decline in poppy recorded for 2009–2011” than more detailed research suggested.⁸⁴⁴

With a focus on the provision of agricultural inputs and stabilization, rather than supporting a longer-term process of agricultural transformation, programs like AVIPA were limited in how much they could support farmers who were transitioning out of opium poppy cultivation. A recent review by USAID identified the limits of programs such as AVIPA, reporting:

The [alternative development] programs implemented over the past dozen years have in general lacked a consistent and longer-term strategic focus. The programs have not been based on an integrated analysis of competitive constraints and opportunities and preconditions for long-term sustainability of alternative livelihood options. Instead, they have tended to focus on shorter-term approaches largely focused on crop substitution, and related agricultural input supply provision and cultivation practice and storage training activities. . . . Frequently the project vehicles through which [alternative development] programs are implemented have had short, two- to three-year life-spans—clearly inadequate to the task of fomenting sustainable stakeholder commitment to transitioning permanently away from engagement in illicit activities.⁸⁴⁵

USAID struggled to articulate how its programs impacted levels of poppy cultivation. Explanations often changed over time, and with changes in staff. As a former USAID staff member noted:

The criteria for allocating alternative development funds versus non-alternative development funds were not optimal. The allocation was constrained by the fact that the level of alternative development funds received in any given year did not necessarily coincide with where the funds were needed at the time. The allocations did not require that the projects receiving funds had substantive poppy-related activities. Nor was any attempt made to ensure that USAID could track poppy-relevant achievements on the ground.⁸⁴⁶

Divided Approaches to Alternative Development

USAID had the technical knowledge and understanding to design effective alternative development programs, but rarely evaluated the programs based on their impact on opium production. INL lacked the expertise necessary for effective alternative development programs, but attempted them—and is currently planning to allocate significant funding to these initiatives.

USAID's focus on large, bilateral alternative development programs and its unwillingness to engage in "counternarcotics mainstreaming" contributed to the rift within the international development community regarding counternarcotics policies and programs. When other development donors participated in policy discussions about integrating the causes of cultivation into development programs and operationalizing this in the NPPs and bilateral and multilateral efforts, USAID was notably absent. USAID was also unreceptive to attempts by donors such as DFID, the World Bank, and the EU to shift the discussion away from unsuccessful models of alternative development and work within the changing development architecture in Afghanistan.

Instead, USAID focused on responding to pressure from within the U.S. government to address increases in opium poppy cultivation. This led to a number of conventional alternative development programs that did not have an overall effect on poppy cultivation, but were viewed as an indicator of the agency's commitment to counterdrug efforts. When pressure to commit resources to alternative development dissipated, USAID allocated alternative development funds to more generic agricultural programs, few of which mentioned opium poppy or its causes. In contrast, INL was under pressure to deliver alternative development programs that were specifically intended to reduce poppy cultivation, but was hobbled by its lack of knowledge on how best to do so. INL recently transferred \$37.8 million for alternative development projects implemented by the UN, a return to the kind of conditional assistance and small-scale, single-sector development programs INL funded in 2002.⁸⁴⁷

USAID had the technical knowledge and understanding to design effective alternative development programs, but rarely evaluated the programs based on their impact on opium production. INL lacked the expertise necessary for effective alternative development programs, but attempted them—and is currently planning to allocate significant funding to these initiatives.

The U.S. government's divided approach to alternative development was driven by the different mandates, authorities, knowledge bases, and philosophies its agencies, specifically INL and USAID, brought to the task. The divisions also

reflected the different reporting requirements and metrics by which each agency was judged. These factors, combined with the failure to include counternarcotics indicators and risk mitigation strategies within larger development efforts, significantly limited the impact of U.S. counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan. While crop and livelihood diversification occurred in some of the more economically advantaged parts of rural Afghanistan, progress was uneven and limited in areas with a history of concentrated opium poppy cultivation.

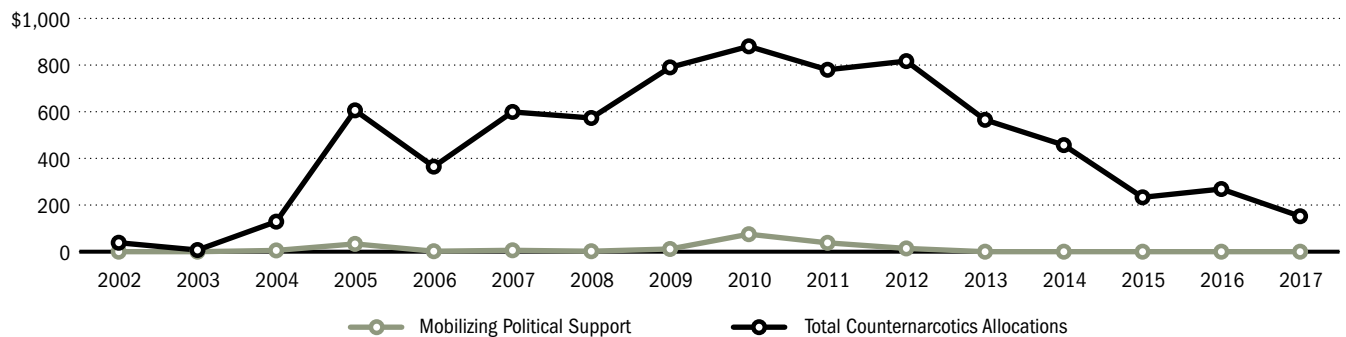
MOBILIZING AFGHAN POLITICAL SUPPORT AND BUILDING INSTITUTIONS

Within the fourth strand of the counternarcotics effort, a range of different programs sought to build political support for counternarcotics among the Afghan leadership and population. These programs typically focused on building capacity and political will to reduce opium production at both the national and provincial levels. (See figure 15.) Some of these interventions, such as the Good Performers Initiative, sought to create direct links between development assistance and reductions in opium poppy, while others, like the creation of the Counter Narcotics Trust Fund, encouraged wider ownership of the counternarcotics agenda among line ministries.

Public awareness programs aimed at enhancing the Afghan population's knowledge of the social costs of the cultivation, trade, and use of drugs, as well as the legal consequences, were further components of this strand. Each of these programs sought to change attitudes toward illicit drugs among the Afghan population and incentivize changes in behavior.

FIGURE 15

MOBILIZING POLITICAL SUPPORT FUNDING COMPARED TO TOTAL COUNTERNARCOTICS FUNDING, 2002-2017 (\$ MILLIONS)



Source: SIGAR analysis of agency budget documentation and budget data.

Building Political Will and Capacity at the Center: The Ministry of Counter Narcotics and the Counter Narcotics Trust Fund

Building the political will of Afghan leadership to take action against drug cultivation and trafficking was an important part of U.S. and international counternarcotics efforts from 2002 through 2017. In addition to policy discussions with President Karzai and other senior Afghan leaders, initial efforts to mobilize political support for counternarcotics focused on the central government through the Afghan Counter Narcotics Directorate and then the Ministry of Counter Narcotics.⁸⁴⁸

As lead nation for counternarcotics, the UK initiated some of the earliest efforts to build capacity and political will. The UK was instrumental in the push to promote and transform the Counter Narcotics Directorate into the Ministry of Counter Narcotics, believing this change would raise the profile of counternarcotics in the Afghan government, as well as reflect the UK's political commitment to the issue at a time when it was facing criticism from the United States.⁸⁴⁹ The UK also invested heavily in institution building for the Ministry of Counter Narcotics through the Strengthening CN Institutions in Afghanistan Program, which primarily focused on building the ministry's management capacity.⁸⁵⁰

The UK was also the driving force behind the establishment of the Counter Narcotics Trust Fund. Launched in October 2005, the CNTF's objective was "to provide greater resources for the [Afghan] government's counternarcotics efforts, ensure transparency and accountability in the allocation and use of those resources, enable increased government ownership over counternarcotics implementation, and promote greater coherence in the funding of counternarcotics-related activities."⁸⁵¹ Having a dedicated funding source was proposed as a tool for building line ministries' ownership of counternarcotics as a cross-cutting issue. The CNTF was envisioned as a \$900 million trust fund.⁸⁵²

The UK was the largest contributor to the CNTF, committing over \$44.3 million, followed by the European Commission (\$17.6 million), Japan (\$5 million), Sweden (\$2 million), Australia (\$1.5 million), and 11 other countries.⁸⁵³ The United States issued instructions to its embassies to encourage contributions from G8 nations, EU member states, and others, while also pursuing a more narrowly tailored contribution to the fund.⁸⁵⁴

In order to tie its assistance to provinces that were "poppy-free" or had almost eliminated poppy production, and to have greater control over how funds were spent, the United States set up a Good Performers Initiative "window" within the CNTF.⁸⁵⁵ This window, supported in part by \$8 million from USAID, had a fast-track procurement process designed to give preliminary approval to the

GPI Project Review Board and speed up the disbursement of funds.⁸⁵⁶ These USAID funds were designated solely for alternative livelihoods projects to be implemented by UNDP. A central premise of the funding was that “public awareness of rewards to good performers will demonstrate to others the benefits of reducing poppy production,” and that funded projects “are expected to motivate existing producers to reduce or cease production.”⁸⁵⁷

By 2008, there were allegations CNTF had “consistently underperformed.”⁸⁵⁸ Donors had committed just \$83 million of the hoped-for \$900 million to support the fund. As of June 2008, only \$2.5 million had actually been spent.⁸⁵⁹ UNDP, which was responsible for administering the CNTF, was criticized for its poor financial oversight and management of the fund.⁸⁶⁰ From the start, there were disagreements over the wider objectives of the CNTF, how it should be administered, and what kind of initiatives it should fund.⁸⁶¹ Among Afghan officials, some believed the CNTF should support operations that would have clear counternarcotics outcomes, while others saw it as just another source of financial assistance. MCN officials were concerned that many of the projects being proposed by line ministries were those that could not find funds elsewhere and had no discernible counternarcotics effect.⁸⁶²

MCN’s push for a program implementation role, rather than a coordination and funding role, was a major challenge for the CNTF. Despite lacking the staff and expertise for program implementation, the MCN sought to absorb responsibility for conducting eradication, management of the Counter Narcotics Police Agency, and implementing rural development in poppy-growing areas.⁸⁶³

A review commissioned by DFID in September 2007 outlined many of the problems with the trust fund. At a strategic level, the review criticized both the sub-cabinet committee on counternarcotics and the management board of the fund.⁸⁶⁴ With regard to programming, it pointed to the failure to “develop costed and thematically prioritized provincial based implementation plans,” arguing that this “led to the development of poorly integrated, targeted, and ad hoc sub-projects whose impact on [National Drug Control Strategy] objectives is unknown.”⁸⁶⁵ A senior Afghan official familiar with the initiative lamented that the “CNTF was a good modality and was designed to encourage ministries to engage. It would have helped mainstream counternarcotics, but no one was in charge.”⁸⁶⁶

The slow rate of disbursements from the CNTF provoked a former Afghan minister who worked with the fund to comment, “MCN behaved as if its job was to save money rather than spend it.”⁸⁶⁷ Others went further, suggesting there were more fundamental problems of corruption. A senior international consultant working in the MCN at the time claimed the CNTF was designed as a “funding

mechanism for good ideas at the provincial level, but it was actually a vehicle for people to gain favors. . . . The rules written for it weren't viable and UNDP performed poorly. Also, there was no interest from the ministries as [the head of the CNTF] wanted kickbacks to put papers through. The structures were flawed, it was never implemented, and no one would take responsibility."⁸⁶⁸ Frustrated by the delays in decisions over funding, managing director of UK-based NGO Afghanaid Anne Johnson noted, "There is now a widespread perception that the few projects ever funded through CNTF were awarded based on personal connections with key ministry figures, rather than more objective criteria."⁸⁶⁹ The Counter Narcotics Trust Fund was subsequently closed in 2009.⁸⁷⁰

Building Political Will and Capacity in the Provinces: Counter Narcotics Advisory Teams and the Good Performers Initiative

In response to disappointing results from centrally led efforts, and driven by the belief that working more closely with provincial governors could help achieve its counternarcotics goals, the United States focused additional capacity-building efforts in the provinces.⁸⁷¹ In 2006, the United States launched the Poppy Elimination Programs (PEP), later to become known as Counter Narcotics Advisory Teams (CNAT), in seven of the main poppy-growing provinces.⁸⁷² Working with provincial governors' offices, the teams were responsible for advising the provincial governor and mobilizing action against the opium crop.⁸⁷³ The UK also funded provincial-level planning aimed at integrating counternarcotics into the development planning for a number of key provinces, most notably Balkh, Herat, and Helmand.⁸⁷⁴

CNAT faced significant challenges when trying to win national-level Afghan government support for provincial initiatives. MCN was already frustrated by what it saw as UNODC's attempts to build parallel structures in the provinces and saw CNAT as a replication of these efforts. A senior Afghan official expressed his frustration, stating the United States funded "up to \$40 million for CNAT. They created an office in Kabul and provincial offices. They operated parallel to the ministry and our provincial offices. The MCN had no control."⁸⁷⁵ One UN official more intimately involved in CNAT argued it was doing "what MCN should have been doing in the provinces," and that it was a "good source of information on what was happening in the provinces."⁸⁷⁶ However, both individuals acknowledged it was a parallel institution.⁸⁷⁷ The Poppy Elimination Program was closed in late 2009, in tandem with the Poppy Eradication Force.⁸⁷⁸

One flagship U.S.-backed effort to build political will and capacity in the provinces was INL's Good Performers Initiative. Under GPI, provinces were rewarded each year for (1) attaining or maintaining poppy-free status (\$1 million), (2) reducing poppy cultivation by more than 10 percent (\$1,000 for each hectare above 10 percent), and (3) exceptional counternarcotics

achievements (\$500,000 per province for up to two provinces).⁸⁷⁹ GPI provided money for projects within provinces to encourage governors “to offer greater cooperation in reducing and eliminating opium production.”⁸⁸⁰ In November 2009, Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Affairs Ambassador Earl Anthony Wayne described GPI as an “excellent demonstration of Afghan leadership.”⁸⁸¹

As of August 31, 2014, GPI had awarded a total of \$108 million for more than 221 projects in 33 provinces.⁸⁸² A 2014 embassy cable referred to GPI as “one of the most successful counternarcotics programs in Afghanistan.”⁸⁸³ Despite this praise and a program redesign announced in 2014, GPI was phased out in 2016.⁸⁸⁴ U.S. officials stated that their concerns about the Afghan government’s capacity, specifically within MCN, to implement GPI led to the cancellation of the program before the redesigned GPI II had begun.⁸⁸⁵ In 2015, INL terminated a separate effort to improve MCN, amid concerns about the efficacy of that effort, but U.S. concerns that the ministry “didn’t have much capacity,” persisted.⁸⁸⁶ In 2016 INL established a new program, the MCN Institution Building Project, to address shortcomings at the ministry.⁸⁸⁷

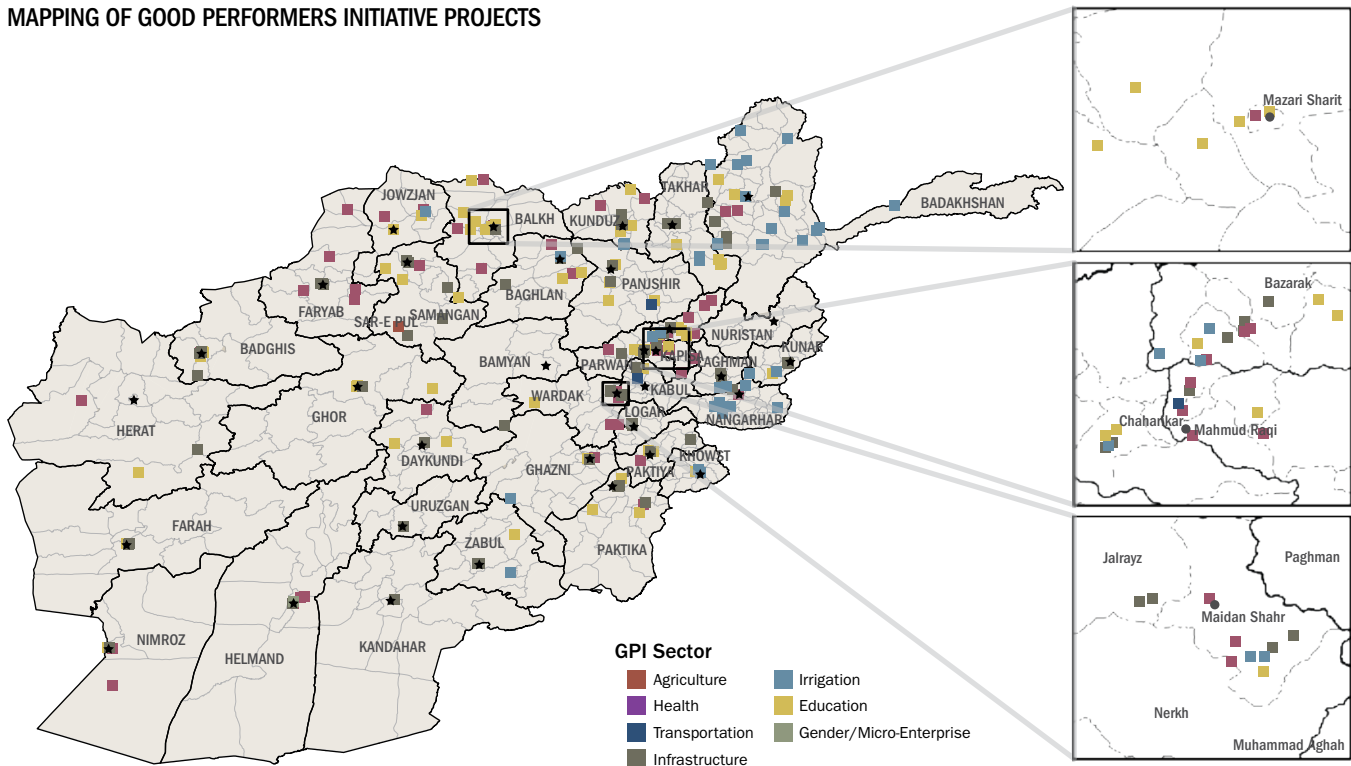
Given the specific objective of the program, it is important to examine how GPI-funded projects translated into reductions in opium poppy cultivation in rural Afghanistan. To date, there has not been an independent evaluation of GPI. For this report, SIGAR conducted a detailed review of the projects funded by GPI. Our review suggests that priority was given to financing infrastructure programs that were implemented by private sector construction companies. These projects were in a limited range of sectors, such as health, education, transport, and agriculture, and largely consisted of the construction of buildings, such as schools, health clinics, gymnasiums, conference centers, and meeting halls, as well as roads, bridges, and irrigation systems.

It is particularly notable that very few GPI projects focused on income generation or helping farmers replace the income lost by abandoning opium poppy cultivation. It is not clear how many of the projects funded under GPI were actually implemented in rural areas that had a history of opium poppy cultivation or how specific interventions explicitly addressed the causes of cultivation. Analysis of geospatial data shows a preponderance of projects located in urban areas, primarily in close proximity to provincial centers, despite the claim that “GPI funding enables local communities to receive development assistance in return for successfully reducing poppy cultivation.”⁸⁸⁸

Figure 16 shows, however, that some GPI projects based in rural areas provided resources for farm equipment and irrigation. These projects could have had a demonstrable effect on farmers by supporting crop diversification and

FIGURE 16

MAPPING OF GOOD PERFORMERS INITIATIVE PROJECTS



Note: GPS data for the Good Performers Initiative (GPI) shows many of the GPI projects were located in close proximity to urban provincial centers rather than rural, poppy-dependent areas.

Source: SIGAR visualization of imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC. For the original imagery, see figure A.3 in appendix A.

increasing income. However, according to one review of GPI, because of GPI's disproportionate focus on provincial capitals, "rural communities were not receiving the economic and employment benefits of GPI projects." The same review noted "there were even concerns that excluding the non-growing poppy communities from the process might incentivize some farmer to switch from licit to illicit crops in order to qualify for the fund."⁸⁸⁹

Irrigation projects were a notable example of GPI projects with the potential to have a more direct effect on the income of rural communities over an extended period. However, as noted earlier, there was a risk that such projects could inadvertently enable increased opium production in subsequent seasons. This risk proved particularly problematic in areas where irrigation improvements were not combined with the agricultural and market support necessary to transform improved water supply into increased agricultural yields and sales of licit farm produce.

The irrigation projects in Nangarhar, Badakhshan, and Kunar—provinces where there was a return to opium poppy following periods of significant reductions in cultivation, or even after being declared poppy-free—provide examples

where GPI may have supported increased opium production. For example, high-resolution imagery shows that almost all of the land under the improved irrigation systems funded by GPI in Bamikhel, in the district of Pachir wa Agam in Nangarhar Province, showed opium poppy cultivation in both 2013 and 2014. (See figure 17.) It is possible other areas in Nangarhar, particularly Kuz Bihar in Khugyani and Garatek in Chapahar, were also experiencing greater cultivation and higher opium yields after benefiting from irrigation projects awarded by GPI. Similar to irrigation projects funded under other lines of expenditure, there was an unmet need to include mitigating measures and apply a “do no harm” principle when working in areas that had a history of opium poppy cultivation.⁸⁹⁰

The GPI emphasis on the construction of buildings in the health, education, and transport sectors, as shown in figure 16, suggests the theory of change that underpinned GPI was that provincial governors could be motivated to engage in counternarcotics efforts through the provision of projects that increased their political capital and public support. The design of the program assumed that building schools, clinics, and other government buildings projected the appearance of state power, and bolstered a governor’s position in negotiations with rural communities to reduce opium poppy cultivation. INL noted in 2014 that GPI “enjoys strong Afghan backing” and “a large body of embassy reporting confirms GPI’s value as an incentive to governors seeking validation of their [counternarcotics] performance and resources from the central government.”⁸⁹¹

While State Department officials maintained in 2018 that provincial development councils approved GPI projects and money was not given directly to provincial governors, others had a different impression.⁸⁹² As Ambassador Neumann noted:

The idea was that the province would see a connection between the giving up of poppy and the resulting assistance. In any event, it didn’t work. Projects were not approved quickly. [Provincial] Councils didn’t have much role. The money turned into a slush fund for governors and those who were hurt by giving up poppy felt no connection with the rewards. For the larger provinces, the amounts were insignificant.⁸⁹³

A senior Afghan official claimed GPI sought to buy the cooperation of governors and expressed concerns about the interests it served.⁸⁹⁴ Mohammed Ehsan Zia, a former Minister of MRRD, suggested governors misappropriated money, and he expressed doubts about the overall efficacy of the program.⁸⁹⁵ Other officials familiar with the program were equally explicit, describing it as “a blank check” that allowed governors to offer favors to others through subcontracts.⁸⁹⁶

Given the distance and disconnect between the many projects GPI financed and the rural communities where poppy was grown, it is questionable whether GPI played a role in reducing opium poppy.⁸⁹⁷ In fact, as INL concluded in 2015, “While the ‘top-down’ value of GPI is clear, we have little data to

FIGURE 17

GOOD PERFORMERS INITIATIVE IRRIGATION PROJECTS USED TO SUPPORT POPPY CULTIVATION



Note: Crop mapping in the district of Pachier wa Agam, Nangarhar Province, shows land that benefitted from improved irrigation systems funded by GPI was used to cultivate poppy. For errors or more information, contact info@alcis.org.

Source: Copyright © 2018 Alcis Holdings Ltd.

demonstrate the causal effect of GPI awards on local communities. Nor do we know whether most farmers are aware that projects in their communities—or the lack thereof—result from their cultivation choices.”⁸⁹⁸ Even the claim of the “top-down value” of GPI is far from proven. Considering the tenuous and contested nature of a governor’s control over much of the territory where opium poppy was grown, a governor may not have been able to deliver anything but a temporary lull in cultivation.⁸⁹⁹

Given the distance between the bulk of the projects GPI financed and the rural communities where poppy was grown, it is questionable whether GPI played a role in reducing opium poppy.

Furthermore, while a province might have achieved success in reducing opium poppy cultivation, GPI did not account for continued drug trafficking in the province. For example, while the 2008 UNODC survey proclaimed Takhar Province poppy-free, a different UNODC report highlighted that, in 2009, Takhar was a major conduit for processing and onward trafficking of opium and heroin.⁹⁰⁰ Thus, according to some, it was a misconception to call provinces with little or no poppy cultivation “opium-free.”⁹⁰¹

In 2014, MCN and INL announced the redesign of GPI to GPI II, and a shift toward projects that “better meet the needs of rural communities, by prioritizing alternative livelihoods projects that support farmers as they transition away from poppy cultivation.”⁹⁰² However, before this redesign could take effect, INL decided to end the GPI program as a consequence of MCN’s failure to spend allocated funding.⁹⁰³

Counternarcotics Public Awareness Campaigns

INL funded a succession of counternarcotics communications and outreach campaigns over the course of the reconstruction effort. These projects largely focused on increasing awareness of the social cost of opium poppy cultivation and garnering public support for the Afghan government’s counternarcotics efforts. Initiatives included radio and television broadcasts and poster campaigns designed to raise the Afghan population’s awareness of the negative effects of opium and deter them from cultivating the crop. Many of the messages drew on the same themes and linked opium production with opiate use among the Afghan population.⁹⁰⁴

The most recent public awareness campaign was the Counternarcotics Community Engagement Program, a \$12.6 million program designed to strengthen the capacity of MCN to undertake its own targeted counternarcotics awareness campaign. As of 2018, this program was ongoing.⁹⁰⁵

What These Programs Achieved

Institutional capacity building within the Counter Narcotics Directorate and then the Ministry of Counter Narcotics yielded few tangible improvements, despite the United States spending considerable resources for this purpose. The MCN suffered from poor leadership and a lack of influence over Afghan line ministries.⁹⁰⁶ The promotion from directorate to ministry created a separate bureaucratic entity in charge of counternarcotics policies and programs, which pulled responsibility away from the Afghan National Security Council and failed to gain the backing of the wider government. This error was compounded by the fact that the United States, UK, and MCN's other main partner, UNODC, could not agree on a vision for the ministry that included a common counternarcotics strategy.⁹⁰⁷ Regardless, it was unlikely that a small coordinating ministry like MCN, which had no authority over the line ministries responsible for implementing counternarcotics programs and little political stature, could have succeeded in leading a strong government-wide counternarcotics effort. The appointment of a Deputy Minister for Counternarcotics within the MOI to oversee and coordinate counterdrug law enforcement activities just prior to the establishment of the MCN was an early harbinger of the institutional limitations on MCN influence.⁹⁰⁸

There is little evidence that U.S. efforts to build Afghan political support had measurable success in achieving long-term counternarcotics goals. Formal evaluations of the programs in this strand of activity were infrequent due to a combination of factors, including the short-lived, ad hoc nature of many of the initiatives, the challenges of evaluating them on site, and the difficulty of attribution. Rather than formal evaluations that examined causality, there was a tendency toward self-reporting and embassy reviews. The evidence base for these assessments was harder to judge, particularly when considering how infrequently U.S. embassy staff were able to visit the locations where program activities were taking place.

The scale of security and development resources flowing into a given province incentivized some governors to support and undertake counternarcotics efforts. The most dramatic reductions in poppy cultivation occurred in Nangarhar and Helmand, where active, well-resourced PRTs were run by the United States and the UK, respectively. In Nangarhar, provincial governors were able to implement a ban on opium poppy cultivation through the promise of development assistance, the threat of military action against villages that did not comply with the ban, and fragile political bargains with rural elites.⁹⁰⁹ The temporary nature of these reductions, however, suggested the political support for counternarcotics was unsustainable without donor-nation resources and coalition security force support.

As for the counternarcotics awareness campaigns, a late-2008 UNODC evaluation found, “in general, people were skeptical about the effectiveness of [counternarcotics] public awareness campaigns. In the first place, illiterate people could not understand the messages, and secondly, promises of alternative livelihoods made by the government were seldom kept.”⁹¹⁰ In particular, the evaluation questioned the effectiveness of awareness campaigns that were not “accompanied by practical action from the government and the international community to introduce farmers to realistic alternatives to opium poppy cultivation as part of a comprehensive program of rural development.”⁹¹¹

In addition to programming shortcomings, Afghan political commitment to strive for counternarcotics goals was limited, in part, due to mixed signals from the international donor community. Senior foreign officials were faced with what often appeared to be conflicting objectives in the areas of politics, development, and security. Among U.S. ambassadors to Afghanistan, some were hesitant to push counternarcotics to the top of the agenda, while those who were willing to do so often focused on eradication, which alienated Afghan leadership. (See pages 95–100.)

At both the national and provincial levels, the political support for counterdrug activities was often more a function of the funding available through counternarcotics programs than a lasting commitment from Afghan officials.



CHAPTER 4

MAINTAINING A COHESIVE STRATEGY

DOD photo

Policymakers in the United States often agreed on the need for an integrated and balanced counternarcotics strategy where the different strands of activities worked in unison.⁹¹² But what does integrated and balanced actually mean in the context of the counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan? Moreover, given the diverse political, economic, and environmental topography of the country, how should the different strands be weighted under these different conditions and circumstances?

One indicator of balance and integration is the way resources were allocated across the different strands of the counternarcotics strategy. Financial data offer some insights into how U.S. funds were allocated over time, what the priorities were, and whether an appropriate balance was maintained. Data on the types of programs funded indicate how strands evolved over time, how these programs addressed gaps in analysis and capacity, and how agencies learned from prior experience. The data also show whether gaps were filled and whether new programs were financed to meet recognized shortfalls.

This section examines whether and to what degree the different strands of the counternarcotics strategy were integrated. First, it looks at budgetary data and what the data reveal about both priorities and financial commitments to the

strands of activity. Second, it uses geospatial data to examine how the strands and their programs were coordinated on the ground.

BACKGROUND ON SEQUENCING AND COLLOCATION

Sequencing refers to the order in which counternarcotics interventions take place. In the counternarcotics effort, **sequencing** refers to the order in which counternarcotics interventions take place. For example, the sequencing of alternative development before eradication is considered especially important for lasting reductions in cultivation and to prevent backlash from those dependent on poppy farming. As a UNODC report observed, “There is a strong argument that enforcement efforts against opium poppy farmers should follow rather than precede the availability of viable alternative livelihoods.”⁹¹³ Until approximately 2009, however, the United States emphasized eradication, regardless of whether or not other economic support was available for those farmers and laborers cultivating poppy.⁹¹⁴

Sequencing can also be an important feature within the same strand of activity. For example, targeting better-off or less opium-dependent areas for eradication prior to moving into poorer communities can lead to more lasting transitions away from poppy.⁹¹⁵

Collocation occurs when programming for different strands is implemented in the same geographic area and reaches the same people. Along with sequencing, the physical collocation of the different strands of activity is critical for lasting success. **Collocation** means programming for different strands is implemented in the same geographic area and reaches the same people. In a country like Afghanistan, achieving an appropriate balance in the counternarcotics effort not only required a clear understanding of how interventions were collocated, but the circumstances and conditions under which they were carried out. For example, a strong eradication effort in Nangarhar and robust rural development programs in Helmand clearly would not have the combined effect that both strands of effort in the same location could achieve. The Helmand and Kandahar Food Zones were two examples of projects that attempted to collocate strands of the counternarcotics strategy within the same geographic area, but they were the exception, rather than the rule.⁹¹⁶ And, even in those focused efforts, there were limits to the scope of the accompanying development effort and varying levels of success.

ALIGNING FUNDING WITH U.S. COUNTERNARCOTICS STRATEGIES

This report’s analysis of the U.S. counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan has focused on four strands, or areas of activity: interdiction and counterdrug law enforcement, eradication, alternative development, and mobilizing Afghan political support and building institutions. Tracking and analyzing counternarcotics funds by these strands is one important tool to assess whether

U.S. efforts achieved a balance among counternarcotics activities. The 2007 U.S. counternarcotics strategy intended to provide “the appropriate balance of incentives and disincentives” through the lines of effort it pursued.⁹¹⁷

At the same time, funding alone is not an adequate measure to judge the appropriate balance between strands. SIGAR is not in a position to determine what constitutes an exact dollar-for-dollar financial balance and recognizes the difficulties of doing so, particularly given that funding has not been tracked according to strand. Additionally, an appropriate balance between the strands may differ by province or community, and there is no way to say, for example, that every dollar spent on eradication has an impact equivalent to some other dollar amount in alternative development. Nevertheless, an analysis of how counternarcotics appropriations changed over time provides insights into how the different strands were prioritized.

Between 2002 and the end of fiscal year 2017, Congress appropriated \$120.78 billion for Afghan reconstruction, of which \$7.28 billion was explicitly made available for counternarcotics purposes. In addition to the \$7.28 billion in funding, SIGAR recognizes that reconstruction funding that was not appropriated for or identified by U.S. agencies as counternarcotics funding had an impact on the counterdrug effort. This includes, for example, funding from the Afghan Security Forces Fund to establish the Special Mission Wing. More broadly, the roughly \$750 billion in funding for the U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan sometimes helped to establish the security improvements that supported short-term reductions in opium poppy cultivation and production.⁹¹⁸ Additionally, the air strikes against drugs labs in Helmand in late 2017 were supported by non-counterdrug DOD funding; while the strikes’ primary purpose was to counter Taliban financing, the strikes might also have had a counternarcotics effect. This section, however, focuses on those funds explicitly made available for counternarcotics purposes, according to the year in which they were appropriated, in order to draw lessons and make recommendations about how U.S. funding practices can improve counternarcotics outcomes.

Our report focuses on the year of appropriation because of the difficulty of establishing actual counternarcotics spending in a particular year. For example, a 2014 State Inspector General report highlighted that INL’s budget practices do not provide a clear picture of annual spending or an effective way to measure obligations.⁹¹⁹ Additionally, some counternarcotics funds were available for a single year, while others were available for two or even five years. Given these budgetary and accounting challenges, this report focuses on the fiscal year for which funds were appropriated as the best indicator of when policy changes were enacted or priorities shifted.

To date, there has been no detailed analysis of the counternarcotics budget examining how funds were allocated across the strands of the counternarcotics effort, primarily because the financial data were not disaggregated by strand or pillar across U.S. agencies. This was a problem that was identified as early as 2007, when a State and DOD Inspectors General assessment noted:

The [counternarcotics] effort in Afghanistan suffers from the absence of any system of centralized records to assess what individual agencies are spending, where funds are being spent, funds remaining, and what is being accomplished. While each agency or office attempts to track funding in its area of responsibility, there is no central point to provide an overall picture. This hampers both the planning of [counternarcotics] programs and the evaluation of those efforts.⁹²⁰

In 2016, INL wrote that “agencies do not aggregate and track [counternarcotics] funding based on the five pillars in the U.S. CN strategy for Afghanistan, which is not the basis for financial reporting,” stating that a “pillar structure . . . is a policy perspective and irrelevant for tracking funds.”⁹²¹

Balancing Eradication and Alternative Development Funding

Nearly 30 percent of the annual U.S. counternarcotics budget from 2005 to 2009 was allocated to eradication, reaching a cumulative total of \$877 million over those five years. Allocations for eradication declined dramatically in 2010 with the decision to scrap the Poppy Eradication Force; dispensing with the enormous logistical and contractor costs associated with the PEF accounted for a significant portion of the funding reduction. Since 2010, eradication has been only 1 percent of the annual counternarcotics budget, largely because Governor-Led Eradication was considerably less costly than the centrally planned eradication that preceded it.⁹²²

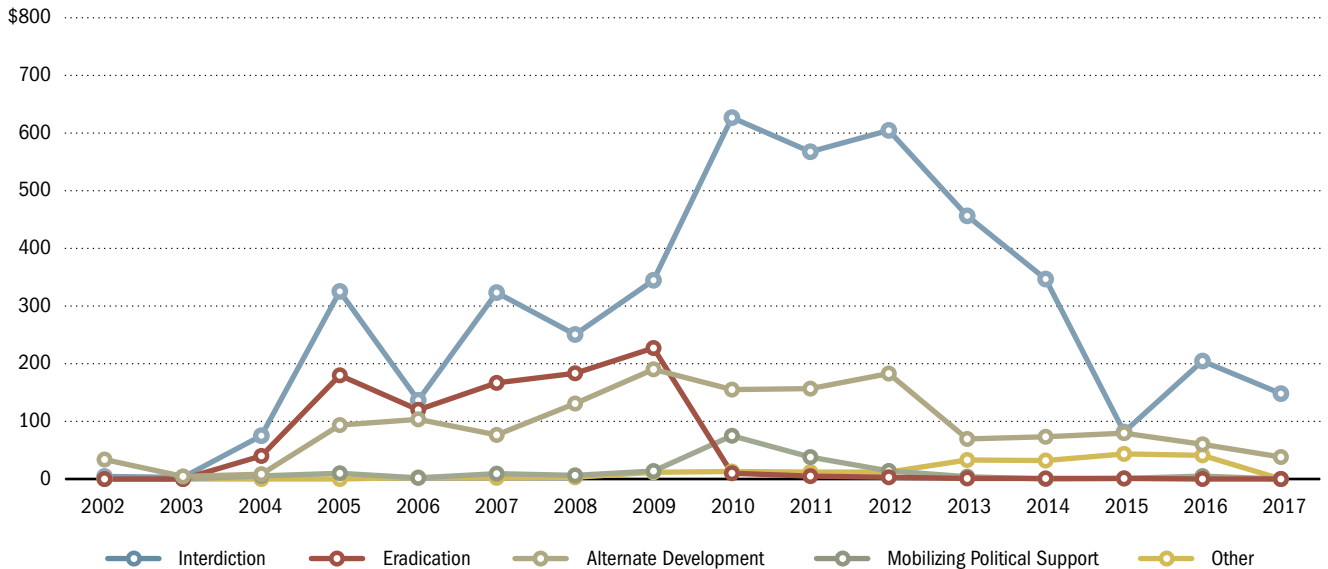
While the funds for eradication fell from 2010 onward, the money allocated to alternative development increased to over \$190 million in 2009, and was then maintained at over \$150 million per year until 2012. (See figure 18.) This was a significant increase from 2005, when alternative development was allocated only \$93 million of the annual counternarcotics budget of \$608 million, or about 15 percent.

Between 2005 and 2009, annual allocations for alternative development were lower than those for eradication. Some years saw considerable differences, such as 2005, when approximately half as much money was allocated to alternative development as eradication. This financial emphasis on eradication over alternative development was misplaced in light of the extended conflict and drought that had severely disrupted the rural Afghan economy.⁹²³

In total, \$938 million was allocated for eradication between 2002 and 2017, accounting for 41 percent of INL’s \$2.27 billion in counternarcotics funding for

FIGURE 18

U.S. COUNTERNARCOTICS FUNDING ALLOCATIONS BY STRAND, 2002-2017 (\$ MILLIONS)



Note: Mobilizing Political Support includes funding for the Good Performers Initiative, institution building, and public information. "Other" includes funding for (1) demand reduction programs (\$110 million) and (2) programs for which SIGAR does not have adequate funding information to categorize by strand (\$96 million).

Source: SIGAR analysis of budget data by year of allocation and strand of effort based on agency data calls, budget documentation, and correspondence.

Afghanistan, and approximately 14 percent of the \$7.28 billion that U.S. agencies allocated specifically for counternarcotics in Afghanistan. In contrast, 20 percent of the total counternarcotics budget was allocated for alternative development over the same period, for a total of approximately \$1.46 billion.⁹²⁴

While \$1.46 billion for alternative development is a significant portion of U.S. counternarcotics funding over 16 years, it is less than the estimated \$1.5 to \$3 billion Afghans earn from the drug trade in just one year and a small fraction of the larger development budget for Afghanistan.

The evolution of alternative development funding from 2002 through 2017 suggests this strand of the U.S. counternarcotics strategy was underfunded initially. The increases for alternative development over time demonstrate how U.S. strategy changed, particularly relative to eradication, and officials recognized more needed to be done to provide alternatives to poppy for Afghan farmers. For example, from 2005 to 2008 USAID allocated up to 82 percent of its total agriculture budget in Afghanistan on alternative development programming, suggesting that counternarcotics efforts were an institutional priority during this period.⁹²⁵ While \$1.46 billion for alternative development is a

significant portion of U.S. counternarcotics funding over 16 years, it is less than the estimated \$1.5 to \$3 billion Afghans earn from the drug trade in just one year and a small fraction of the larger development budget for Afghanistan.

An Evolving Interdiction Budget

U.S. government interdiction efforts were initially hampered by the lack of U.S. law enforcement personnel in country and virtually nonexistent Afghan counterdrug law enforcement counterparts. The low U.S. expenditures on interdiction from 2002 to 2004 were indicative of the challenging circumstances that early efforts encountered, as well as the fact that the UK was the lead nation for counternarcotics. However, as poppy cultivation numbers trended upwards, so too did interdiction expenditures. This trend also reflected the evolution of the interdiction effort itself, from one focused on destroying drug-processing laboratories to one aimed at arresting, prosecuting, and convicting major drug traffickers.

The budget for counternarcotics law enforcement and interdiction increased from less than \$3 million in 2003 to a peak of \$627 million in 2010. Building capable counternarcotics law enforcement units was expensive and required a multi-year commitment, particularly for resource-intensive endeavors like the Special Mission Wing. Purchasing the Mi-17 helicopters for the SMW presented significant start-up costs, as seen in the initial \$553.8 million contract.⁹²⁶ DOD funded the largest portion of interdiction-related expenditures from 2004 through 2014, and was responsible for major purchases like the Mi-17s.

From 2009 to 2010, allocations for interdiction across the U.S. government increased from just over \$345 million to more than \$627 million. This coincided with the appointment of Ambassador Holbrooke as SRAP and his reorientation of U.S. counterdrug efforts to emphasize interdiction operations over eradication. State's interdiction budget remained at significantly elevated levels through 2013, tracking closely with the increased military presence in poppy-producing regions. The budget shows that the policy shift made by Ambassador Holbrooke was matched by resource allocation and budget planning, demonstrating an alignment of strategy and funding.

Finally, while \$452.5 million for DEA from fiscal years 2002 through 2017 may seem small in comparison to the allocations of State and DOD, it is important to note DEA's smaller budget and agency size, as well as the fact that its primary expenditures were on personnel salaries. Thus, even relatively small increases for DEA could represent an increase in the number of agents on the ground and focus on Afghan interdiction efforts. Additionally, DEA benefited significantly from over \$209 million in transferred funds from State's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs to support DEA's work in Afghanistan. From fiscal years 2009 through 2015, nearly half of DEA's budget for its work in Afghanistan

was provided by State, money without which DEA would have been unable to sustain its increased presence in Afghanistan.

Overall, U.S. investments in interdiction increased dramatically during the surge years of greater civilian and military presence in Afghanistan, from roughly 2009 to 2014. This reflected the evolution of U.S. counternarcotics strategy toward greater reliance on interdiction efforts, but the post-2014 decline in funding for interdiction also illustrates the diminished U.S. footprint—and capacity to address Afghanistan’s drug problem—since then.

GIS ANALYSIS: USING SATELLITE IMAGERY

To develop a better understanding of how the counternarcotics strategy performed on the ground in Afghanistan, SIGAR commissioned a GIS provider to undertake geospatial analysis of different aspects of the drug control effort. This section describes the methods applied to the data, the analysis, and the challenges of that analysis.

It is important to recognize that the GIS work done for SIGAR was constrained by the quality of data U.S. agencies could provide. Problems with the specificity of the GPS data for rural development programs, for example, prevented a close inspection of individual projects. We further recognize that the alternative development data are not an exhaustive list of the development programs implemented; for example, it’s not clear if all of the individual projects completed by implementing partners were included in the data provided by USAID. In addition, our analysis does not include alternative development projects implemented by other countries. For a detailed explanation of the data and methodology used for this analysis, see appendix B.

While the GIS evaluation prepared for this report is not an exhaustive country-wide analysis, it is the first attempt to document the geographical distribution of major elements of the counternarcotics effort within Helmand and Nangarhar Provinces over a 15-year period. This is a step toward identifying whether the different strands of the counternarcotics strategy were collocated and achieved an appropriate geographic balance.

Although the analysis focused predominantly on Helmand and Nangarhar, some additional work was done on a country-wide basis, including detailed site analysis and crop mapping of several locations to examine how different interventions affected the types of crops grown and whether these changes endured over time. A limited analysis of the Kandahar Food Zone was conducted to examine whether improvements in the irrigation system could be identified and what their effect was on the amount of land under cultivation, its productivity, and levels of poppy cultivation.

What Do the Data Show?

Eradication and Alternative Development Efforts Were Not Coordinated or Sufficiently Collocated

Policymakers have frequently emphasized the need for balance in the counternarcotics effort. They have argued that an effective counternarcotics strategy requires each of the different strands or pillars of counternarcotics to work together. U.S. and Afghan counternarcotics strategies further underscored that alternative development and eradication be collocated “in the same geographic areas in order to reinforce the ‘carrot and stick’ aspects of the program.”⁹²⁷

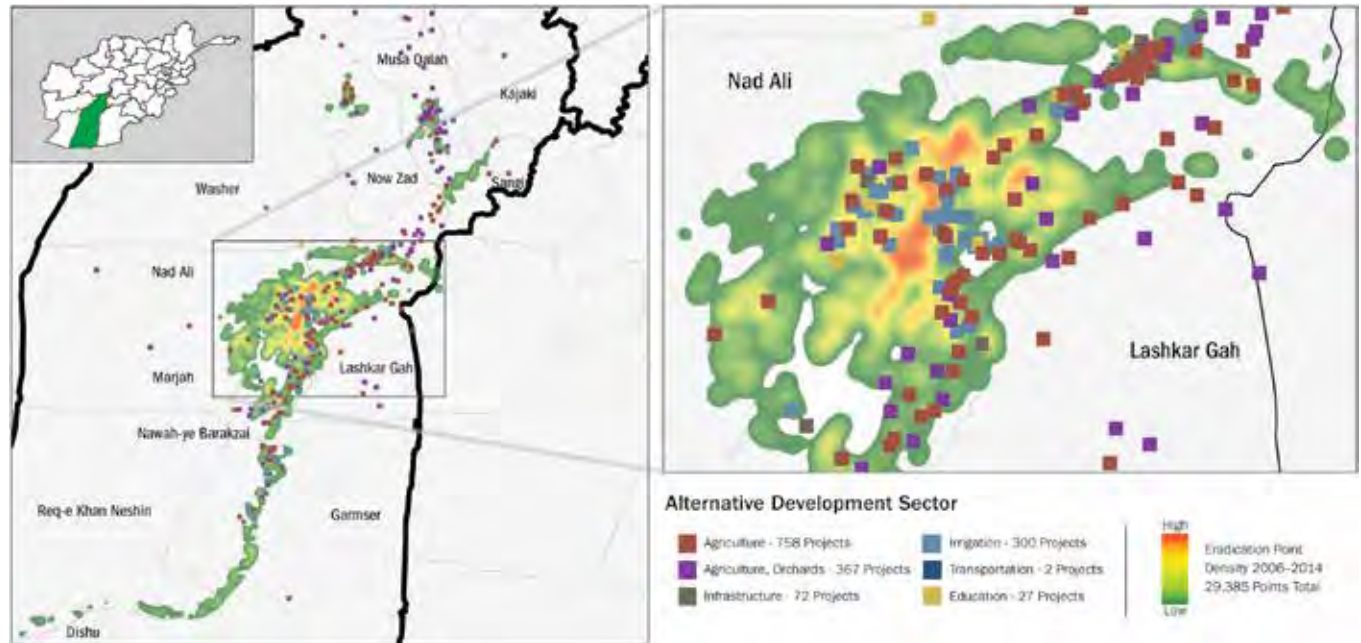
The GIS analysis highlights the degree to which eradication was conducted in areas where other elements of the counternarcotics effort—most importantly, alternative development—were not undertaken before, during, or after crop destruction. Many of the areas that saw high levels of eradication and little to no alternative development assistance comprised populations that were highly dependent on opium poppy for their livelihood. Compelling farmers to abandon their opium crop in the absence of viable alternatives has been closely associated with increasing insecurity and rural resistance and rebellion, as well as the inability to sustain reductions in poppy cultivation.⁹²⁸

In Helmand, the highest cumulative density of crop destruction was in the area just west of the city of Lashkar Gah, in the district of Nad Ali. (See figure 19.) This area experienced repeated crop destruction between 2006 and 2014. Yet, according to the available rural development data, the parts of this area that experienced the most intensive eradication efforts, received few, if any, alternative development projects.

Data for the HFZ also suggest that communities near Lashkar Gah were not recipients of wheat seed distribution in 2009.⁹²⁹ (See figure A.4 in appendix A.) Alternatives to poppy cultivation were limited northwest of Lashkar Gah. Despite their proximity to the city and the consumer demands of the urban population there, farmers in that area were constrained in their choice of spring and summer crops due to a shortage of irrigation during the summer months.⁹³⁰ The area had a very low vegetative quality and saw few development programs due to the population not having the strong tribal and political links to power holders in the province, as well as because of the uncertain claim they had over the land.⁹³¹ With lower levels of opium poppy, the population relied heavily on non-farm income and work opportunities in Lashkar Gah during the surge of military forces. Fieldwork in the area indicated that by the spring of 2015, “Wage labor opportunities [were] limited, and even harder to find with the reduction in development investment that these communities have experienced

FIGURE 19

MAPPING OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND ERADICATION IN HELMAND PROVINCE, 2006-2015



Note: From 2006 to 2014, the district of Nad Ali was subject to the highest cumulative density of crop destruction in Helmand Province. At the same time, however, there were almost no alternative development projects in the immediate areas that experienced repeated eradication. This image is based on MDA analysis of SIGAR-provided data. The data set for alternative and rural development programs includes those programs that identified reducing poppy cultivation as a program objective. One exception is Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) South, a stabilization program which supported a large number of irrigation programs in Helmand Province; SIKA South GPS coordinates are included in this data set. Without the inclusion of SIKA South data, the number of development projects in areas with high cumulative crop destruction levels would likely be reduced.

Source: SIGAR visualization of imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC. For the original imagery, see figure A.5 in appendix A.

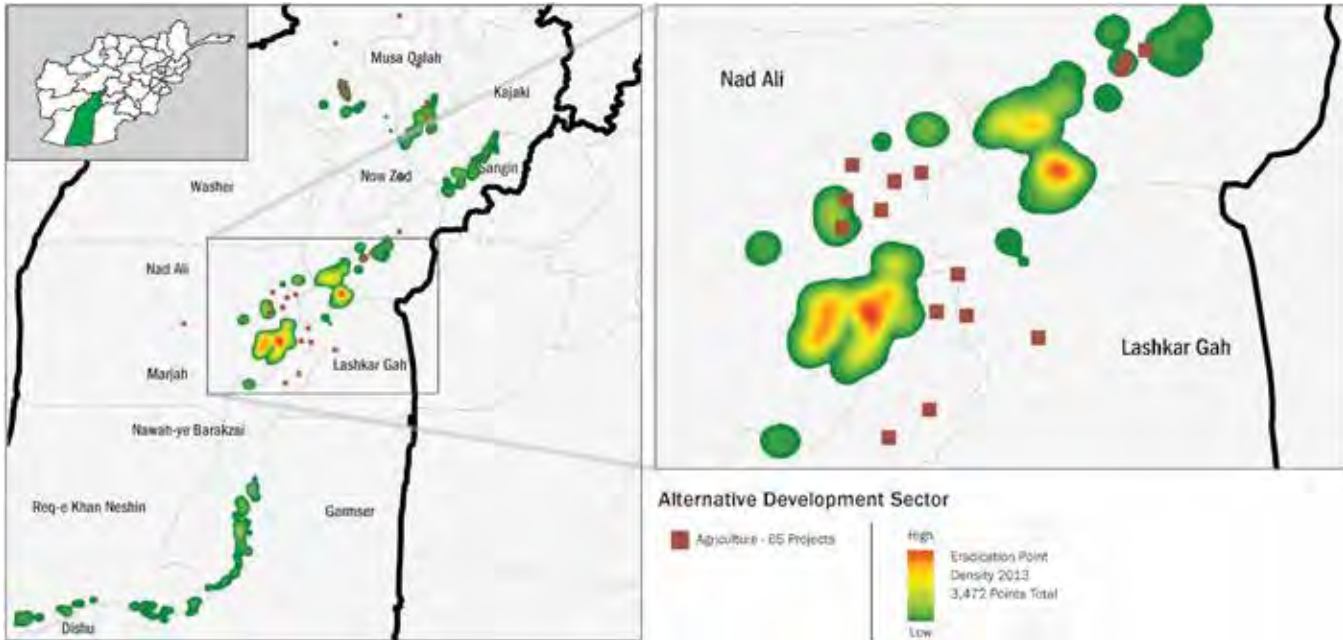
in [preceding] years.”⁹³² This reduction in development investment, which coincided with the 2014 drawdown, is supported by the GIS analysis for 2014 and 2015. (See figures A.6 and A.7 in appendix A.)

Longitudinal research has shown that the loss of the opium crop in parts of Nangarhar Province, and the resulting impact on the welfare of the population, contributed to a loss of support for the Afghan government and facilitated the penetration of insurgent groups.

Imagery from 2013 in Helmand also shows the concentration of eradication in Trek Nawa, the former desert area to the east of Marjah. (See figure 20.) This is an area that had few, if any, alternative development programs and where households were highly dependent on opium poppy for their livelihoods. In the absence of opium poppy, the households in this area were unable to fund the recurrent costs of their deep wells and were compelled to abandon agricultural production.⁹³³ A similar area with few, if any, alternative development

FIGURE 20

MAPPING OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND ERADICATION IN HELMAND PROVINCE, 2013



Note: Mapping of alternative development programs and eradication efforts in 2013 shows high levels of eradication in eastern Marjah. At the same time, there were no alternative development programs undertaken in the areas with the most intense eradication in 2013, despite the fact that households were highly dependent on opium poppy. This image is based on MDA analysis of SIGAR-provided data. The data set for alternative and rural development programs includes those programs that identified reducing poppy cultivation as a program objective. One exception is Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) South, a stabilization program which supported a large number of irrigation programs in Helmand Province; SIKA South GPS coordinates are included in this data set. Without the inclusion of SIKA South data, the number of development projects in areas with high cumulative crop destruction levels would likely be reduced.

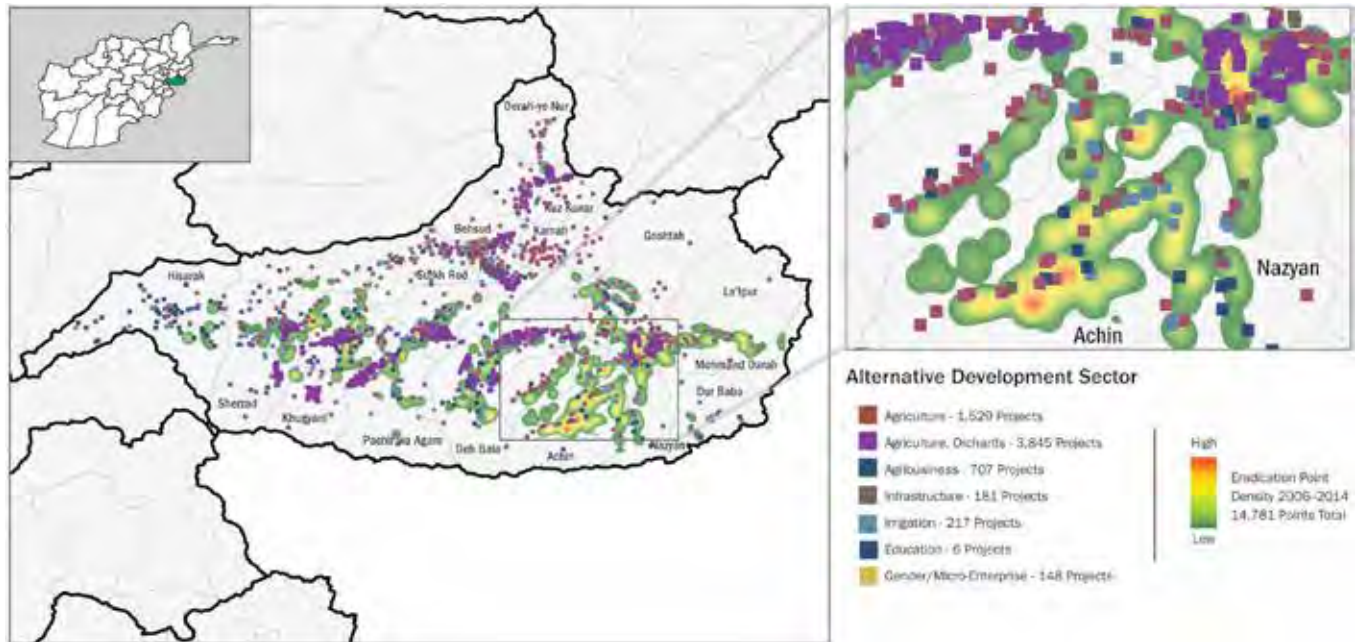
Source: SIGAR visualization of imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC. For the original imagery, see figure A.8 in appendix A.

programs was the border between Lashkar Gah and Nad Ali. (See figure A.9 in appendix A.) Evidence shows that in areas that received little alternative development assistance, farmers persisted with opium poppy cultivation, despite repeated crop destruction. (See figure A.10 in appendix A.)

The same disconnect between rural development and eradication can be seen in parts of Nangarhar Province. (See figure 21.) Here again, in a number of the areas with the highest concentration of eradication, the data indicate there was a paucity of alternative development assistance. The upper part of the district of Achin, for example, was one of the areas where eradication was most concentrated and alternative development projects were scarce. This might be appropriate if these were relatively prosperous areas where viable alternatives to poppy cultivation were widely available. However, Achin was an area where land holdings were particularly small, the availability of irrigation during the summer months constrained the production of spring and summer vegetables, and non-farm income opportunities were limited. This was also an area where the Afghan state traditionally had a limited presence.⁹³⁴ Importantly, longitudinal

FIGURE 21

MAPPING OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND ERADICATION IN NANGARHAR PROVINCE, 2005-2014



Note: Some areas where there was a high concentration of eradication, such as the southern district of Achin and the northwestern part of Khugyani, received relatively little alternative development assistance.

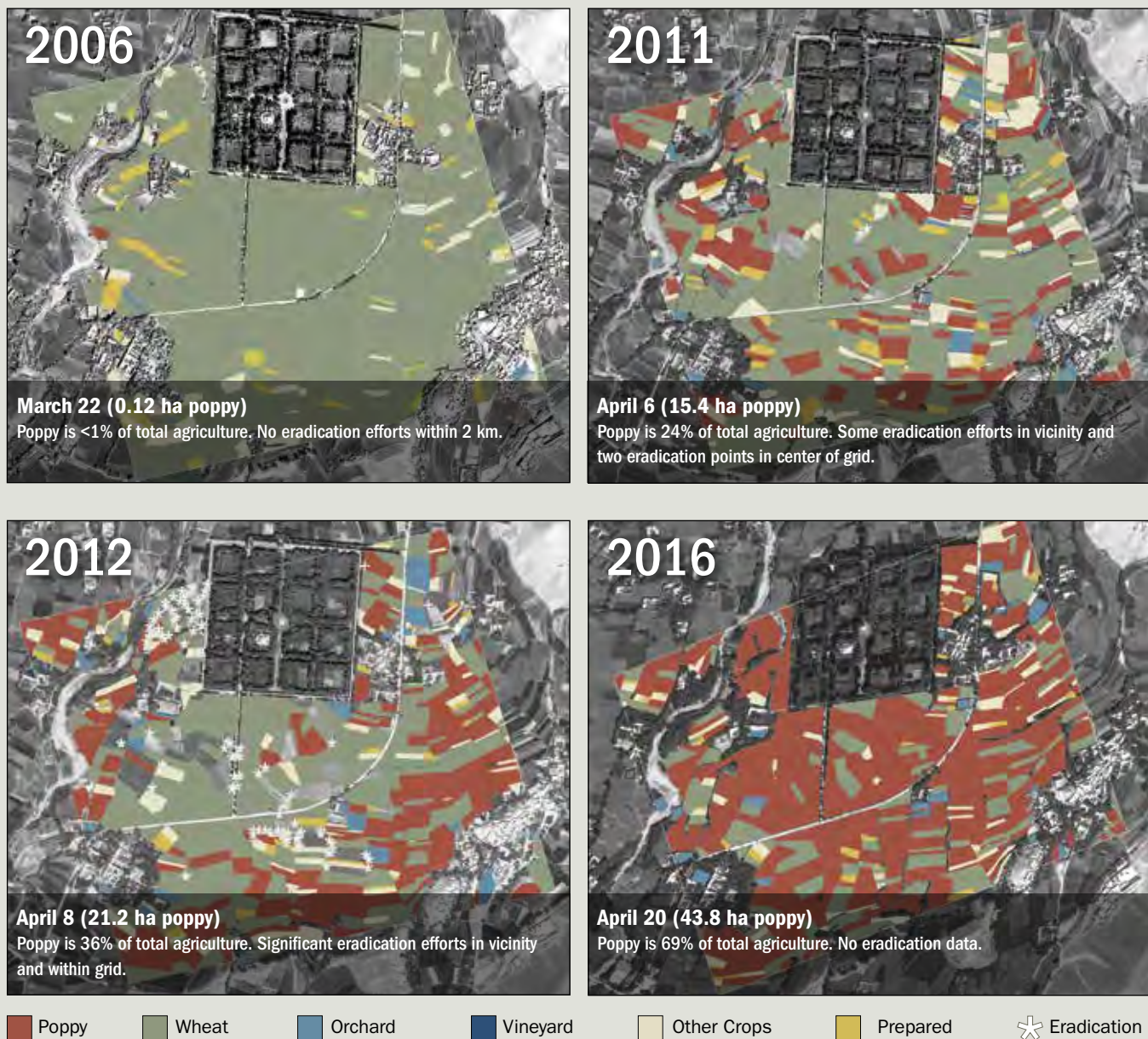
Source: SIGAR visualization of imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC. For the original imagery, see figure A.11 in appendix A.

research has shown that the loss of the opium crop in this area and its impact on the welfare of the population contributed to a loss of support for the Afghan government and facilitated the penetration of insurgent groups.⁹³⁵

In the Khugyani district in Nangarhar, there is further evidence of eradication being concentrated in areas where there was little development assistance between 2005 and 2014. This disconnect was at its most acute in the area of Mimla, where the data suggest there were very few alternative development programs, yet repeated instances of eradication over many years. Figure 22 shows how unsustainable this proved to be, with poppy cultivation rising from less than 1 percent of the total land in 2006 to 69 percent in 2016. This was also an area where eradication was associated with high levels of violence, particularly in April 2012.⁹³⁶ The areas north of the district center of Kargha also saw a high concentration of eradication, yet few signs of development assistance. While it was possible to coerce the population in Nangarhar to abandon opium poppy cultivation in the earlier years of reconstruction, it was not possible to sustain this in light of growing opposition to the government of Afghanistan and its increasingly limited presence, starting in 2010, and the withdrawal of U.S. forces after 2014.⁹³⁷ (See figure A.13 in appendix A and figure 25 on page 158.)

FIGURE 22

CROP MAPPING FOR KHUGYANI IN NANGARHAR PROVINCE, 2006–2016



Note: Crop mapping shows significant growth of poppy in areas that were targeted by eradication, with poppy cultivation rising from less than 1 percent of the total land in 2006 to 69 percent in 2016.

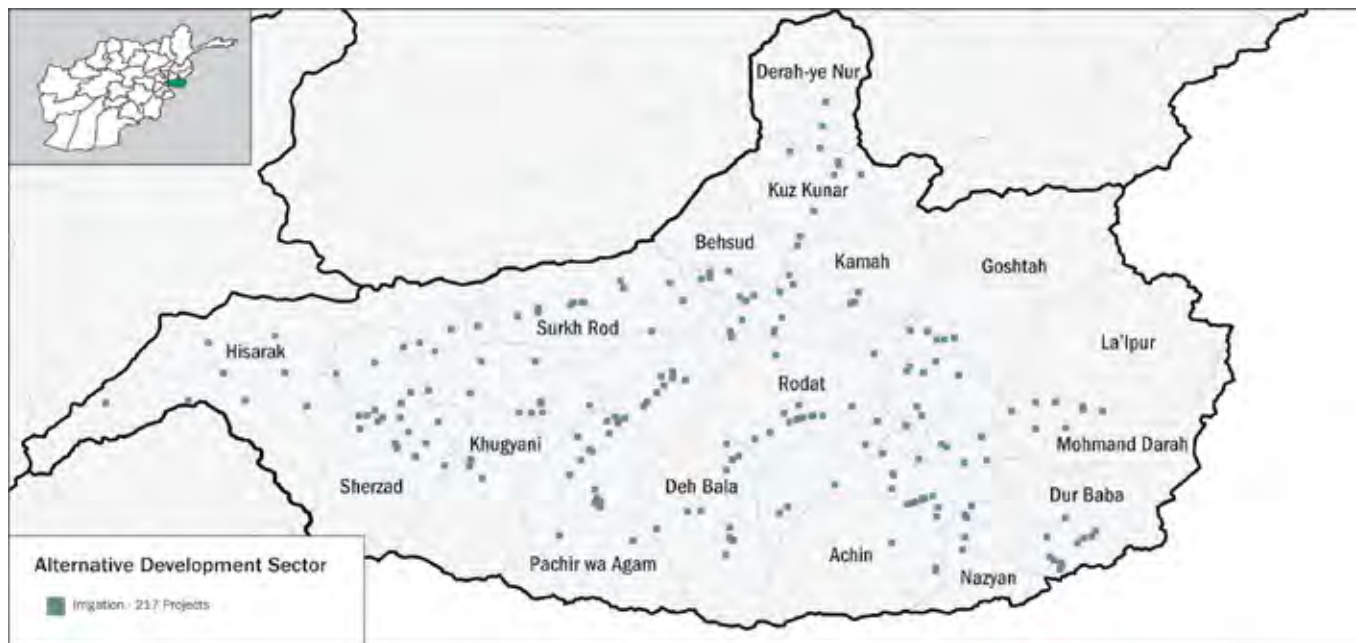
Source: SIGAR visualization of imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC. For the original imagery, see figure A.12 in appendix A.

The Distribution of Development Assistance by Sector and Geographic Area

A further point of interest with regard to the coordination of eradication and rural development is the apparent concentration of development interventions in the relatively resource-wealthy and more accessible areas around the provincial capitals of Jalalabad (Nangarhar) and Lashkar Gah (Helmand). In these areas, the population was less dependent on opium poppy for its

FIGURE 23

MAPPING OF IRRIGATION PROJECTS IN NANGARHAR PROVINCE, 2004–2016



Note: U.S. assistance supported a number of irrigation projects in areas with a history of poppy cultivation and where populations were heavily dependent on the poppy crop. Increased poppy cultivation is a significant risk when irrigation improvements are implemented in these areas.

Source: SIGAR visualization of imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC. For the original imagery, see figure A.14 in appendix A.

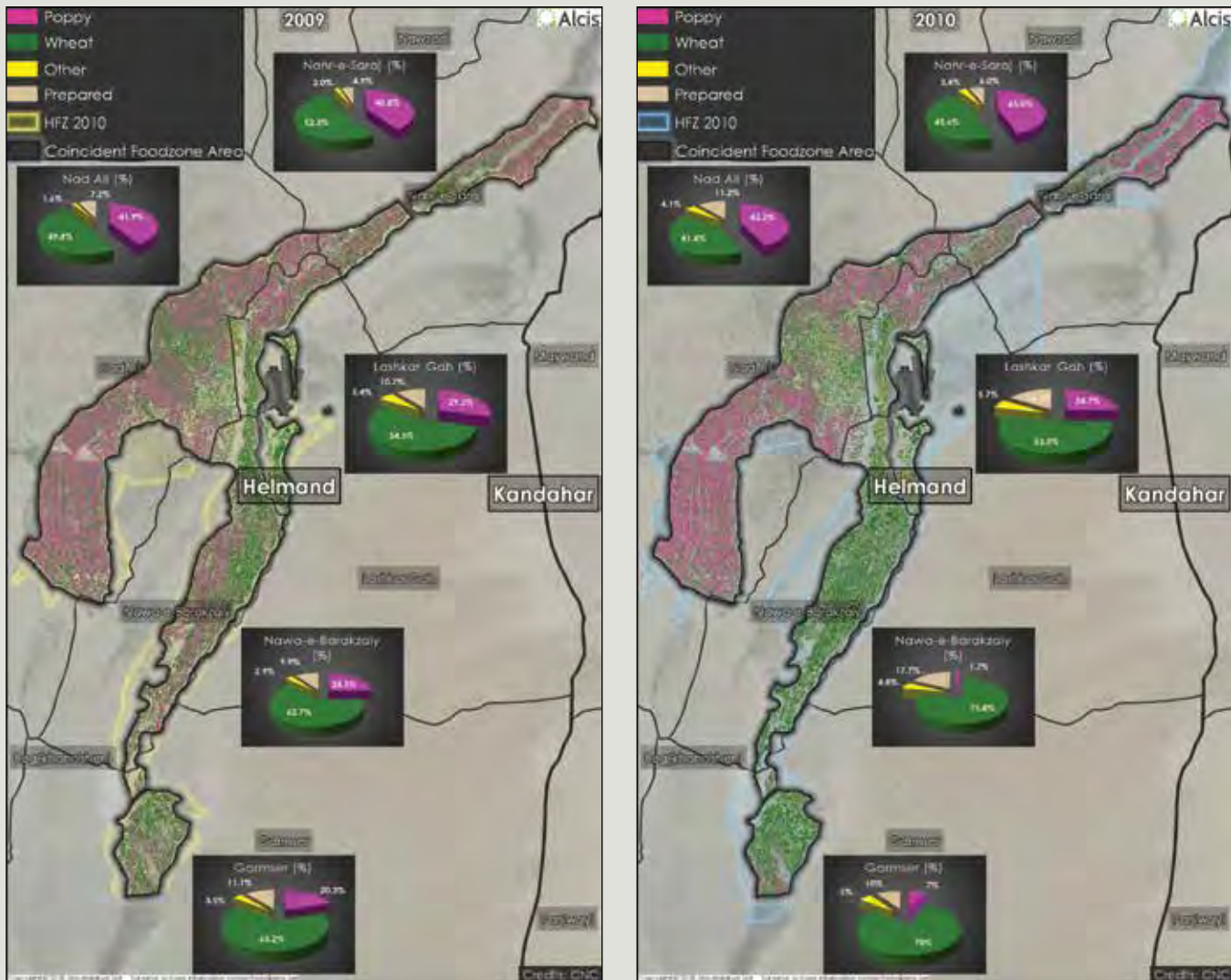
livelihood and, even prior to delivery of development assistance, showed signs of more diverse sources of income and cropping patterns.

According to data made available by USAID, the largest numbers of alternative development projects in Nangarhar were located in prime agricultural land around the city of Jalalabad, comprising lower Surkhrud and the district of Behsud. The wide range of projects in this area included orchards, agriculture, infrastructure, irrigation, and agribusinesses. This is in direct contrast to the more limited programs implemented in districts like Khugyani, Chapahar, and Rodat, where the population was more dependent on poppy for their livelihood. Here, the bulk of the investments appear to have been in orchard development, much of it concentrated in 2005 and 2007 under the auspices of ALP East. (See figures A.15 and A.16 in appendix A.) Given the geospatial analysis of IDEA-NEW and the findings of its program evaluation, as well as the very high levels of opium poppy that have returned to these areas since 2014, there is a high probability that some of these orchards have been removed and replaced with other crops, including opium poppy.⁹³⁸ (See figure 12 on page 115.)

As opposed to the high levels of eradication, low levels of development investment, and resurgent opium poppy cultivation in the southern districts of

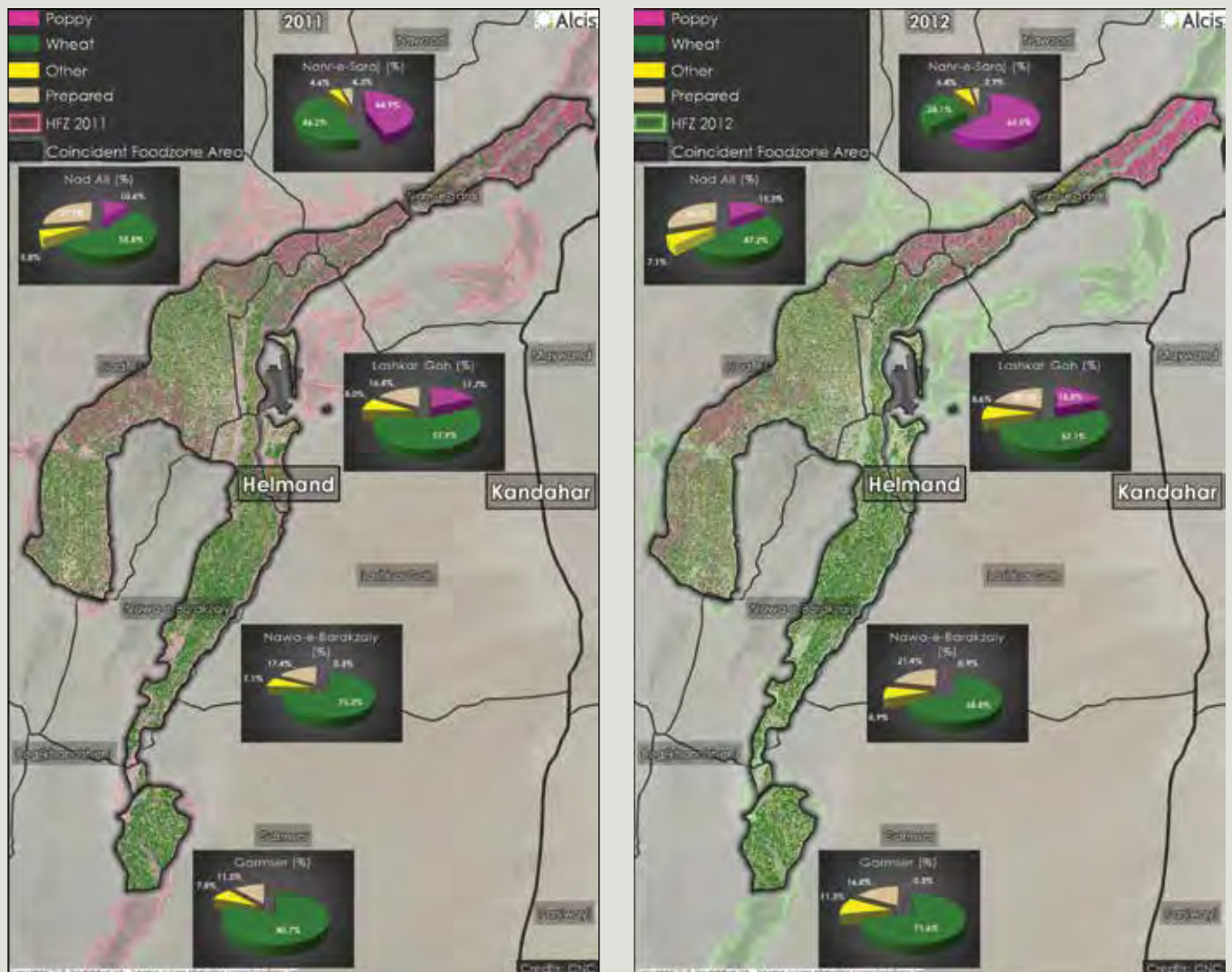
FIGURE 24

CROP MAPPING FOR HELMAND FOOD ZONE, 2009-2012



Note: Crop analysis of the HFZ indicates much of the poppy cultivated as of 2009 was replaced with wheat by 2012. The crop analysis also shows the area cultivated with spring cultivars, orchards, and vineyards (represented by "other" and "prepared"), which did not increase significantly in Helmand during this period. These crops, however, are the only viable agricultural alternatives to poppy. For errors or more information, contact info@alcis.org.

Nangarhar, we see the opposite pattern in the areas around Jalalabad. In fact, there appears to have been no eradication in lower Surkhrud, the district of Behsud, or the district of Kamah, a well-irrigated area to the east of Jalalabad. Eradication was also limited in Kuz Kunar and Darrah-ye Nur in northern Nangarhar. (See figure A.16 of appendix A.) It is worth noting that, according to UNODC, Kamah cultivated an estimated 1,898 hectares of opium poppy in 2004, while Surkhrud cultivated 1,229 hectares that same year. In 2005, Kahmah cultivated small amounts of opium poppy while Surkhrud cultivated none at all; there was no eradication reported in these districts. Kamah today shows negligible levels of opium poppy cultivation, although there has been a return to



Source: Copyright © 2018 Alcis Holdings Ltd.

opium production in parts of Surkhrud.⁹³⁹ Again, the lack of correlation between eradication and declining poppy cultivation levels suggests eradication was not the determining factor in Kamah's transition away from poppy cultivation.

Irrigation projects were additional investments, beyond orchards and some agricultural projects, in the southern districts of Nangarhar. Figure 23 shows the number of irrigation projects reported by USAID across the province. Increased poppy cultivation is a risk when investing in irrigation projects in areas where there is such a long history of and high dependency on opium poppy cultivation, particularly if the support provided to perennial horticulture is limited in

duration and scope.⁹⁴⁰ Given the locations of these projects and the findings from the evaluation of IDEA-NEW, there is a strong likelihood that many of these rehabilitated or new systems are being used to grow larger amounts of opium poppy.⁹⁴¹

The lack of correlation between eradication and declining poppy cultivation levels suggests eradication was not the determining factor in one area's transition away from poppy cultivation.

Compared to southern Nangarhar, GPS data for Helmand did not show the same degree of investment in orchards by rural development programs.⁹⁴² As discussed earlier, the focus in Helmand was on wheat, a winter crop, and a variety of spring and summer crops. (See pages 123–125.) A crop analysis of Helmand shows an increase in the cultivation of spring crops, but not on a significant scale. (See figure 24.) GIS analysis indicates that much of the land that was once cultivated with opium poppy was replaced with wheat, an annual crop, rather than multi-year, high-value horticulture. However, as previously noted, wheat is much more likely than high-value horticulture to be replaced by poppy in future years.

The Relationship between the Presence of Security Forces and Poppy Cultivation in Helmand

The Ministry of Counter Narcotics and INL touted how the HFZ reduced the levels of opium poppy cultivation in the main canal-irrigated areas of central Helmand, while UNODC hailed it as an example to be emulated by other counternarcotics efforts.⁹⁴³ These institutions argued that the combination of a strong governor, eradication, and the provision of agricultural inputs, primarily wheat seeds and fertilizer, led to opium poppy cultivation falling from 103,590 hectares in 2008 to 63,307 hectares in 2011.⁹⁴⁴ Although this argument was based on a limited analysis of the factors at play, the MCN, INL, and UNODC used it as justification for the extension of the food zone concept to other provinces, including Kandahar. A more inclusive explanation for the fall in cultivation acknowledges the wider political, economic, and security environment.⁹⁴⁵ This includes the significant rise in the value of wheat and drop in opium price that occurred between October 2007 and April 2009, the dramatic uptick in the number of Afghan and international military forces in the area, and the increase in the amount of development assistance.⁹⁴⁶

The GIS analysis commissioned by SIGAR supports the more inclusive understanding of why there was such a dramatic shift in levels of cultivation in central Helmand. For example, there was a particularly high concentration of security infrastructure in Marjah, Nad Ali, Nawa Barakzai, and Garmsir. Crop mapping shows that the expansion of these bases and the inflow of international

military forces coincided with dramatic reductions in opium poppy cultivation in the area around the security infrastructure.

This points to a more complex explanation for the fall in cultivation than a strong governor, eradication, and the provision of basic agricultural inputs. The GIS analysis supports earlier field research that argued, “It is not the act of crop destruction itself, but rather the ongoing presence of the state that has determined the level of cultivation in central Helmand.”⁹⁴⁷ In fact, farmers across central Helmand noted the prevalence of government and international forces in and around rural communities—concurring with reports of “an ISAF base on every road junction”—and how this deterred cultivation.⁹⁴⁸ Furthermore, longitudinal research found that in areas with weak governance, farmers viewed eradication as an act that could be managed through patronage and corruption, which led to increasing resentment.⁹⁴⁹

Eradication had only a limited role in the dramatic reductions in opium poppy cultivation in Marjah. There was no eradication in the district in 2009 or 2010, aside from the minimal and poorly considered Marjah Accelerated Agricultural Transition Program, which largely consisted of paying farmers to destroy a failing—and in many cases already harvested—opium crop and to plant spring cultivars.⁹⁵⁰ Despite these limited eradication efforts, poppy cultivation in Marjah fell from almost 60 percent of agricultural land to less than 5 percent between 2010 and 2011 after Operation Moshtarak and the influx of over 15,000 ANDSF and U.S. Marines. It is only from 2011 onward that more significant eradication occurred in Marjah, largely as an attempt to destroy the residual crop and the concentrated cultivation in the desert area in Trek Nawa in 2013.

Crop mapping commissioned by SIGAR also reflects the important role that the 2010 influx of foreign military forces into Nad Ali played in reducing opium poppy cultivation. For example, figures A.2 and 9 show dramatic drops in cultivation between 2010 and 2011: figure A.2 after repeated rounds of crop destruction in 2008 and 2009 with no effect, and figure 9 after no eradication within three kilometers. (See pages 102–103.) In Nangarhar, the handover and closure of security bases was associated with rising levels of cultivation. (See figure 25.)

BALANCING THE U.S. APPROACH TO COUNTERNARCOTICS: FINDING THE RIGHT FORMULA

Policymakers emphasized the need for balance in the counternarcotics effort, arguing that an effective counternarcotics strategy required each of the different strands or pillars of counternarcotics to work together. However, budgetary and geospatial data show this did not happen. Budgetary data show that in the early years of the counternarcotics effort, eradication was a higher priority than

FIGURE 25

CROP MAPPING OF POPPY NEAR SECURITY INFRASTRUCTURE, NANGARHAR PROVINCE

Shinwar, Nangarhar Province

Khugyani, Nangarhar Province

2013



2015



2016



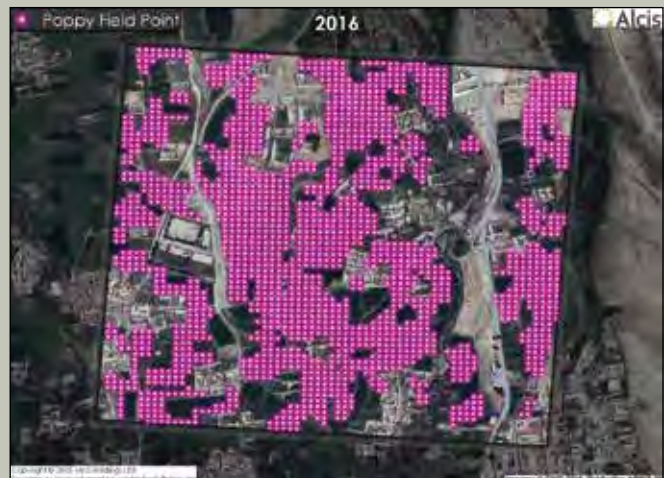
2013



2015



2016



Note: In Shinwar and Khugyani, Nangarhar Province, the closure of security bases or their handover to Afghan forces coincided with rising levels of poppy cultivation. While the above images do not show nearby security infrastructure, according to Alcis, security infrastructure existed a few hundred meters from the sites shown here. For errors or more information contact info@alcis.org.

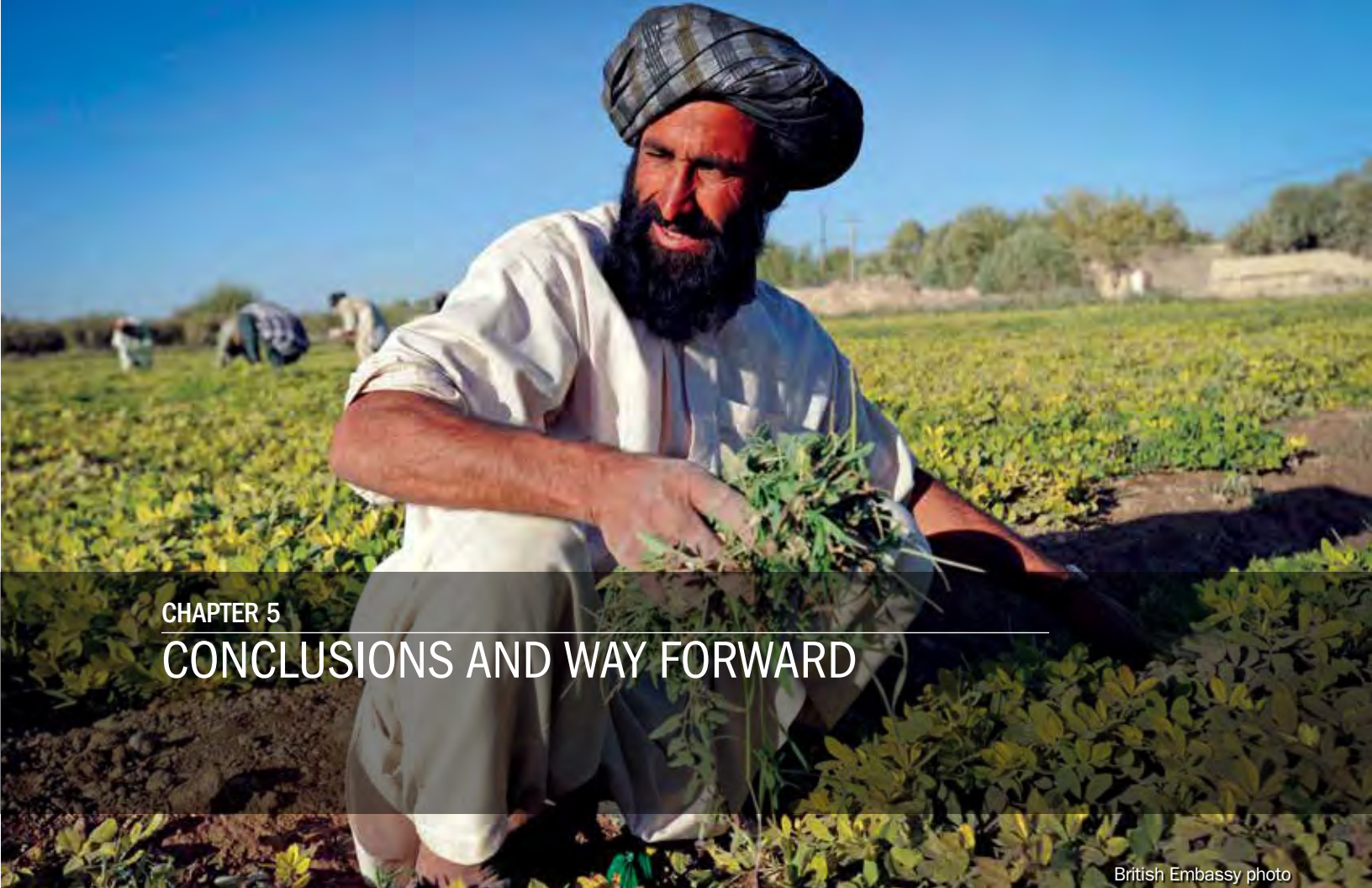
Source: Copyright © 2018 Alcis Holdings Ltd.

alternative development. This was in the initial phase of the reconstruction process, when Afghanistan was just emerging from an extended conflict and drought that had taken a particularly heavy toll on the rural population. The financial data also reveal that when this imbalance was resolved at the time of the surge, the focus of the alternative development effort was on short-term development assistance, primarily the provision of agricultural inputs. This kind of assistance could not, nor was it intended to, bring about the long-term economic change required for enduring reductions in opium poppy cultivation.

The geospatial data also reflect a divide between the policy rhetoric of a balanced counternarcotics strategy and its implementation on the ground. While many in the counternarcotics community insist eradication is just one part of an integrated counternarcotics strategy, the evidence suggests eradication has often been pursued in geographic isolation. While not exhaustive, the GIS analysis highlights the degree to which eradication was conducted in areas where other elements of the counternarcotics effort—most importantly, alternative development—were not undertaken before, during, or after crop destruction. In many of these areas, the population was highly dependent on opium poppy for its livelihood.

The lack of information regarding what types of interventions were implemented in which locations, and whether they were coordinated or appropriately sequenced, weakened both planning and implementation. It also made meaningful impact assessment of the counternarcotics effort all but impossible. Moreover, the same intervention or combination of interventions may not have had the same effect in areas with different socioeconomic, political, and environmental conditions. For example, eradication, or the threat of eradication, in relatively resource-wealthy areas where there were improvements in governance, security, and economic growth did not undermine the welfare of the population or security. The same cannot be said in more marginal areas, where eradication impoverished the population and led to political instability.

Geospatial analysis and crop mapping further show the degree to which opium poppy has been replaced by other crops. Together, they highlight how fragile the reductions in opium poppy cultivation are when the crop is replaced by wheat. As a low-value annual crop that requires little long-term investment and has limited economic value compared to specialized horticulture, wheat can easily be replaced with poppy the following year. Without a movement into high-value annual and perennial horticulture and increased non-farm income opportunities, there is a high likelihood that opium poppy will return in abundance.



CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND WAY FORWARD

British Embassy photo

From 2002 to 2017, Afghan poppy cultivation soared and estimated opium production rose to historic levels, from approximately 3,400 metric tons in 2002 to roughly 9,000 metric tons in 2017.⁹⁵¹ During this period, the U.S. government allocated approximately \$8.62 billion for counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan. This included more than \$7.28 billion for programs with a substantial counternarcotics focus and \$1.34 billion on programs that included a counternarcotics component. Our report reaches the inevitable conclusion that despite the U.S. investment, no counterdrug program undertaken by the United States, its coalition partners, or the Afghan government resulted in lasting reductions in poppy cultivation or opium production.

Counternarcotics policies and programs suffered from many of the same obstacles that dogged the wider reconstruction effort: persistent insecurity, corruption, and weak rule of law; lack of consensus among senior policymakers; changing strategies and priorities; uneven coordination among U.S. agencies, Afghan stakeholders, and coalition partners; stove-piping of issues and goals; short-term metrics poorly suited to long-term efforts; unreliable data on funding levels, program outcomes, and conditions on the ground; and a weak understanding of the local Afghan political and socioeconomic context.

Our report also indicates problems specific to the counternarcotics effort. For example, a push for aggressive eradication was based on flawed assumptions and poor data that fostered unrealistic expectations. U.S. advocacy for aerial spraying was met with such resistance by the Afghan government and coalition partners that it damaged the U.S.-Afghan bilateral relationship and undermined unity of purpose in the counternarcotics mission. Further, geospatial imagery confirms that significant eradication efforts rarely led to any sustainable reductions in cultivation. Eradication was not consistently conducted in the same geographic locations as development assistance. In addition, some alternative development programs, intended to help farmers shift away from poppy and toward licit crops, focused narrowly on crop substitution. This contributed to the displacement of people and the relocation of poppy cultivation to areas outside government control. Other alternative development programs had the inadvertent effect of enabling more poppy production, for example, via improved irrigation systems. Many development programs, even though implemented in a country where illegal opium poppy was an economic mainstay, did not adequately account for the programs' potential effect on poppy cultivation and trade.

A key strategic U.S. interest in Afghanistan was to reduce the amount of funding insurgent groups received from the opium and heroin trade. However, the primary metric for U.S. counternarcotics efforts was levels of poppy cultivation, which did not effectively assess efforts to cut off insurgent financing. In addition, there was disagreement among U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies over the nature and level of insurgent financing from drugs. As of late 2017, these financing estimates underpinned assumptions about the potential benefits of a costly air interdiction campaign that carried risks of civilian casualties. Without a clear understanding of how insurgents benefit from and participate in the narcotics trade, particularly at local levels, it is difficult to measure the effectiveness and impact of this campaign.

Despite these challenges, two important positive stories emerge from counternarcotics efforts since 2002. First, although poppy cultivation and production have risen dramatically since 2002, some provinces and districts have seen temporary reductions in poppy cultivation. In these limited areas, better security and economic conditions allowed some Afghans to diversify their livelihoods away from opium poppy. These successes, even if short-lived, suggest U.S. agencies should consider a counternarcotics strategy that prioritizes activities in areas that are more secure, have greater state presence, and offer more diverse livelihood opportunities.

Second, the establishment of well-trained, capable Afghan counterdrug institutions, particularly the National Interdiction Unit, Technical Investigative Unit, Sensitive Investigative Unit, Special Mission Wing, and Counter Narcotics

Justice Center was another positive outcome. These units are regarded as some of the most trustworthy and proficient in the country. Their effectiveness in combating the drug trade has been stymied by the lack of a competent, non-corrupt judicial system or sufficient Afghan political will to support these units, and by the absence of an extradition treaty between the United States and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the fact that these entities have often been redirected to counterterrorism and other security objectives is evidence of their value to both the Afghan and U.S. governments. A remaining challenge is to determine whether the United States should continue to invest in these specialized counterdrug units when the wider security conditions and judicial infrastructure do not allow them to remain trained and effective in their counterdrug mission.

Given the difficult security and economic environment in Afghanistan today, particularly in many of the largest opium-producing regions, the Afghan drug trade will likely persist for decades. These challenges, along with political difficulties, corruption, and limited rule of law that plagued the reconstruction effort also affected the counterdrug effort. As one U.S. official who led counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan noted:

Unless and until Afghanistan achieves a significant degree of security, is able to extend the rule of law to its 34 provinces, and is able to eliminate the government kleptocracy and take meaningful action against corruption in general, there will be no possibility of enacting strategies and programs to effectively fight narcotics and drug cultivation and production in Afghanistan for any mid-term or long-term success.⁹⁵²

This makes it critical that U.S. policymakers focus limited resources on those counternarcotics programs that directly contribute to wider U.S. strategic goals. The insights from this report point to several important steps that can improve ongoing U.S. counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan, as well as inform U.S. efforts in other major drug-producing countries. These findings, lessons, and recommendations are discussed in the following section.

FINDINGS

Our study of the U.S. experience with counternarcotics in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2017 identified the following 13 key findings:

- 1. No counterdrug program undertaken by the United States, its coalition partners, or the Afghan government resulted in lasting reductions in poppy cultivation or opium production.**

Over the course of the reconstruction effort to date, poppy cultivation rose more than 340 percent, from roughly 74,000 hectares in 2002 to an estimated 328,000 hectares in 2017. Potential opium production increased

by approximately 164 percent, from 3,400 metric tons to 9,000 metric tons over the same period.⁹⁵³ Although localized poppy crop reductions occurred in some areas, such as the Helmand Food Zone and Nangarhar Province, these reductions were either temporary or offset by increases in cultivation elsewhere.

The overall growth of poppy cultivation and opium production was, in part, due to failures in the strategy, design, and implementation of counternarcotics efforts, as this report detailed. It was also, however, a function of problems much larger than counterdrug programs themselves—namely, widespread insecurity, lack of licit economic opportunities, and limited government presence in areas where drug production was concentrated.

2. Without a stable security environment, there was little possibility of effectively curtailing poppy cultivation and drug production in Afghanistan.

As of January 2018, approximately 14.5 percent of districts in Afghanistan were under insurgent control or influence, and 29.2 percent of districts were contested—controlled by neither the Afghan government nor the insurgency.⁹⁵⁴ These areas include many of the districts where opium poppy cultivation is most concentrated. Violence disrupted economic activity by preventing access to markets and destroying infrastructure that could otherwise help people pursue livelihoods in the licit economy. Persistent insecurity also precluded effective law enforcement and empowered criminal actors. Furthermore, drug-control efforts in insecure areas often met with significant resistance and failed to deliver lasting results. For example, in 2007 and 2008, eradication forces—including U.S. contractors—encountered significant armed resistance and were subject to frequent attacks while in the field.⁹⁵⁵ Such violence limited both the efficacy and deterrent effect of crop destruction efforts.

Journalist Steve Coll described the downward spiral of insecurity and opium production:

Perhaps it was not that opium caused war. Perhaps it was war that caused opium. . . . Since the 1980s, there had been a self-reinforcing cycle in the opium belt: War created desperation, which made opium attractive for poor farmers, which created profits for warlords, who then used those resources to fight for greater wealth and power, which created more desperation for poor farmers.⁹⁵⁶

Without a stable security environment, lasting reductions in drug-crop cultivation and drug production could not be achieved. Until this condition

is met, poppy cultivation and opium production are likely to persist at high levels in Afghanistan.

3. The U.S. government failed to develop and implement counternarcotics strategies that outlined or effectively directed U.S. agencies toward shared goals.

The State Department produced four counternarcotics strategies between 2005 and 2012 that relied on coordinated efforts by State, DOD, USAID, and DEA. However, State, particularly INL, which often led strategy design, lacked the ability to direct other agencies to provide the inputs called for in the strategies. U.S. counternarcotics strategies also failed to establish consensus on goals or develop the coordinating mechanisms necessary for an effective interagency effort.

The strategies called for a multi-agency, multi-pronged approach, but this was not delivered or implemented on the ground. Strategies also failed to recognize the constraints on achieving counternarcotics goals. They set forth counterdrug objectives that were outside the ability of U.S. counternarcotics institutions to achieve, did not prioritize counterdrug activities that supported wider U.S. strategic goals, and did not fully account for impacts on other reconstruction goals.

4. Eradication and development assistance efforts were not sufficiently coordinated or consistently implemented in the same geographic locations.

U.S. counternarcotics strategies repeatedly advocated a balance of different counterdrug interventions, particularly eradication and alternative development. According to the 2007 U.S. counternarcotics strategy, “Coercive measures, such as eradication, must be combined with both short- and long-term economic incentives in order to alter the risk/reward calculus of rural households to be in favor of licit crop cultivation.”⁹⁵⁷

Despite U.S. policymakers’ emphasis on the need for such balance, there is limited evidence of a coordinated, balanced implementation effort on the ground—or of monitoring and evaluation to ensure communities in poppy-growing areas experienced both the deterrent of crop destruction and the ameliorating effects of development aid.

Geographic Information System mapping of U.S.-funded development projects shows that many areas that experienced significant, repeated eradication efforts were both highly dependent on poppy as a livelihood

and received relatively little development assistance. This frequent failure to collocate eradication and development aid reduced the chances of successful transitions away from poppy dependence and sustainable reductions in poppy cultivation.

5. Counternarcotics goals were often not incorporated into larger security and development strategies, which hindered the achievement of those goals and the wider reconstruction effort.

Beginning with the G8 Security Sector Reform process that designated the UK as the lead nation for counternarcotics in 2002, the Afghan drug trade was generally treated as a separate concern within the reconstruction effort. Counternarcotics objectives were poorly integrated into the design and implementation of donors' development programs and Afghan national development plans, and were not sufficiently considered within the wider context of U.S. security, development, and governance strategies. This improved somewhat from roughly 2009 to 2012, when agencies took steps to nest counternarcotics objectives within broader counter-threat finance and police and judicial reform efforts.

Counternarcotics goals also became a silo on the Afghan government side, where those goals were not integrated into national development plans or various ministries' responsibilities. For example, the Ministry of Counter Narcotics was charged with coordinating counterdrug activities, but lacked the political capital, authority, and institutional capacity to effectively undertake a coordinating role. Nevertheless, considerable funding was allocated to MCN, while other ministries that implemented policies and programs in areas where poppy was grown, such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, did not receive sufficient support for counternarcotics-related work.⁹⁵⁸ In addition, where counternarcotics capacity was built within capable, specialized Afghan counterdrug units, this capacity was often diverted for higher-priority security and counterterrorism missions.

6. Counternarcotics efforts were not a consistent priority at the most senior levels of the U.S. or Afghan government.

Few U.S. ambassadors or military commanders in Afghanistan viewed counternarcotics as a priority line of effort. Some senior leaders, including officials within DOD and USAID, opposed increased engagement on the issue because they viewed certain counterdrug programs as detrimental to their mission. In the absence of sustained attention and commitment to narcotics-related issues at senior levels, there was little agreement across the U.S.

government on how counternarcotics goals should be pursued, prioritized, or integrated within the larger framework of counterterrorism, state building, and counterinsurgency. Lower-ranking officials and sub-agencies, such as INL, DEA, and OSD's Office of Counternarcotics and Global Threats, were unable to lead or implement successful, coordinated counterdrug strategies.

Similarly, the Afghan government, facing numerous critical challenges, did not bring consistent leadership to counternarcotics efforts. According to Mohammed Ehsan Zia, the former Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development, one of the main problems contributing to the failure of counternarcotics efforts was “lack of unity of purpose” within the Afghan government. As he described, “Due to lack of political will on the part of President Karzai, there was no government vision for counternarcotics. The Ministry of Finance and other technical ministries never subscribed to the MCN objectives.”⁹⁵⁹

7. Eradication efforts, including compensated eradication, had no lasting impact on poppy cultivation or national-level drug production.

Even at its highest estimated levels, eradication never reached more than 10 percent of the poppy cultivated in Afghanistan. The emphasis on eradication was based on weak data and misguided assumptions. For example, the assertion that it was necessary to destroy 25 percent of the standing poppy crop each year to deter future planting—also known as credible threat—was arbitrary, unproven, and counterproductive. The concept of credible threat inflated policymakers' expectations of what was possible, bolstered arguments for aerial eradication, and detracted from efforts to target eradication in areas with greater livelihood opportunities.

The push for eradication often reflected a single-minded focus on simply reducing cultivation levels in the short term. Eradication efforts failed to mitigate the adverse impact of crop destruction on rural communities, and officials did not fully appreciate the risk of alienating those communities. Ground-based eradication efforts were plagued by corruption, over-reporting, inconsistency in targeting, and unrealistic expectations of the hectareage that could be destroyed.

Further, eradication efforts were often undertaken without assessing whether viable alternative livelihood options existed for affected farmers. Without alternative livelihoods, there was little chance crop destruction would lead to sustained reductions in poppy cultivation. For Governor-Led Eradication, the UK identified target areas where farmers had greater economic opportunity and alternative livelihood options. For a period of about four years, INL agreed to only make payments to governors for

eradication conducted in these target areas. But for the majority of the years GLE was in place, INL compensated governors regardless of whether the destroyed crop was in the target area, undermining attempts to promote a targeted campaign.

8. The failed U.S. push for aerial spraying damaged the U.S.-Afghan relationship and unity of effort in the coalition's counterdrug mission.

The INL-led push for aerial eradication was opposed by parts of the U.S. government, but gained new life in 2007 when the Bush administration advocated for aerial spraying. Yet, President Karzai and the majority of key actors within the Afghan and British governments remained staunchly opposed. Aggressive U.S. advocacy for aerial eradication contributed to the lack of a unified counterdrug effort by donors and Afghans. At times, that advocacy drove a wedge in the U.S.-Afghan relationship, damaging cooperation on other fronts. As journalist Steve Coll recounted, “The prolonged stalemate over Plan Afghanistan during 2007 wasted American money and effort. It also opened a breach of trust between Hamid Karzai and the United States—an early episode of mutual suspicion in what would soon become a cascade.”⁹⁶⁰

9. Alternative development programs were too short-term and often relied on the simple substitution of other crops for poppy. These programs did not bring about lasting reductions in opium poppy cultivation and sometimes even contributed to increased poppy production.

Alternative development programming was often based on a poor understanding of why poppy was grown and failed to address the multiple economic roles played by poppy in rural Afghanistan. USAID's alternative development programs overemphasized crop substitution and did not devote sufficient resources to creating off-farm and non-agricultural income opportunities for rural populations.

Furthermore, USAID underestimated the amount of time and investment required to establish crops that could compete with poppy. For example, perennial crops—one of the only viable agricultural alternatives to poppy cultivation—take four to five years to reach their full production potential, whereas most alternative development projects lasted an average of three and one-half years.

In addition, U.S. agencies and implementing partners often failed to consider and mitigate the risk that alternative development programs

could contribute to increased poppy cultivation and drug production. Consequently, in some areas, alternative development programs inadvertently enabled more poppy production, for example, by improving irrigation systems that were then used for poppy cultivation.

10. In limited areas with improved security and greater economic opportunities, some Afghans were able to diversify their livelihoods away from opium poppy. However, local reductions in poppy cultivation were almost always short-lived or offset by increases elsewhere.

Where improvements in security were combined with the development of legal livelihood options, localized poppy crop reductions were possible. Reductions were achieved within the Helmand Food Zone and in Nangarhar Province. In Helmand, the inflow of international military forces, coupled with significant development investments, primarily the provision of wheat seed and fertilizer, coincided with dramatic reductions in opium poppy cultivation.

Those reductions, however, were either temporary or offset by increases in other areas. In Nangarhar, provincial leaders were able to enforce the ban on opium poppy cultivation through the promise of development assistance, the threat of military action against villages that did not comply with the ban, and fragile political bargains with rural elites. Nevertheless, it was not possible to sustain these reductions in light of growing opposition to the government of Afghanistan and the withdrawal of U.S. forces after 2014.

11. U.S. support helped Afghan counterdrug units develop promising capacity and become trusted partners. However, these units did not have a strategic impact on the drug trade due to insecurity, corruption and poor capacity within the criminal justice system, and lack of high-level support from the Afghan government.

The Afghan National Interdiction Unit, Technical Investigative Unit, and Sensitive Investigative Unit are regarded as some of the most trustworthy, proficient police units in the country. SIU and TIU teams, for example, investigated significant drug trafficking organizations. They worked closely with DEA officials to monitor authorized wiretaps, as well as to gather and analyze sensitive intelligence on trafficking networks.⁹⁶¹

However, these units have not yielded large numbers of high-value target arrests or, according to recent U.S. military estimates, significantly reduced insurgency funding from the drug trade. The work of these units was repeatedly stymied by pervasive political interference and corruption in

the police and judicial system as a whole. Similarly, while the Counter Narcotics Justice Center was considered the least corrupt judicial entity in Afghanistan, political influence sometimes prevented convictions of senior drug traffickers and, if convictions were secured, even aided in their release.

In addition, Afghan counterdrug units were sometimes undercut by the conflicting relationships and approaches U.S. agencies took toward certain high-value targets. For example, despite Haji Juma Khan's known drug-trafficking activities, Khan reportedly supplied information to and received payments from the CIA, DEA, and U.S. military. Yet, the U.S. government was also engaged in building a case against Khan, and he was eventually transferred to the United States for prosecution.⁹⁶²

12. Poor-quality estimates of poppy cultivation levels, eradication numbers, and drug money going to the insurgency made it more difficult for policymakers to accurately assess the problem and determine effective policy responses.

For senior U.S. policymakers, levels of poppy cultivation came to not only describe the scale of the drug problem in Afghanistan, but also the progress toward counternarcotics and state-building objectives at the national and provincial level. Yet, in early years, estimates by the UN and CIA's Crime and Narcotics Center—the two credible sources of data on cultivation—diverged significantly, complicating policymakers' task of assessing the problem. These discrepancies reflected CNC's better methodology and use of imagery. A positive development was that from 2005 on, methodologies for estimating cultivation at the national level were improved. However, challenges persisted at the provincial level.

Poppy eradication figures were similarly problematic. Many eradication forces self-reported the hectareage of crops destroyed, and their numbers were later found to be grossly exaggerated. This contributed to inflated expectations of the scale of eradication that could be accomplished. Those inflated expectations, in turn, led some policymakers to view eradication as a potential panacea and to pursue eradication efforts, despite serious obstacles to their effectiveness.

There was also little consistency and in-depth reporting on the estimates of drug trade revenues flowing to the Taliban and other insurgent groups. Internal intelligence community debates on these estimates were often not reflected in policy debates, resulting in policymakers attaching more certainty to these estimates than was merited.

The ongoing U.S. and Afghan air interdiction campaign against opium-processing facilities is underpinned by the assumption that strikes against drug labs will prevent a certain amount of revenue from going to the Taliban—and those revenue losses will put added pressure on the Taliban to come to the negotiating table. If the calculation of destroyed revenues is markedly overestimated, as we believe to be the case and show in this report, policymakers are dealing with inaccurate information to judge the degree of harm inflicted on Taliban finances.

13. The counternarcotics performance metrics used in Afghanistan, particularly the overemphasis on annual estimates of poppy cultivation and eradication, contributed to ineffective policy decisions.

For U.S. policymakers, estimated levels of poppy cultivation served as the primary proxy indicator of the success or failure of counternarcotics efforts. The pressure to demonstrate progress, as measured by cultivation levels, was one factor that led to the push for increased eradication and cultivation bans. This overemphasis on cultivation estimates crowded out other indicators—such as crop diversification, income levels, and the number of people dependent on the drug trade for their livelihood—that could have given policymakers a more complete, nuanced picture of narcotics-related challenges in Afghanistan.

The failure to develop a comprehensive set of indicators meant policymakers lacked accurate data on which interventions worked and which ones failed. Furthermore, the overwhelming focus on cultivation as a performance metric did not align well with the U.S. strategic interest in cutting off insurgent groups' funding from the drug trade.

LESSONS

This section distills lessons from the U.S. experience with counternarcotics programs and policies during the Afghanistan reconstruction effort to date. Some lessons are specific to Afghanistan and should be used to reevaluate and improve ongoing counternarcotics work there. All lessons are intended to inform and strengthen U.S. counterdrug policies and programs more generally.

However, this report does not advocate the universal application of specific counterdrug interventions based on our experience in Afghanistan. As the report has demonstrated, taking practices used in one country or region and assuming they would work elsewhere has often been counterproductive. Instead, we identify key factors that influence the success or failure of counterdrug efforts, as well as principles policymakers should apply when making decisions.

In major drug-producing and transit countries that receive significant levels of U.S. foreign assistance:

- 1. A whole-of-government U.S. counternarcotics strategy should be developed to coordinate various agencies around shared, long-term goals.**

In a major drug-producing country, illicit drug crops may form a backbone of the economy. This complicates U.S. and host-nation efforts to combat the drug trade without further impoverishing or alienating rural populations. Moreover, drug-related corruption may touch many parts of the host-nation government, from local to national levels. This means U.S. security, development, and governance efforts must account for how the drug trade can impact those efforts, as well as how those efforts may impact the drug trade.

Given the pervasive and cross-cutting effects of illicit narcotics, combating the drug trade inherently requires a multi-sector, interagency approach. Counternarcotics activities should occur across several complementary lines of effort, including security sector assistance, development, governance, and rule of law. At the same time, political will is required to effectively undertake a coordinated counternarcotics effort.

A cohesive strategy is needed to coordinate and prioritize these activities, and ensure they are working in support of one another. In addition, activities should center around two long-term, generational goals: to help rural communities sustainably shift away from drug-crop cultivation and toward licit livelihoods, and to strengthen host government institutions to resist and prosecute drug-related corruption and crime. U.S. counternarcotics efforts toward these goals should be designed to endure for the long term. In addition, U.S. objectives should reflect reasonable expectations for progress that can be made in the nearer term.

While a counternarcotics strategy can be helpful in directing various agencies toward common goals, the existence of a strategy does not in itself guarantee effective implementation. What matters, rather, is that the strategy sets out actionable steps that diverse stakeholders—within State, USAID, DOD, Justice, DEA, Treasury, and other agencies—can take to mitigate the negative effects of the drug trade on U.S. interests and ensure U.S. activities do not inadvertently facilitate or worsen narcotics-related threats.

2. The U.S. ambassador, in coordination with the U.S. military commander in country, should have responsibility for directing agencies to implement the counternarcotics strategy.

Our analysis of the U.S. experience in Afghanistan indicates that only the ambassador, as chief of mission, has sufficient authority over all agencies in country to direct those agencies toward shared counternarcotics goals. With visibility and authority over all U.S. policies and programs in a given country, the ambassador is also best placed to determine what level of counterdrug effort is appropriate and what the priorities of that effort should be. Counternarcotics strategies rely on inputs from a number of U.S. agencies. For the best chance of successful implementation, a strategy requires sustained, high-level ownership—one person holding various agencies to account for coordination and learning from mistakes. In Afghanistan, the designation of a Kabul-based “drug czar” to lead counternarcotics efforts did not result in effective coordination or implementation, in part because the designee lacked the authority or ability to direct multiple U.S. agencies.

Unity of effort is critical to prevent duplicative and wasteful programs. Unless the ambassador and U.S. military commander agree on counternarcotics goals, and coordinate efforts and resources to achieve these goals, their efforts are likely to be disjointed and ineffective. A unified effort is also important to enable U.S. agencies to coordinate with the host-nation government and other donors. If the ambassador is unable to dedicate sufficient attention to lead the implementation of a counternarcotics strategy, the United States should reconsider funding and administering a large-scale counterdrug effort

3. The goals of a U.S. counternarcotics strategy should be aligned with and integrated into the larger security, development, and governance objectives of the United States and the host nation.

In Afghanistan, the counterdrug effort was often justified as a means to weaken insurgent groups and strengthen the Afghan government. However, counternarcotics programs were commonly implemented and assessed independent of these strategic goals. This led to programs that were at times out of sync with U.S. objectives or unrealistic given the security situation in the country.

Given the reality that counternarcotics goals are rarely the United States’ top priority in any one country, counternarcotics programs should aim to advance larger U.S. security and governance goals. This integration should help ensure that U.S. agencies maintain their support for

counternarcotics programs over many years and thereby avoid disjointed and ineffective implementation.

For example, applying only a counternarcotics lens (i.e., seeking to stem the drug trade), investigating and arresting any illicit drug trafficker would appear to be as worthwhile as investigating and arresting traffickers connected to an insurgency or corrupt government officials engaged in the drug trade. But if the policy guidance is that counternarcotics activities should support larger U.S. security and governance goals, then the insurgency-connected trafficker and corrupt official become higher-priority targets.

Similarly, systematically incorporating a counternarcotics perspective into all development programming would better equip agencies and implementing partners to recognize the potential counternarcotics impacts of their interventions. It would also promote steps to ensure projects do not inadvertently facilitate poppy production.

4. U.S. counternarcotics strategies and programs should be based on a robust understanding of how the illicit drug economy functions and how it relates to local socioeconomic and political conditions.

Policymakers and planners must consider local context when designing counterdrug programs and evaluating their contribution to the overall reconstruction effect. In Afghanistan, policymakers sometimes assumed that a counterdrug intervention—whether eradication, rural development, or interdiction—would have the same effect in different locations, regardless of local conditions. However, this was often not the case. For example, the destruction of drug crops in a district with few viable alternatives and where insurgent groups hold sway will likely lead to different outcomes than eradication in areas under government control. Similarly, investments in rural development, such as irrigation, might support agricultural diversification in an area where there are opportunities to produce and sell legal crops, while in other areas they may inadvertently support increased opium production. The failure to accurately evaluate the rural Afghan economy often led to overly simplistic crop replacement programs that failed to fill the economic gap left by decreased opium production or yield lasting poppy reductions.

Further, drug production often thrives in areas of limited state presence. Counternarcotics programs should account for that fact and be designed to bolster state influence rather than deliver short-term, unsustainable reductions in drug production.

- 5. To implement a balanced counternarcotics strategy, development programs and eradication should be collocated on the ground. In addition, tracking funding by strategy component is critical for effective oversight and evaluation of counternarcotics efforts.**

U.S. counternarcotics strategies for Afghanistan articulated a balance of different counterdrug programs, but lacked the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms necessary to ensure that balance was achieved on the ground. Without consistent monitoring of program location, including the kind of information available through GIS imagery, policymakers are unable to assess whether complementary interventions are being implemented in the same areas. More broadly, they are unable to assess which programs or combination of programs deliver the best outcomes over time.

Similarly, the failure to track expenditures by strategy pillar made it difficult to assess whether the resource allocations matched strategic priorities. An accurate accounting of expenditures by the strategy component they support provides a valuable tool for both Congress and executive branch agencies to evaluate and adjust funding in subsequent years.

Effective monitoring of resource allocation and physical program location can help ensure implementation matches strategic intent and prevent a disjointed counternarcotics effort.

- 6. Development assistance programs should include measures to mitigate the risk of programs inadvertently contributing to drug production and trafficking.**

Prior to final approval of project proposals, development programs are typically required to address a number of cross-cutting issues, including human rights, poverty alleviation, gender, and the environment. In a country like Afghanistan, where the economy is highly dependent on the production and trade of illicit drugs and where the population is increasingly affected by problem drug use, this list of cross-cutting issues should include narcotics. Program designers need to consider both the intended and unintended development and counternarcotics outcomes.

For example, the provision of irrigation and agricultural inputs, such as fertilizer, and the increase in the yield of staples, such as wheat, can increase poppy cultivation if not complemented by other interventions that support farmers in diversifying their livelihoods. In those cases where interventions might lead to an increase in the production and trade of opiates, mitigating actions must be pursued.

- 7. Development assistance programs that aim to incentivize a shift away from illicit drug production should be sustained for more than five years, support farmers' household income diversification, and consider the needs of different socioeconomic groups.**

Development programs should be designed to help farmers achieve a mix of income sources rather than attempting to replace poppy with another crop. Enduring reductions in drug-crop cultivation are best supported by diversifying farmers' income sources, including increased high-value horticultural crops, reductions in dependence on staples like wheat, and non-farm income. Effective development programs must also account for all parts of the rural population that depend on drug production, not just landowners. Interventions that target landowners but ignore the land-poor can impoverish the rural population, leading to the relocation of drug-crop production and fueling instability, as was the case with the Helmand Food Zone.

Furthermore, these interventions must be sustained for more than five years. Perennial crops take four to five years to reach their full production potential. To help communities permanently transition away from drug-crop cultivation, therefore, development assistance programs should be sustained and conduct monitoring and evaluation at least over a period of five years.

- 8. Eradication can be an effective deterrent to drug-crop cultivation when undertaken in areas where viable alternative livelihoods to drug-crop cultivation exist and the state has an enduring presence.**

As with rural development programs, eradication efforts must account for variations in the socioeconomic and political realities on the ground. Geospatial analysis shows that poppy crop destruction in Afghanistan failed to deliver lasting reductions in cultivation in areas where viable economic alternatives did not exist. Eradication undermined economic growth and support for the Afghan government when conducted in contested areas where the Afghan state had limited influence and control.

Practitioners must take a more holistic and long-term approach to assessing the effects of eradication that considers effects on other crops cultivated, economic growth, stability, and governance over the long term. When eradication is conducted in areas firmly controlled by the government and combined with alternative livelihood sources that provide sufficient replacement income, it can be an effective deterrent to drug-crop cultivation.

9. The U.S. government should strive to reach consensus with the host nation and other partner countries on counternarcotics goals and measures. Lack of consensus can alienate host and partner governments and preclude a cohesive counternarcotics effort.

A push for counterdrug programs that are not widely supported—or are opposed outright—by the host-nation government or coalition partners can undermine the unity of the counternarcotics effort, damage bilateral relationships, and complicate the pursuit of U.S. objectives on other fronts. Efforts to convince the host-nation government and others to support a polarizing program can occupy time and resources that are better directed toward broadly supported counternarcotics initiatives, such as bolstering interdiction and anticorruption efforts.

An important caveat is that the host-nation government in a major drug-producing or transit country is likely to be influenced by powerful political and economic elites who are themselves invested in the drug trade. In cases where the host-nation government obstructs a critical investigation and prosecution of a high-profile figure involved in the drug trade, U.S. officials should use available tools and leverage to try to persuade the government to support the law enforcement effort.

10. Specialized counterdrug units and targeted law enforcement interdiction efforts have limited impact without a competent judicial system or extradition agreements.

The National Interdiction Unit, Sensitive Investigative Unit, and Special Mission Wing are examples of the highly capable counterdrug law enforcement units that can be stood up in places like Afghanistan. However, these units were built at significant cost to the U.S. government and cannot be fully effective without more mature, non-corrupt judicial and law enforcement institutions in place. If progress in these larger institutions is not commensurate, and if counterdrug units do not have the political support and legal independence to conduct investigations, then these units have a limited ability to achieve counternarcotics goals. If a host nation is unable or unwilling to provide the necessary legal infrastructure and political support, or commit to extradite high-value targets, the United States should not make significant investments in specialized counternarcotics units.

In addition, the U.S. government should ensure that its various activities in country are not working at cross-purposes with respect to these specialized counterdrug units. For example, the U.S. intelligence community and U.S.

agencies assisting such counterdrug units should de-conflict their efforts so intelligence officials are not cultivating drug traffickers as sources, while a U.S.-supported counterdrug unit is simultaneously trying to arrest them.

11. U.S. support for host-nation counternarcotics institutions should be resourced according to the priority that nation is willing and able to place on counterdrug efforts.

Counternarcotics institutions in host nations are ill-equipped to lead a successful counterdrug effort without support from senior political leaders and agencies that control the resources necessary for that effort.

Counterdrug efforts in Afghanistan were marked by the creation of institutions that often lacked the ability to achieve counternarcotics goals. A coordinating agency, such as the Ministry of Counter Narcotics, that lacks the budgetary resources, implementing capacity, and political influence to direct the efforts of more powerful line ministries has limited effectiveness. Provincial Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan units, which fell under the command of provincial chiefs of police, were similarly unable to lead counterdrug programs without support from the MOI and ANP leadership.

U.S. counternarcotics assistance should be directed toward creating partner institutions capable of achieving positive counterdrug outcomes and strengthening the institutions that control the resources necessary for those outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations suggest actions for both Congress and executive branch agencies to institutionalize the lessons learned from the U.S. counternarcotics experience in Afghanistan. They are intended to improve counternarcotics outcomes and yield a better return on U.S. investments in partner nations. The recommendations aim to inform policy decisions and foster institutional improvements within the U.S. government so policymakers are better equipped to make the difficult decisions inherent in countering narcotics in reconstruction efforts.

Recommendations 1 through 3 are specific to U.S. efforts in Afghanistan. All other recommendations apply generally to U.S. counternarcotics efforts, including ongoing efforts in Afghanistan.

AFGHANISTAN-SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **The U.S. government should finalize its revised counternarcotics strategy for Afghanistan. This strategy should prioritize efforts to disrupt drug-related financial flows to insurgent and terrorist groups, promote licit livelihood options for rural communities, and combat drug-related corruption within the Afghan government.**

The new, revised U.S. counternarcotics strategy should focus on: (1) disrupting insurgent and terrorist groups' financing from the drug trade, informed by a robust understanding of how these networks operate at local levels; (2) advancing the development of viable alternative livelihoods in more secure rural areas, to include steps to ensure development assistance programs do not inadvertently contribute to drug production; and (3) combating drug-related corruption within the Afghan government. In support of the first and third goals, U.S. agencies should continue to assist and mentor the small, specialized Afghan counterdrug units that are trusted partners. These units are an important starting point for improving Afghan police, investigative, and prosecutorial capacity. All the above measures fit within and advance larger U.S. security, development, and governance goals.

Levels of opium poppy cultivation remain an important indicator of progress, or lack thereof, against the Afghan drug trade. However, given the current security situation, the entrenched nature of the drug trade, and limited mobility of U.S. and international actors in Afghanistan, it is not realistic to expect U.S. efforts to substantially reduce poppy cultivation. Furthermore, an overemphasis on cultivation levels skews policymakers' attention toward measures, like eradication, that may produce short-term results, but do little to address the underlying causes of cultivation and drug production and may even undermine broader U.S. goals. Thus, the United States should not establish a near-term goal to reduce overall levels of poppy cultivation.

2. **The Director of National Intelligence should produce an annual assessment of how much funding the Afghan insurgency obtains from the drug trade and the extent of the insurgency's direct involvement in that trade.**

The funding the drug trade provides to insurgent and terrorist groups has been one of the key justifications for the U.S. counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan, yet there is limited consensus on the extent and nature of these financial flows. U.S. government officials publicly cite estimates of how much money insurgent

groups obtain from the drug trade, but these estimates differ, and official statements rarely acknowledge the uncertainty around the figures. A better understanding of insurgent financing from the Afghan drug trade is critical to designing effective, sustainable efforts to cut off that financing.

The recommended intelligence assessment should provide a consensus estimate of the amount of money from Afghan drug cultivation, production, and trafficking that is going to insurgent and terrorist groups. The assessment should detail how intelligence agencies calculate the consensus estimate of funding amounts, and how insurgent groups obtain that money. It should also acknowledge the reliability and extent of available sourcing on these financial flows, or lack thereof.

This assessment should inform and support ongoing U.S. military and civilian efforts to cut off insurgent financing from the drug trade. With this assessment, policymakers and implementers would be better equipped to judge whether interdiction efforts, such as air strikes on drug labs, are likely to impose significant costs on insurgent groups.

The assessment should be provided to the National Security Council, executive branch agencies responsible for counternarcotics efforts, and relevant congressional committees, to include the Select Committees on Intelligence, the Caucus on International Narcotics Control, relevant authorizing and appropriating subcommittees, and others. In addition, while we assume this assessment would be classified, we recommend a redacted, unclassified version be released for public consumption, to strengthen understanding of these issues in Congress and among the American public.

3. Given ongoing U.S. military operations and the significant numbers of U.S. forces in country, civilian leaders should coordinate counternarcotics efforts closely with the commander of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan.

The State Department, through the U.S. ambassador, should remain the lead coordinator for U.S. counternarcotics efforts in Afghanistan, but those efforts should also be integrated into military campaign and operational plans. Many counterdrug programs in Afghanistan were reliant on the security and support provided by U.S. or international coalition forces. Until the United States transitions to a more traditional diplomatic and security presence in Afghanistan, the leadership of Operation Resolute Support and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan will have significant influence over resources and factors that make U.S. counternarcotics efforts possible.

Additionally, U.S. programs to counter the drug trade can have significant effects on the security environment and stabilization goals.

Counternarcotics efforts, therefore, should be integrated into Resolute Support and USFOR-A plans. Doing so would more effectively ensure that counternarcotics programming is aligned with broader security goals and prevent duplicative or contradictory efforts.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Legislative Branch Recommendations

4. **Congress should consider strengthening counterdrug reporting requirements, as set out in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, and in Section 706(1) of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for FY 2003 (Public Law 107-228), to include indicators of long-term drug production trends, such as crop diversification, income levels, and the number of people dependent on the drug trade for their livelihood.**

Section 706(1) of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act for FY 2003 requires the president to submit a report—also known as the “Majors List”—identifying each country determined to be a major drug-transit country or major illicit drug-producing country. In the Majors List, the president identifies any country that has demonstrably failed to make substantial efforts to adhere to counternarcotics agreements and take certain measures to combat the drug trade, as set forth in U.S. law. Currently, the State Department prepares an annual International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) that serves as the basis for these determinations. U.S. agencies, coordinated by the Office of National Drug Control Policy and based on analysis from the CIA’s Crime and Narcotics Center, also prepare annual drug-crop cultivation estimates.

The INCSR and these estimates include a range of indicators on a country’s drug-crop cultivation, drug production, and counternarcotics efforts. However, the current reporting requirements should be improved to better assess livelihood opportunities for those most dependent on opium poppy. The INCSR should include an assessment of diversification in licit agricultural products, access to off-farm income opportunities, and proximity to roads and markets. These provide a more accurate indication of the potential for longer-term transitions away from drug production than cultivation and production figures do alone.

Inclusion of these additional indicators would enable executive branch agencies and Congress to better evaluate counterdrug program effectiveness and to make more informed funding decisions.

5. Congress should consider requiring certification from the Secretary of State that viable alternative livelihoods are in place and potential negative outcomes have been considered prior to the obligation of funding for drug-crop eradication.

Eradication efforts in Afghanistan did not result in lasting reductions in opium poppy cultivation. Where rural populations lacked viable alternative livelihoods, eradication efforts risked undermining the local economy, eroding support for the Afghan government, and increasing support for the insurgency. Prior to undertaking eradication in a given area, the State Department should consider factors related to the presence of alternative livelihoods. These factors include access to irrigated land, the extent and availability of high-value horticulture, and access to education and microfinance. In addition, a community's proximity to markets and roads can be used as a proxy indicator of access to non-farm income and sufficient job opportunities.

Congress previously restricted the use of funds for eradication programs through the aerial spraying of herbicides unless the State Department determined that the president of Afghanistan had requested such programs; this recommendation is modeled on that example. Where eradication is pursued, Congress should require a robust verification process that uses high-resolution imagery and field surveys. Further, multiyear impact monitoring should assess the overall effect of eradication on levels of poppy cultivation in subsequent growing seasons. Impact monitoring should also determine whether eradication is leading to a deterioration in welfare, governance, and security.

6. The House and Senate Appropriations Committees should consider requiring an annual report from the Secretary of State for each country that has been designated a major drug-transit or drug-producing country and receives U.S. counternarcotics assistance. The report should detail how counternarcotics assistance for a given country is coordinated across U.S. agencies, track total U.S. counterdrug assistance to that country by fiscal year, and provide a breakdown of assistance supporting each objective of the counternarcotics strategy.

Counternarcotics efforts involve multiple agencies, with a number of different funding lines that need to be well-coordinated to ensure programs build on one another and make the best use of financial resources. In Afghanistan, counterdrug programs were often marked by a lack of unified interagency

goals and little shared understanding of how those programs advanced wider U.S. objectives. Oversight was impeded by financial management practices that did not account for U.S. expenditure by year, or link resource expenditure to different elements of the counternarcotics strategy at the time. Aside from planned transfers from State's International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement account to support DEA operations, interagency collaboration on how best to fund Afghan counterdrug programs was largely ad hoc.

Improved interagency coordination is essential to make the best use of U.S. resources and, as the coordinator for all counternarcotics programs, the State Department should lead this effort. The recommended report should encourage the use of counternarcotics assistance appropriated across multiple funding lines toward shared goals and help prevent non-complementary, disjointed programs.

Requiring an annual report from the Secretary would promote greater strategic coherence, improve interagency coordination in countries that receive significant counterdrug assistance, and provide Congress with improved tools to carry out its oversight responsibilities.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7. U.S. agencies responsible for counternarcotics efforts in major drug-transit or drug-producing countries should focus their eradication efforts in areas that are more secure, have persistent state presence, and offer more diverse livelihood opportunities.**

One of the positive counternarcotics stories to emerge from Afghanistan was that, despite overall increases in poppy cultivation and production since 2002, some provinces and districts saw temporary reductions in poppy cultivation. In these limited areas, better security and economic conditions allowed some Afghans to diversify their livelihoods away from opium poppy. Focusing eradication efforts in areas with improved security and where alternative livelihoods exist is more likely to achieve lasting results. Eradication metrics and development program plans should be more localized to encourage this kind of targeted intervention. Focusing on areas where the state has a persistent presence and where there are viable alternatives to illicit incomes should also help to build popular support for the government rather than impoverishing or alienating local populations.

8. **The Secretary of State should require that, for each country designated a major drug-transit or drug-producing country and receiving U.S. counternarcotics assistance, the U.S. ambassador to that country convene all U.S. agencies providing counternarcotics assistance to design a strategy that identifies actionable steps to integrate a counternarcotics perspective into larger security, development, and governance objectives. This strategy should be devised in close cooperation with the recipient country and should set forth practical and sustainable counterdrug goals.**

The number of agencies and offices providing counterdrug funding, equipment, and assistance contributed to the lack of coherence across the U.S. counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan. The lack of a consistent, shared strategy was exacerbated by the low priority often given to counternarcotics efforts by senior U.S. officials in country.

The U.S. ambassador is best placed to lead an interagency strategy that coordinates all assistance around common goals and wider security, development, and governance objectives. This strategy should be tailored and resourced according to the priority given to counterdrug efforts within the overall mission and by the host-nation and partner governments. Host-nation agreement and buy-in are critical to ensuring a coordinated and viable counternarcotics effort. The U.S. ambassador should ensure that any proposed strategy aligns with host-nation goals and does not inadvertently hinder efforts to meet these goals.

9. **The USAID Administrator should require an assessment of the potential impact a development project could have on illicit crop cultivation prior to obligating funds for development programs in major drug-transit or drug-producing countries.**

Investments in agriculture, economic growth, and governance can support efforts to reduce the negative impact of the drug trade, but can also inadvertently make matters worse. To ensure current and future development programs in major drug-producing countries fully factor in how assistance could affect the production of illicit drugs, USAID should adopt counternarcotics mainstreaming guidelines similar to those included in the 2006 World Bank article, “Treating the Opium Problem in World Bank Operations in Afghanistan.”⁹⁶³ These guidelines provide an analytic framework to assess how development activities may affect the counternarcotics effort and identify any risks that need to be managed to ensure development projects do not inadvertently make matters worse.

- 10. U.S. agencies responsible for counternarcotics efforts should use geospatial imagery, crop mapping, and other effective monitoring and evaluation systems to more accurately capture both development and counternarcotics outcomes. This data should be shared among all U.S. agencies with counterdrug responsibilities.**

Current methods of assessing the performance and impact of development programs implemented in drug-producing areas, particularly surveys, are unreliable and do not provide verifiable data on program outcomes. In a challenging security environment like Afghanistan, it is extremely difficult to assess survey accuracy. In contrast, geospatial data derived from high-resolution imagery provide robust insights into program outputs and outcomes, including livelihood diversification, which can be used to more objectively assess the results of both rural development investments and efforts to reduce farmer dependency on opium production. Nevertheless, USAID and State currently make very limited use of geospatial imagery as a tool for program coordination or monitoring and evaluation.

GIS imagery analysis can clearly link development program inputs, such as irrigation improvements or greenhouse construction, with drug-crop cultivation levels in subsequent years to determine which programs contributed to reduced—or increased—cultivation in subsequent years. This kind of monitoring and evaluation should be required for development assistance in drug-producing regions.

- 11. U.S. agencies charged with reporting to Congress on drug-crop cultivation, eradication, production, and trafficking estimates should include caveats regarding the reliability of those figures and level of confidence in them.**

All narcotics-related reporting needs to be presented to senior policy makers with the appropriate caveats and warnings about the reliability of the data, similar to the caveats required in intelligence reporting. In Afghanistan, key data sets and reports that have proven methodologically weak or inaccurate, such as eradication figures prior to 2008, were detrimental to policy decisions and program design. Strengthened analytic and reporting standards would help prevent such problematic data from unduly influencing U.S. counternarcotics policymaking and program design.

- 12. USAID should have primary responsibility for designing and administering development programs in drug-producing countries. INL should focus on areas where it has a comparative advantage, such as strengthening the rule of law, building law enforcement and interdiction capacity, and initiating demand-reduction programs.**

USAID has a comparative advantage over other U.S. agencies in managing development programs. INL and U.S. military entities should not try to duplicate the development expertise housed within USAID by administering their own development programs. INL should focus on strengthening the rule of law, reducing demand, and building law enforcement and interdiction capacity. Designating USAID as the primary agency to design and administer development programs in drug-producing countries would also encourage the agency to integrate counternarcotics measures into its wider program of activities.

- 13. State, DOD, and Justice should consider supporting small, specialized counternarcotics units as a means to build host-nation counterdrug capacity. However, this assistance should be proportional to the willingness and capacity of host-nation leaders to support such units, and should be coordinated with broader U.S. efforts to strengthen political, security, and judicial institutions.**

Even in a contingency environment such as Afghanistan, it is possible to develop well-trained, capable counterdrug units. However, their effectiveness in combating the drug trade is likely to be hampered by a weak judicial system and insufficient support from host-nation political leaders. When supporting such units, U.S. agencies must therefore set realistic goals and timelines that acknowledge the difficult operating environment. Ideally, U.S. support should be maintained over many years to build relationships and institutional capacity. Further, these efforts should be coupled with and integrated into broader U.S. and international efforts to advance reform in the host nation's law enforcement and judicial systems. Specialized units ultimately depend on larger political, judicial, and security institutions to succeed.

At the same time, U.S. investments in these units should be proportional to the host-nation government's level of commitment to achieving counternarcotics goals. If host-nation political leaders actively work to obstruct the activities of specialized units, U.S. agencies should reconsider the extent to which they support those units and consider applying more robust conditionality to future assistance.

A man wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and a blue turban is harvesting wheat in a field. He is bent over, using a sickle to cut the wheat. The field is filled with golden wheat stalks. In the background, there are mountains under a clear blue sky.

APPENDICES AND ENDNOTES

USAID/Afghanistan photo

APPENDIX A: GIS ANNEX

This appendix contains original GIS imagery that Alcis Holdings Ltd. provided to SIGAR, as well as imagery that SIGAR commissioned from MDA Information Systems LLC. Images appear in the order in which they are referred to in the report. Imagery in this appendix falls into one of two categories:

1. Some imagery serves as the basis for figures that appear in the body of the report. These figures were redesigned by SIGAR and retain the accuracy of the underlying data, but present the imagery in a manner consistent with SIGAR's publication style. This category includes figures A.1, A.3, A.5, A.8, A.11, A.12, and A.14.
2. Other imagery informed our analysis and is referred to in the report. However, these images were not redesigned by SIGAR and do not appear in the body of the report. This category includes figures A.2, A.4, A.6, A.7, A.9, A.10, A.13, A.15, and A.16.

FIGURE A.1

CROP MAPPING FOR NAD ALI IN HELMAND PROVINCE (SITE A)



April 21, 2002 (1.2 ha poppy). Poppy is 6% of total agriculture. No eradication data in grid.



April 23, 2009 (30.6 ha poppy). Poppy is 45% of total agriculture. No eradication within 2.5 km.



April 7, 2010 (39.6 ha poppy). Poppy is 60% of total agriculture. No eradication within 3 km.



April 20, 2011 (10.1 ha poppy). Poppy is 17% of total agriculture. Eradication within vicinity, but not in grid.



April 29, 2012 (6.6 ha poppy). Poppy is 14% of total agriculture. Significant eradication in vicinity and grid.



March 29, 2013 (10.6 ha poppy). Poppy is 21% of total agriculture. Significant eradication in vicinity, one grid location.

Source: Imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC.



April 18, 2014 (4.9 ha poppy). Poppy is 8% of total agriculture. Some eradication in vicinity, one grid location.



April 7, 2015 (6.1 ha poppy). Poppy is 12% of total agriculture. No eradication data.



April 22, 2016 (4.0 ha poppy). Poppy is 6% of total agriculture. No eradication data.



Note: At a different site in Nad Ali, poppy cultivation fell even before the area was targeted for eradication, suggesting that other variables, such as security presence, influenced the reductions in cultivation. GIS data of this area of Nad Ali from 2002 to 2016 shows opium poppy cultivation dropping by 75 percent—from 39.6 hectares to 10.1 hectares—between 2010 and 2011 during the influx of military forces and before any eradication took place. More marginal reductions in poppy cultivation occurred between 2011 and 2014, with a decrease from 10.1 hectares to 4.9 hectares after repeated years of eradication in the area.

FIGURE A.2

CROP MAPPING FOR NAD ALI IN HELMAND PROVINCE (SITE B)



April 21, 2002 (5.7 ha poppy). Poppy is 27% of total agriculture. No eradication data.



April 16, 2008 (33.9 ha poppy). Poppy is 47% of total agriculture. Significant eradication in vicinity and grid.



April 23, 2009 (30.5 ha poppy). Poppy is 39% of total agriculture. Significant eradication in vicinity, two grid locations.



April 7, 2010 (33.8 ha poppy). Poppy is 43% of total agriculture. Some eradication within vicinity, but none in grid.



April 20, 2011 (10.2 ha poppy). Poppy is 15% of total agriculture. Significant eradication in vicinity, some in grid.



April 29, 2012 (9.2 ha poppy). Poppy is 13% of total agriculture. Significant eradication in vicinity, two grid locations.

Source: Imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC.



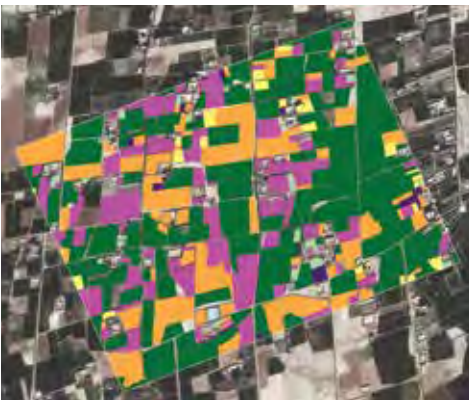
March 29, 2013 (12.5 ha poppy). Poppy is 19% of total agriculture. Significant eradication in vicinity and some in grid.



April 18, 2014 (11.8 ha poppy). Poppy is 17% of total agriculture. Significant eradication in vicinity and grid.



April 7, 2015 (11.1 ha poppy). Poppy is 16% of total agriculture. No eradication data.



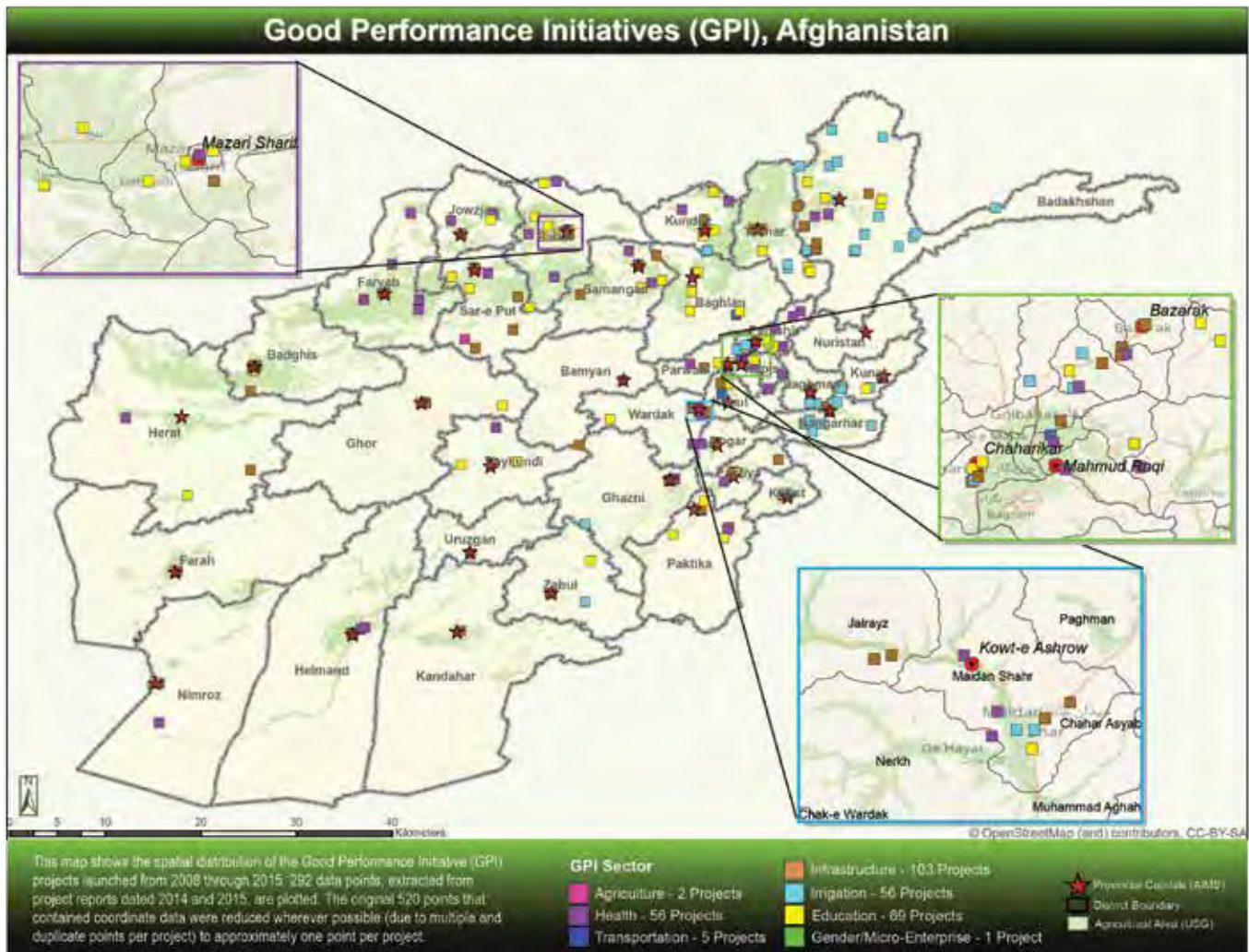
April 22, 2016 (15.8 ha poppy). Poppy is 20% of total agriculture. No eradication data.



Note: Significant eradication efforts in Nad Ali did not reduce overall opium poppy cultivation within the research site. GIS data shows sustained poppy cultivation from 2008 to 2010, despite significant eradication in 2008 and 2009. Poppy cultivation dropped 66 percent from 2010 to 2011 despite no eradication within the grid, suggesting that factors other than eradication (like the post-2009 surge in U.S. and Afghan military presence) drove reductions. Significant eradication efforts between 2011 and 2014 did not reduce opium poppy cultivation levels within this site.

FIGURE A.3

MAPPING OF GOOD PERFORMERS INITIATIVE PROJECTS, 2008-2015

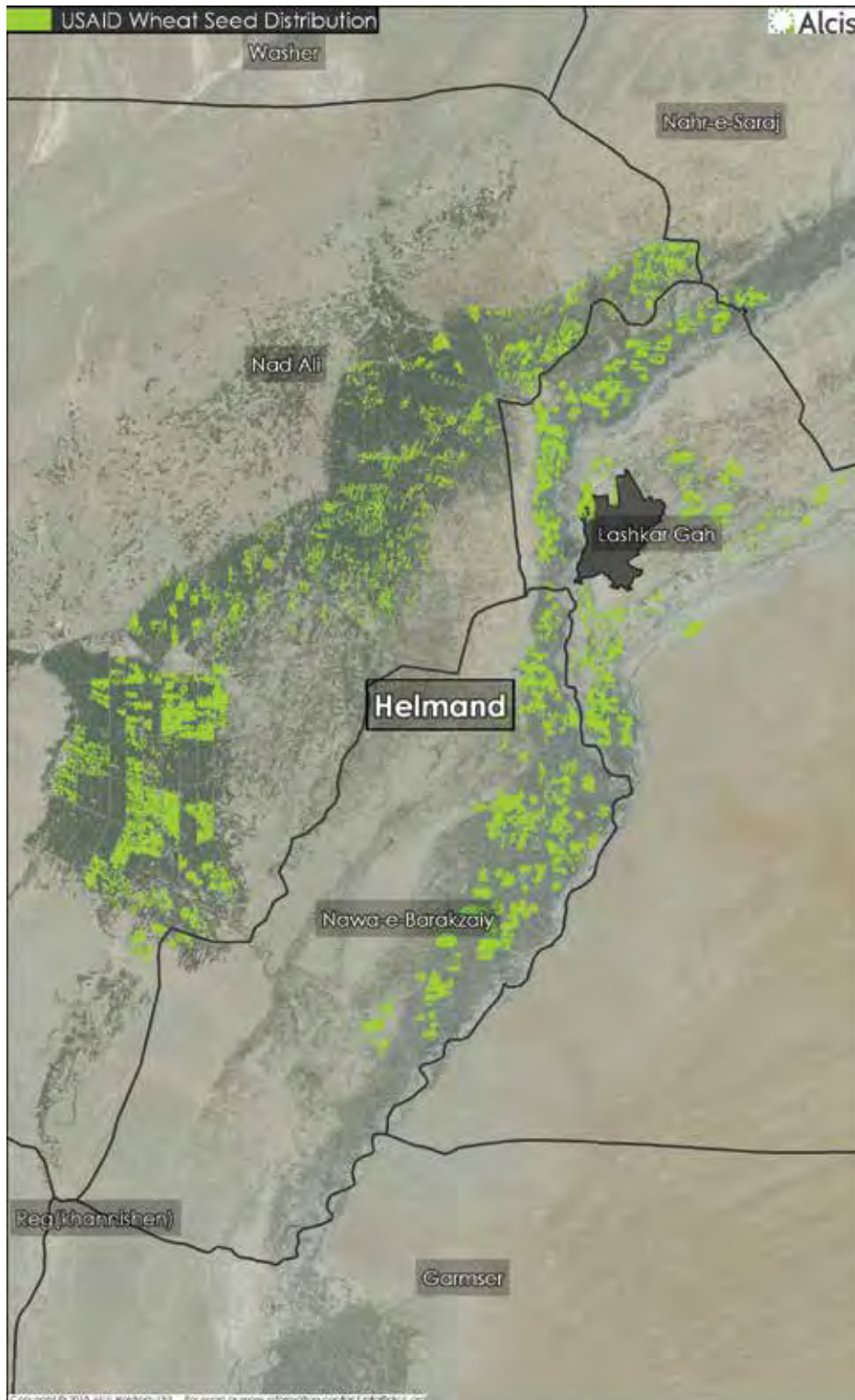


Note: GPS data for the Good Performers Initiative (GPI) shows many of the GPI projects were located in close proximity to urban provincial centers rather than rural, poppy-dependent areas.

Source: Imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC.

FIGURE A.4

HELMAND FOOD ZONE WHEAT SEED DISTRIBUTION, 2009

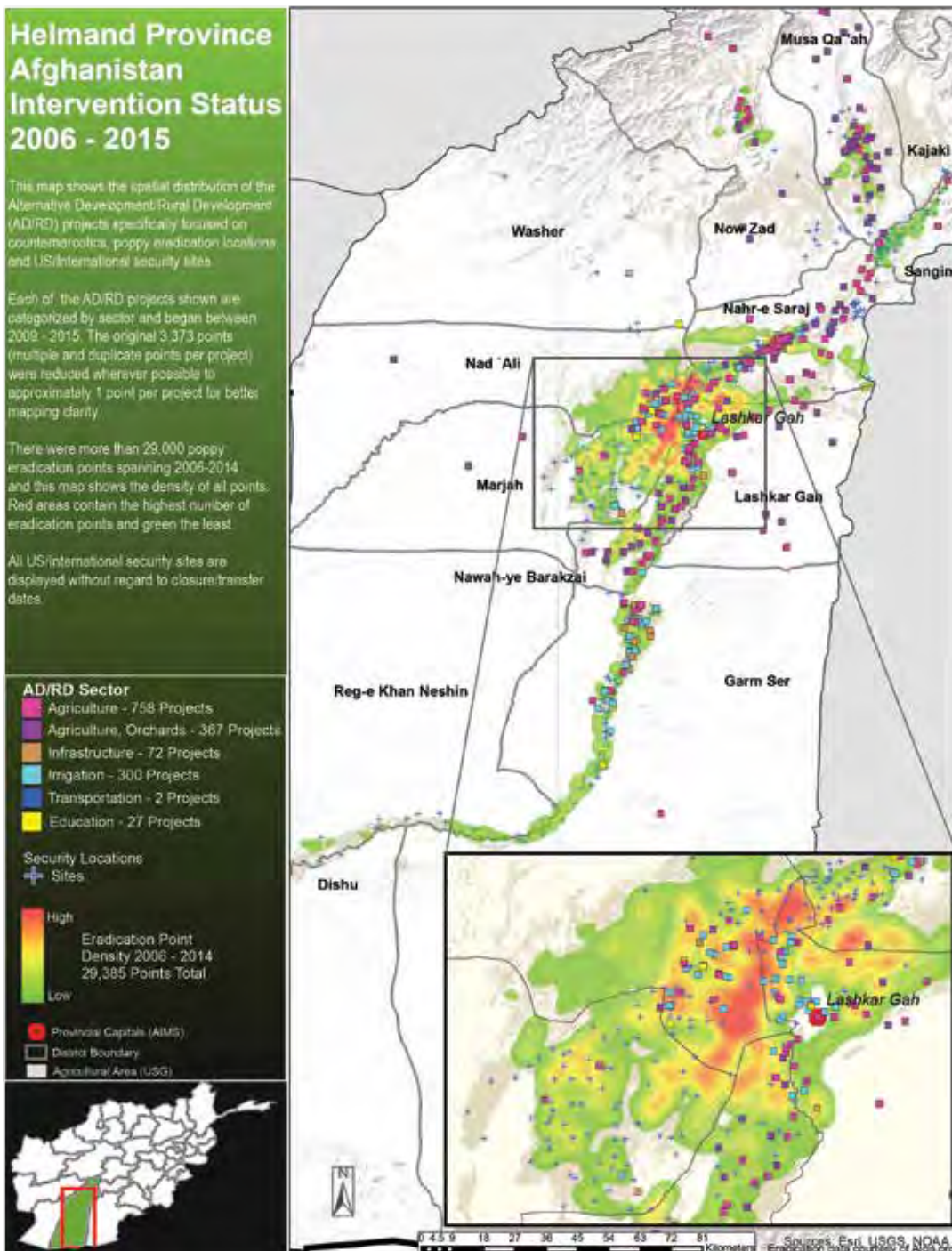


Note: Communities near Lashkar Gah that experienced repeated crop destruction between 2006 and 2014 received a relatively small amount of wheat seeds distributed as part of the HFZ initiative in 2009. For errors or more information, contact info@alcis.org.

Source: Copyright © 2018 Alcis Holdings Ltd.

FIGURE A.5

MAPPING OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND ERADICATION IN HELMAND PROVINCE, 2006-2015



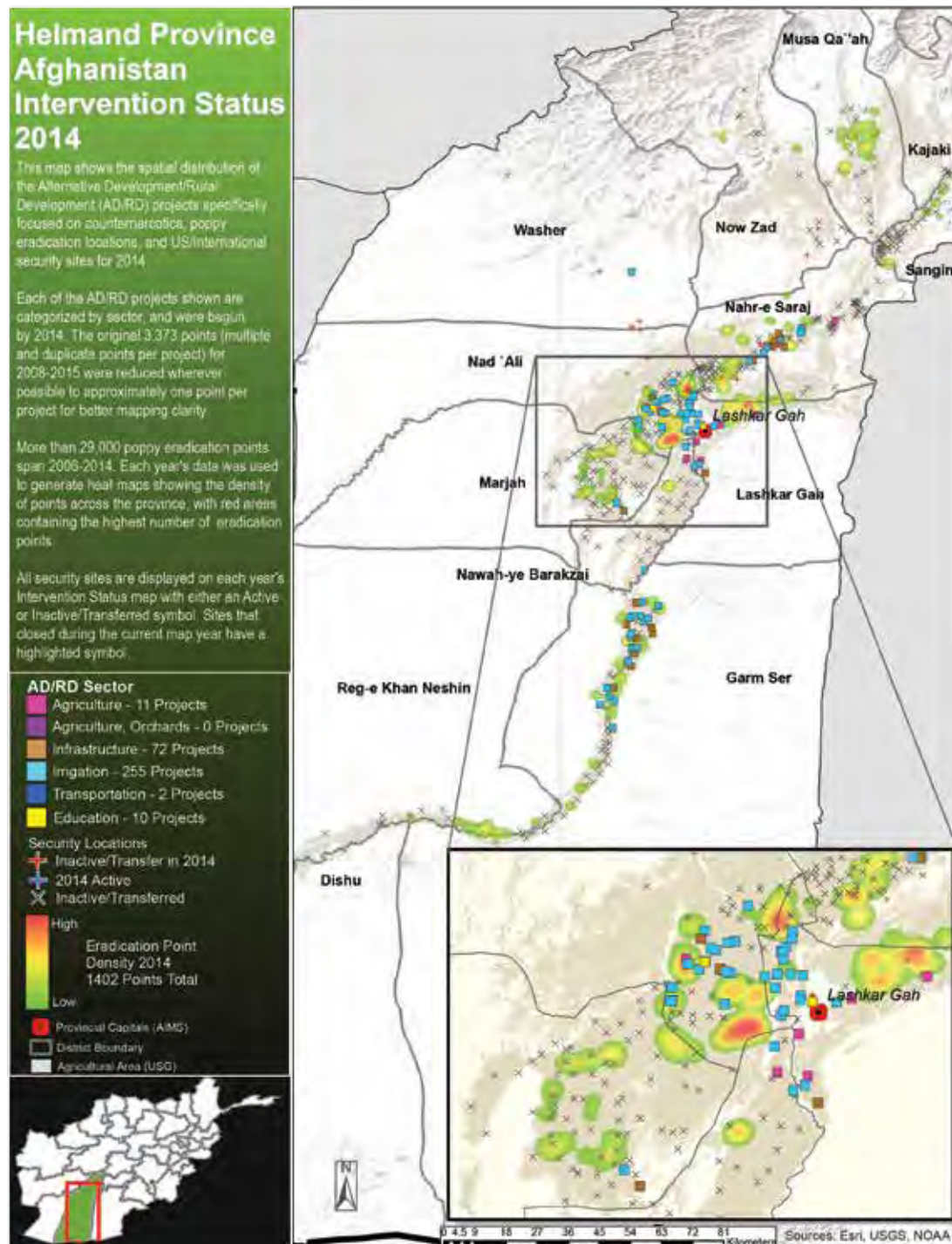
Note: From 2006 to 2014, the district of Nad Ali was subject to the highest cumulative density of crop destruction in Helmand Province. At the same time, however, there were almost no alternative development projects in the immediate areas that experienced repeated eradication.

This image is based on MDA analysis of SIGAR-provided data. The data set for alternative and rural development programs includes those programs that identified reducing poppy cultivation as a program objective. One exception is Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) South, a stabilization program which supported a large number of irrigation programs in Helmand Province; SIKA South GPS coordinates are included in this data set. Without the inclusion of SIKA South data, the number of development projects in areas with high cumulative crop destruction levels would likely be reduced.

Source: Imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC.

FIGURE A.6

REDUCTION OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN HELMAND PROVINCE, 2014



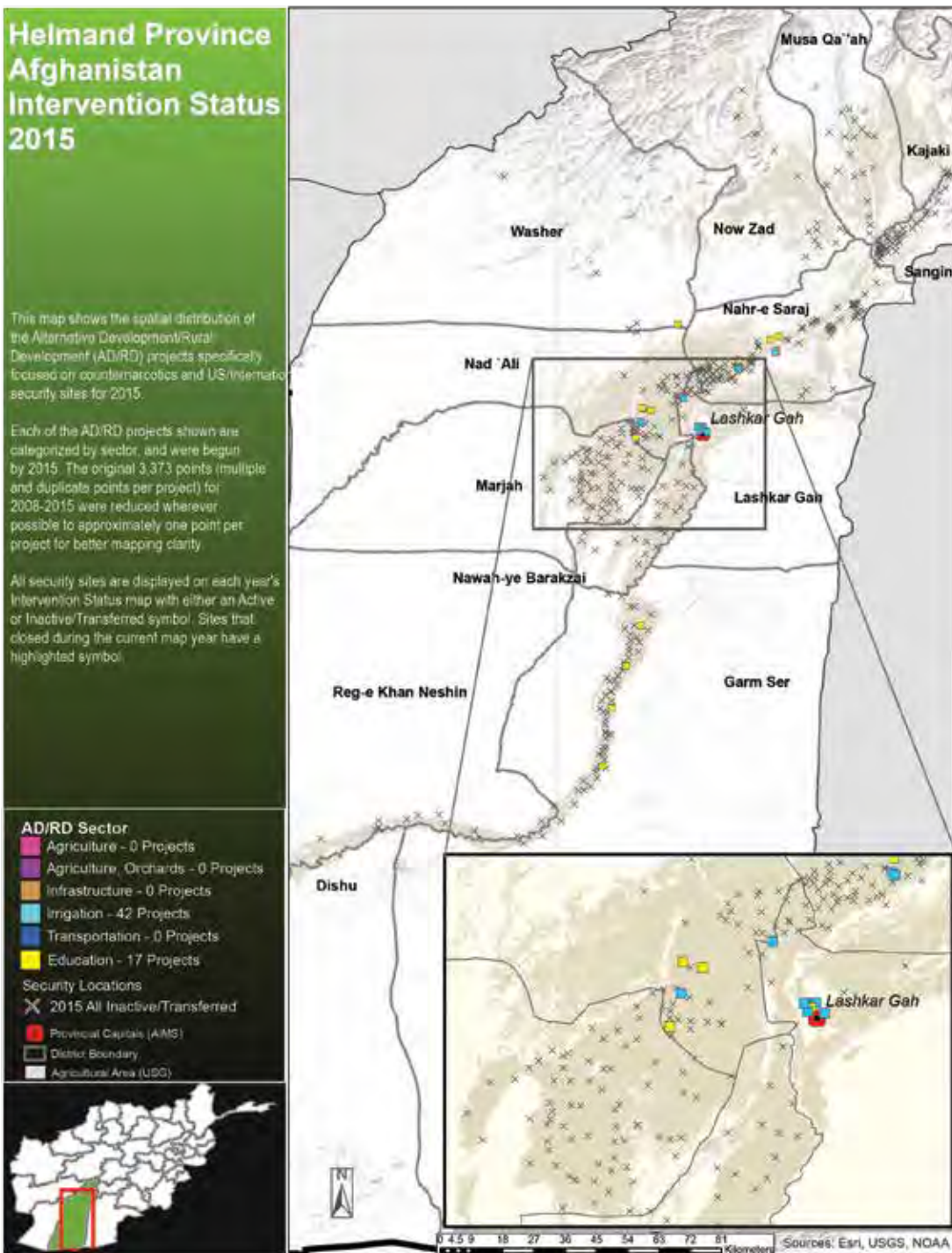
Note: This figure shows alternative development and rural development programs in Helmand Province in 2014. Alternative development projects were significantly reduced after the 2014 drawdown.

This image is based on MDA analysis of SIGAR-provided data. The data set for alternative and rural development programs includes those programs that identified reducing poppy cultivation as a program objective. One exception is Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) South, a stabilization program which supported a large number of irrigation programs in Helmand Province; SIKA South GPS coordinates are included in this data set. Without the inclusion of SIKA South data, the number of development projects in areas with high cumulative crop destruction levels would likely be reduced.

Source: Imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC.

FIGURE A.7

REDUCTION OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN HELMAND PROVINCE, 2015



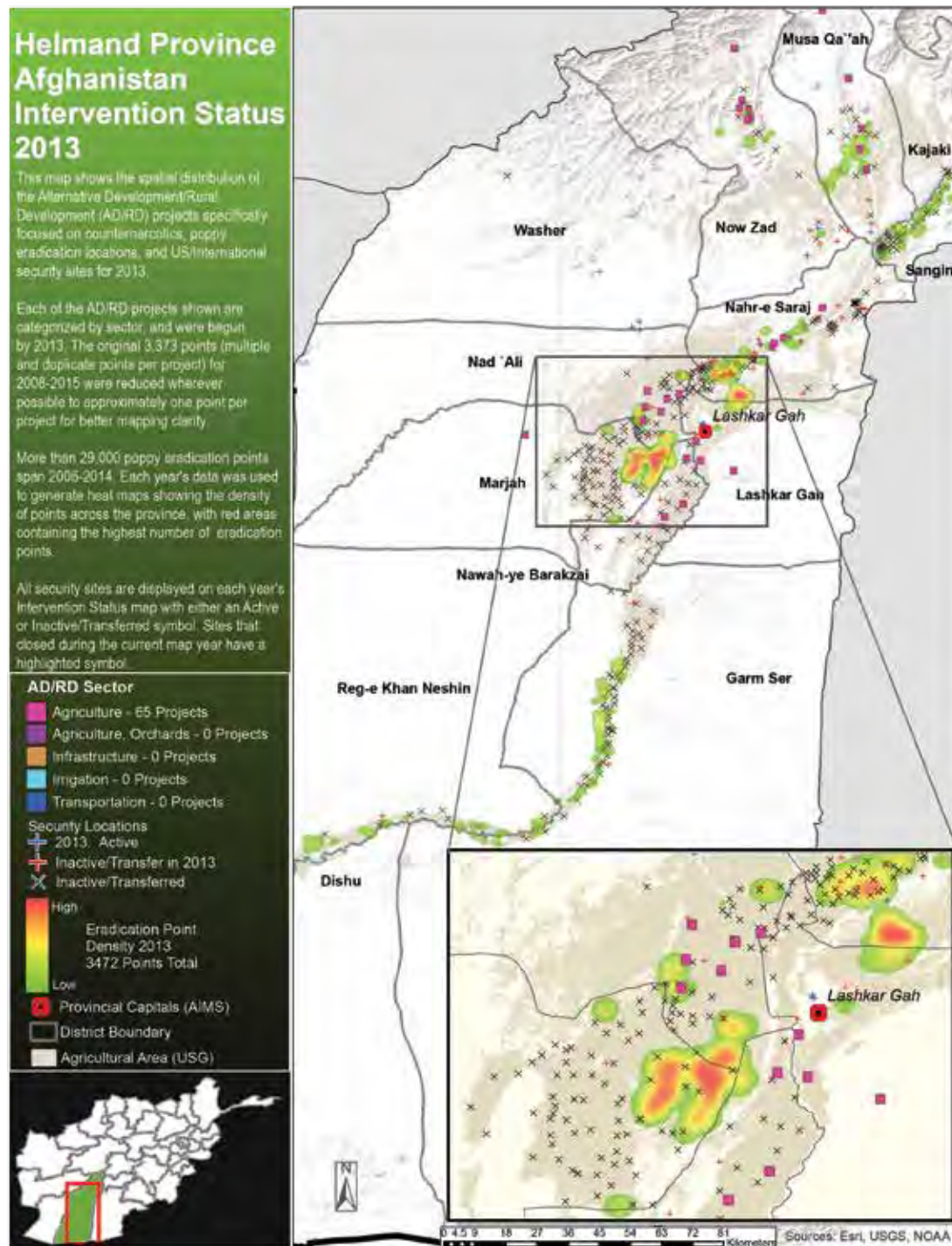
Note: This figure shows alternative development and rural development programs in Helmand Province in 2015. Alternative development projects were significantly reduced after the 2014 drawdown.

This image is based on MDA analysis of SIGAR-provided data. The data set for alternative and rural development programs includes those programs that identified reducing poppy cultivation as a program objective. One exception is Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) South, a stabilization program which supported a large number of irrigation programs in Helmand Province; SIKA South GPS coordinates are included in this data set. Without the inclusion of SIKA South data, the number of development projects in areas with high cumulative crop destruction levels would likely be reduced.

Source: Imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC.

FIGURE A.8

MAPPING OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND ERADICATION IN HELMAND PROVINCE, 2013



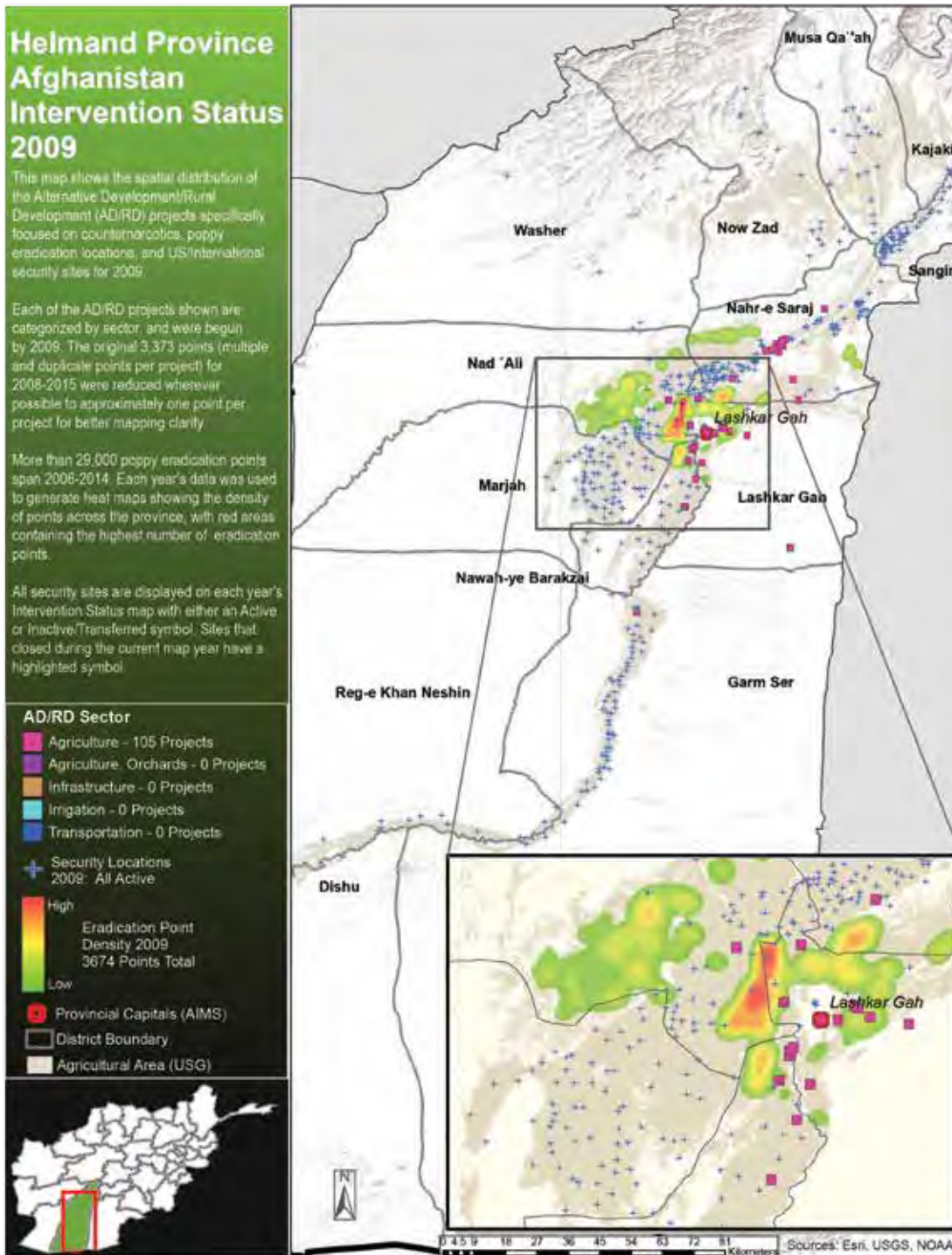
Note: Mapping of alternative development programs and eradication efforts in 2013 shows high levels of eradication in eastern Marjah. At the same time, there were no alternative development programs undertaken in the areas with the most intense eradication in 2013, despite the fact that households were highly dependent on opium poppy.

This image is based on MDA analysis of SIGAR-provided data. The data set for alternative and rural development programs includes those programs that identified reducing poppy cultivation as a program objective. One exception is Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) South, a stabilization program which supported a large number of irrigation programs in Helmand Province; SIKA South GPS coordinates are included in this data set. Without the inclusion of SIKA South data, the number of development projects in areas with high cumulative crop destruction levels would likely be reduced.

Source: Imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC.

FIGURE A.9

MAPPING OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND ERADICATION IN HELMAND PROVINCE, 2009



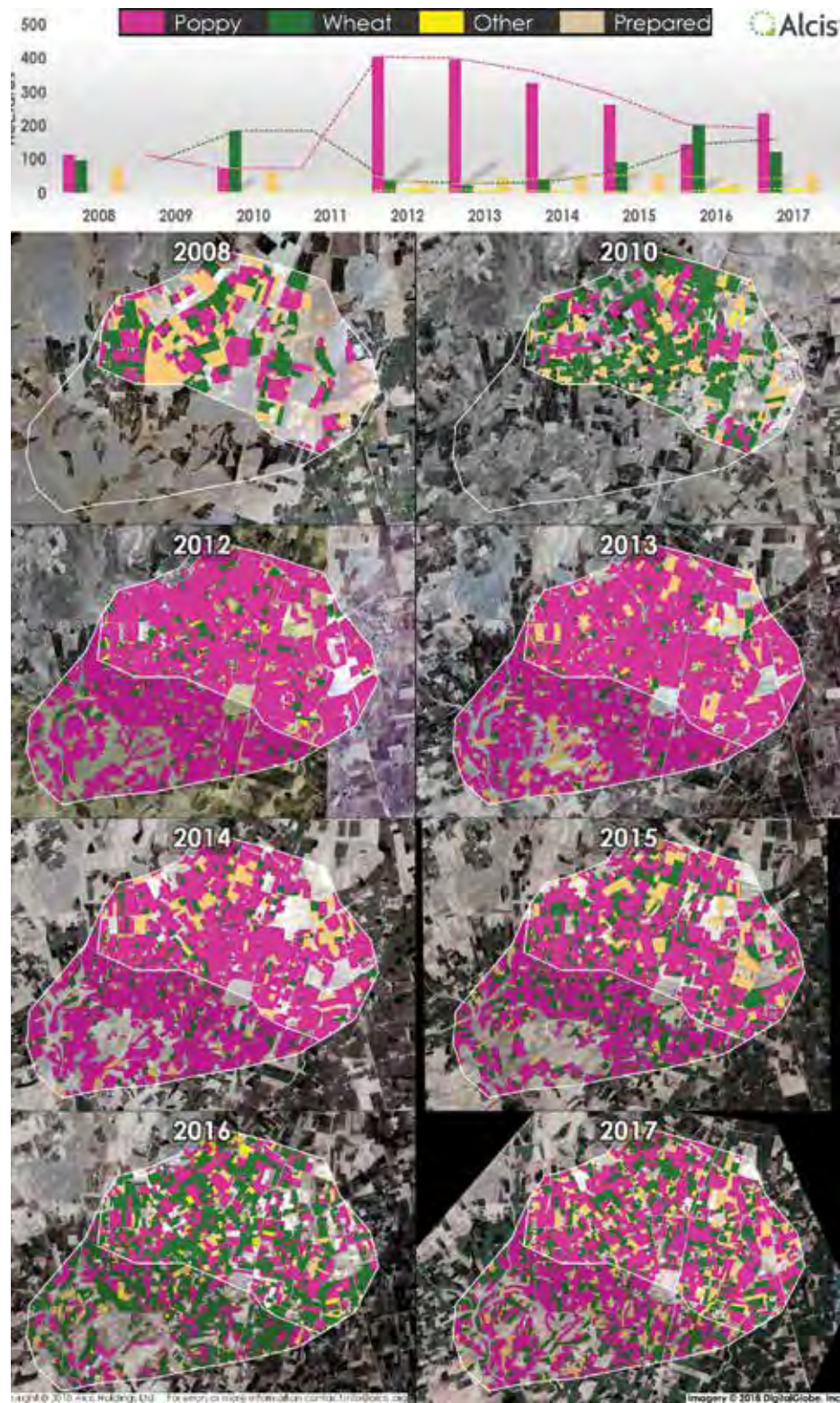
Note: Mapping of alternative development programs and eradication efforts in 2009 shows a high level of eradication on the border between Lashkar Gah and Nad Ali in Helmand Province. Few alternative development programs took place here in 2009, despite the fact that households were highly dependent on opium poppy.

This image is based on MDA analysis of SIGAR-provided data. The data set for alternative and rural development programs includes those programs that identified reducing poppy cultivation as a program objective. One exception is Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) South, a stabilization program which supported a large number of irrigation programs in Helmand Province; SIKA South GPS coordinates are included in this data set. Without the inclusion of SIKA South data, the number of development projects in areas with high cumulative crop destruction levels would likely be reduced.

Source: Imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC.

FIGURE A.10

CROP MAPPING FOR SHNA JAMA IN HELMAND PROVINCE, 2008-2017

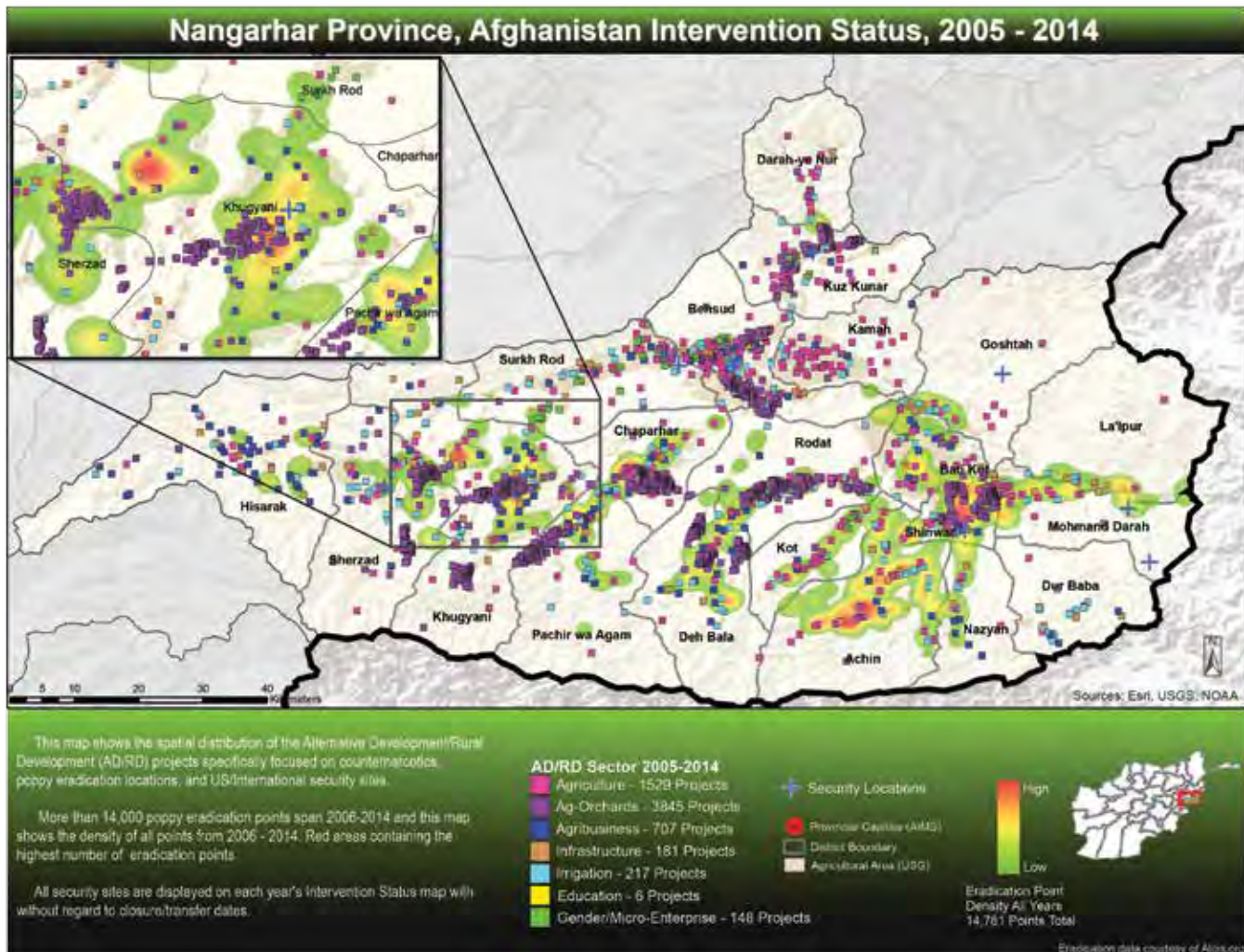


Note: Crop mapping of Shna Jama, in the Nad Ali district of Helmand Province, from 2008 to 2017 shows significant growth of poppy in areas that were repeatedly targeted by eradication, yet received little alternative development assistance. For errors or more information, contact info@alcis.org.

Source: Copyright © 2018 Alcis Holdings Ltd.

FIGURE A.11

MAPPING OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND ERADICATION IN NANGARHAR PROVINCE, 2005-2014

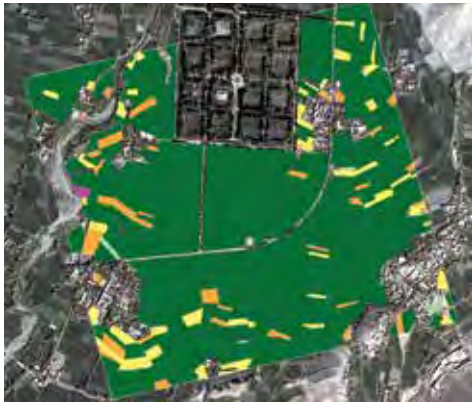


Note: Some areas where there was a high concentration of eradication, such as the southern district of Achin and the northwestern part of Khugyani, received relatively little alternative development assistance.

Source: Imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC.

FIGURE A.12

CROP MAPPING OF KHUGYANI IN NANGARHAR PROVINCE, 2006-2016



March 22, 2006 (0.12 ha poppy). Poppy is <1% of total agriculture. No eradication efforts within 2 km



April 6, 2011 (15.4 ha poppy). Poppy is 24% of total agriculture. Some eradication efforts in vicinity and two eradication points in center of grid.



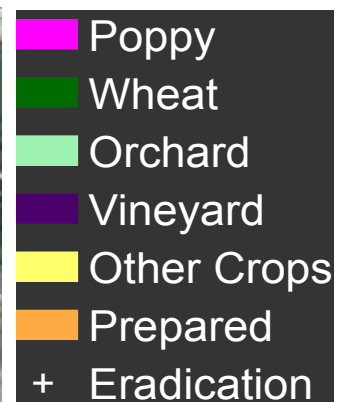
April 8, 2012 (21.2 ha poppy). Poppy is 36% of total agriculture. Significant eradication efforts in vicinity and within grid.



April 8, 2013 (24.7 ha poppy). Poppy is 39% of total agriculture. No eradication efforts within 5 km.



April 20, 2016 (43.8 ha poppy). Poppy is 69% of total agriculture. No eradication data.

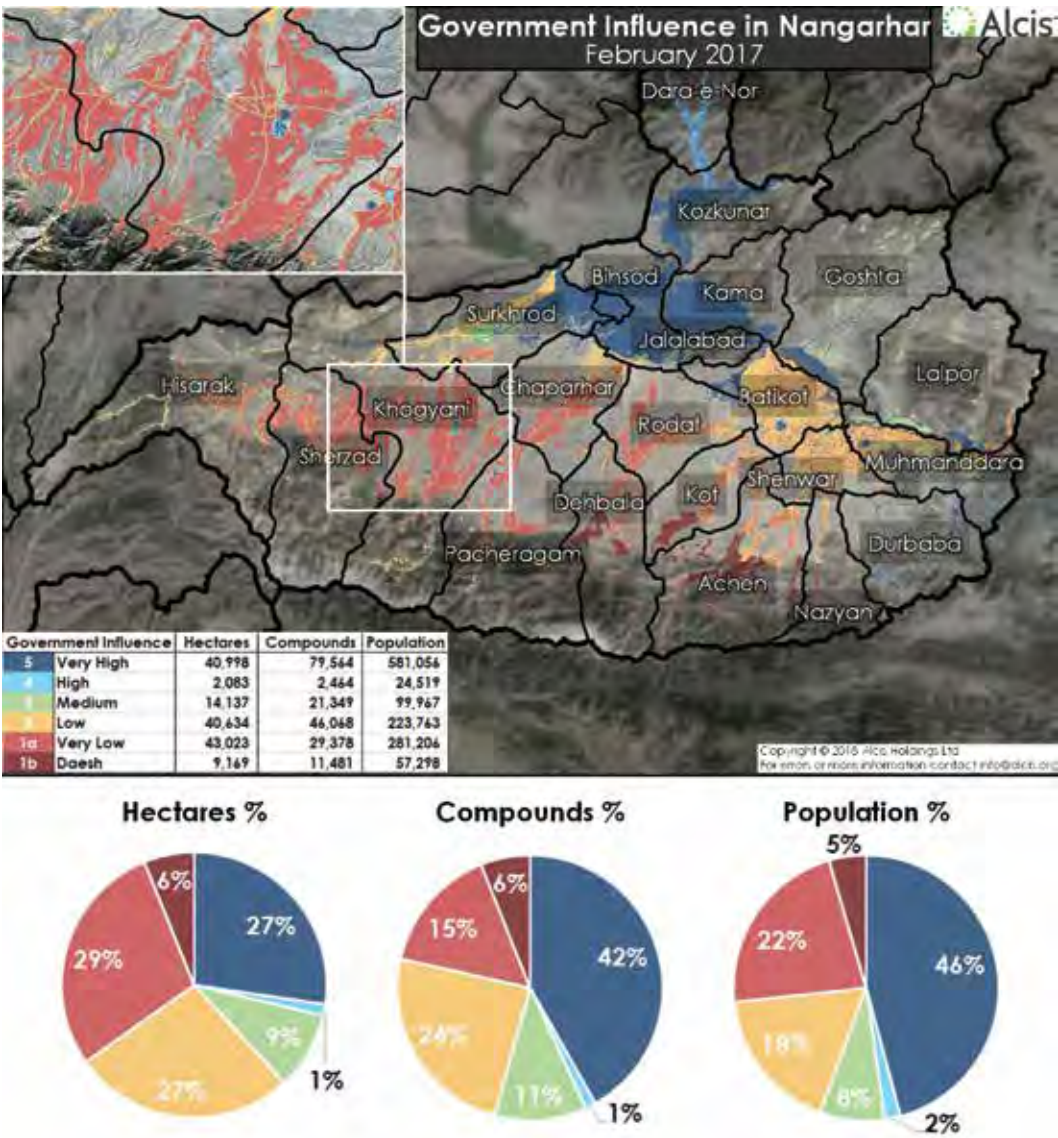


Note: Crop mapping shows significant growth of poppy in areas that were targeted by eradication, with poppy cultivation rising from less than 1 percent of the total land in 2006 to 69 percent in 2016.

Source: Imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC.

FIGURE A.13

LAYERS OF CONTROL, NANGARHAR PROVINCE, 2017

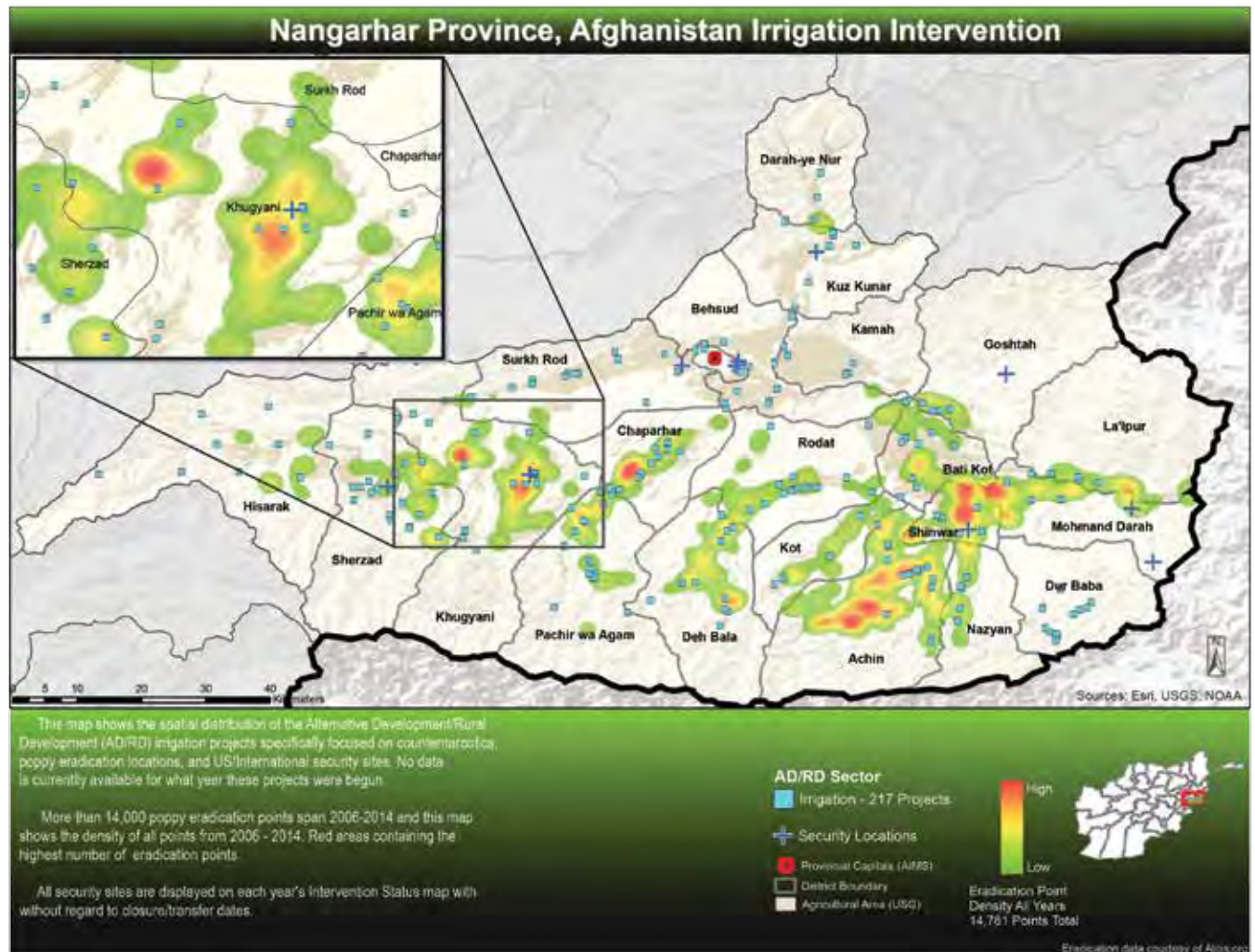


Note: This 2017 poppy probability map of Nangarhar Province highlights the correlation between areas of government control and the decreased likelihood of growing poppy. The opposite is true in areas controlled by the insurgency, except for those areas under the control of the Islamic State in Afghanistan, where a ban on poppy has been imposed. Limited Afghan government control in the province illustrates the difficulty of sustaining poppy reductions made prior to the drawdown of U.S. forces. For errors or more information, contact info@alcis.org.

Source: Copyright © 2018 Alcis Holdings Ltd.

FIGURE A.14

MAPPING OF IRRIGATION PROJECTS IN NANGARHAR PROVINCE, 2004-2016

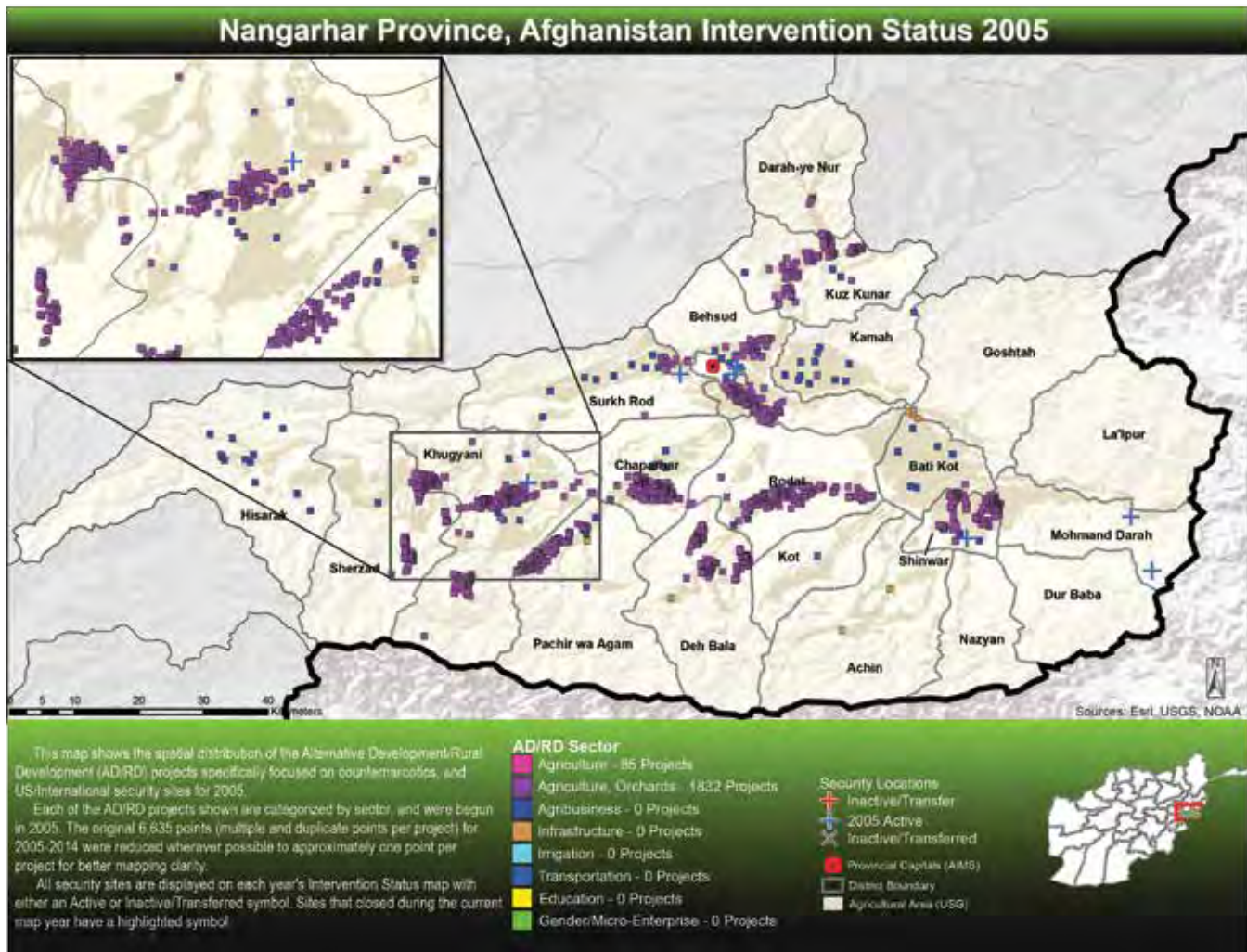


Note: Increased poppy cultivation is a risk when investing in irrigation projects in areas where there is a long history of and high dependency on opium poppy cultivation.

Source: Imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC.

FIGURE A.15

MAPPING OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN NANGARHAR PROVINCE, 2005

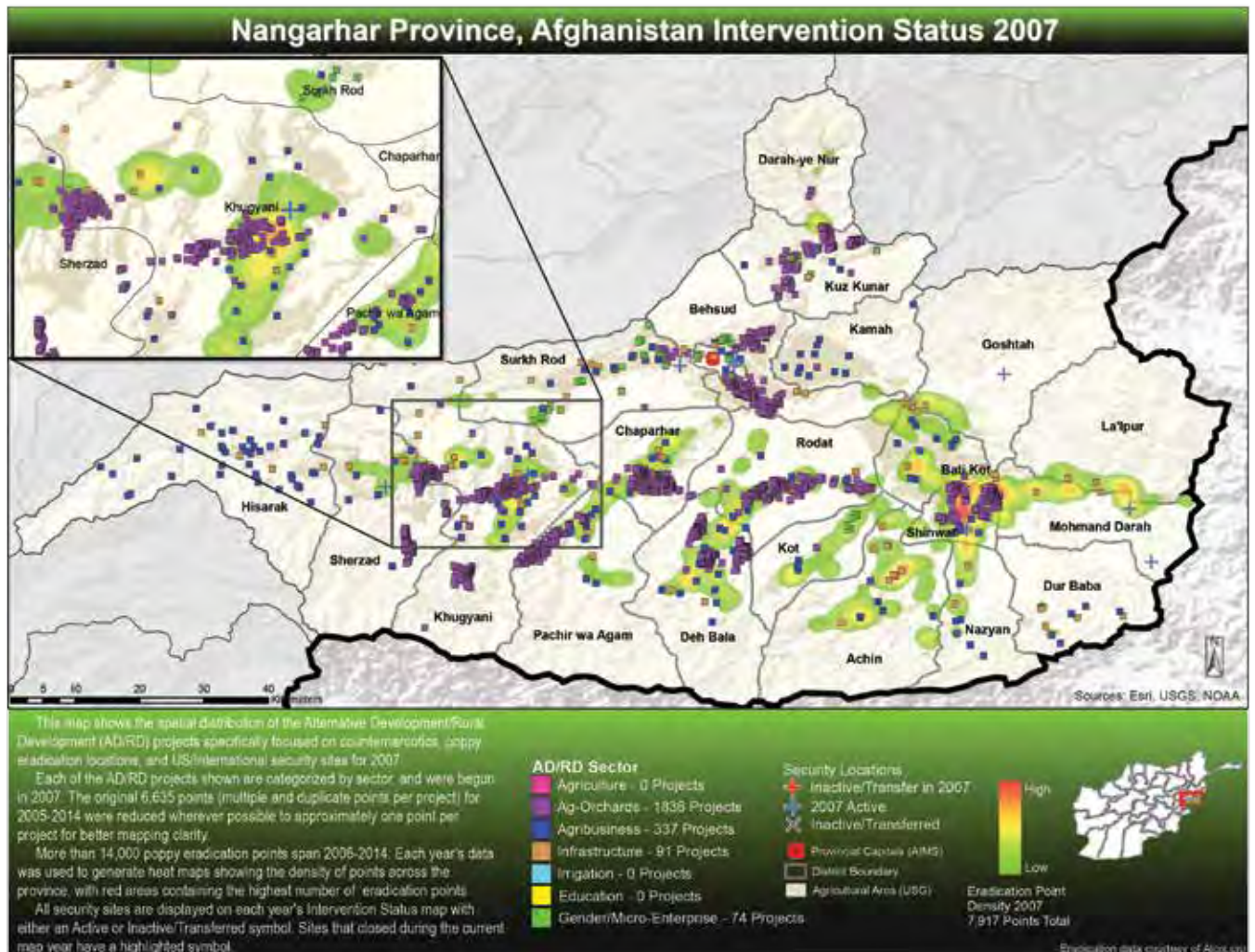


Note: In the districts of Khugyani, Chapahar, and Rodat, the majority of alternative development investment through 2005 was in orchard development.

Source: Imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC.

FIGURE A.16

MAPPING OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND ERADICATION IN NANGARHAR PROVINCE, 2007



Note: There was a continued focus on orchard development in 2007 in the districts of Khugyani, Chaparhar, and Rodat, consistent with previous years.

Source: Imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC.

APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGY

SIGAR conducts its lessons learned program under the authority of Public Law 110-181 and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, and in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Federal Offices of Inspector General*. These standards require that we carry out our work with integrity, objectivity, and independence, and provide information that is factually accurate and reliable. SIGAR's lessons learned reports are broad in scope and based on a range of source material. To achieve the goal of high quality, the reports are subject to extensive review by subject matter experts and relevant U.S. government agencies.

The *Counternarcotics* research team drew upon a wide array of publicly available sources, including reports by USAID, State, DOD, DEA, GAO, Congressional Research Service, UNODC, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and coalition partners. The report incorporates congressional testimony from many senior U.S. officials. In addition, the research team consulted unclassified and declassified material from an archive maintained by Georgetown University that contains the papers of former USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios.

These official sources were complemented by hundreds of nongovernmental sources, including books, think tank reports, journal articles, press reports, academic studies, analytical reports by international and advocacy organizations, and nearly two decades of fieldwork conducted in Afghanistan by Dr. David Mansfield.

The research team also benefited from SIGAR's access to material that is not publicly available, including thousands of documents provided by U.S. government agencies. State provided cables, strategy documents, internal memos and briefings, and planning and programmatic documents. USAID provided GPS information and planning and program design documents for alternative development projects. DOD provided policy directives, strategy documents, and internal planning papers. DEA provided interagency agreements and program assessments. The CIA's CNC provided national-level and provincial-level data for Afghan opium poppy cultivation since 1999. The team also received several unpublished drafts of government papers that proved important to our analysis, for example, a comprehensive USAID assessment of alternative development programming. A body of classified material, including some U.S. embassy cables and intelligence reports, provided helpful context; however, as

an unclassified document, this report makes no use of that material. Finally, the team also drew from SIGAR's own work, embodied in its quarterly reports to Congress, investigations, audits, inspections, and special project reports.

While the documentary evidence tells a story, it cannot substitute for the experience, knowledge, and wisdom of people who participated in counternarcotics-related efforts in Afghanistan. The research team interviewed or held informal discussions with more than 80 individuals with direct involvement in or knowledge of U.S., Afghan, and coalition partners' counternarcotics efforts. Interviews were conducted with current and former U.S. civilian and military officials who deployed to Afghanistan, intelligence officers, and officials who oversaw the counternarcotics effort from Washington; current and former officials from the Afghan government, UK government, and international organizations like UNODC; experts from academia, think tanks, and NGOs; and contractors who implemented counternarcotics measures, such as eradication, in Afghanistan.

Interviews provided valuable insights into the rationale behind decisions, debates within and between agencies, and frustrations that spanned the years, but often remained unwritten. Due, in part, to the politically sensitive nature of many counternarcotics-related policy decisions and activities, a majority of the interviewees wished to remain anonymous. For those still working in government, confidentiality was particularly important. Therefore, to preserve anonymity, our interview citations often cite, for example, a "senior U.S. official" or "former UK official." The research team conducted its interviews in Washington and during research trips to Afghanistan, the UK, Austria, and Germany. The team also drew upon a significant body of interviews conducted for other SIGAR lessons learned reports, such as *Corruption in Conflict: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*.

While *Counternarcotics* reflects careful, thorough consideration of this wide range of sources, it is not an exhaustive treatment of the topic. Given the timeline and scale of U.S. engagement in Afghanistan and the divided responsibility for counternarcotics among coalition partners, the report does not aim to fully address how tens of thousands of U.S. civilian and military officials dealt with counternarcotics on a daily basis since 2002. Rather, the report focuses on key events and trends, and provides context on the development of the counternarcotics effort, relevant U.S. policies and initiatives, and competing priorities. From these, we derive lessons and recommendations to inform ongoing efforts in Afghanistan, as well as current and future contingency operations.

The report underwent an extensive process of peer review. The team sought and received feedback on the full draft report from 14 subject matter experts. These experts included Americans, Afghans, and representatives from ISAF nations, each of whom had significant experience working on or in Afghanistan. These reviewers provided thoughtful, detailed comments on the report, which we incorporated, as possible.

The Departments of Defense, State, Justice, and Treasury, as well as USAID and DEA, were also given an opportunity to formally review and comment on the report, after which we met with agency representatives to receive their feedback. Although we incorporated agencies' comments where appropriate, the analysis, conclusions, and recommendations of this report remain SIGAR's own.

GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM METHODOLOGY

The GIS analysis in this report uses imagery provided by MDA Information Systems LLC and Alics Holdings Ltd. The MDA imagery relies upon three sets of GPS data: (1) coordinates of USAID-funded alternative development and rural development programs; (2) coordinates of the plots of opium poppy crops destroyed by both Governor-Led Eradication and the Poppy Eradication Force; and (3) coordinates of projects funded by the Good Performers Initiative.

SIGAR provided numerous alternative development and rural development reports to MDA which were then subset by MDA based on their relevance to opium poppy cultivation. The data set for USAID-funded alternative and rural development programs includes those programs that identified reducing poppy cultivation as a program objective. If the development program did not identify this as an objective, it was not included in our analysis. One exception is Stability in Key Areas (SIKA) South, a stabilization program which supported a large number of irrigation programs in Helmand Province; SIKA South GPS coordinates are included in this data set. Because these irrigation programs were conducted in areas with high poppy probability, ignoring them would overlook a key poppy-relevant development input. While SIKA South was included for Helmand, SIKA East was not included in the Nangarhar data set. MDA omitted project data for which it was not possible to match project names, descriptions, coordinates and other information with a high degree of confidence. The USAID-funded projects for which SIGAR received GPS data spanned 2009–2014 in Helmand Province and 2005–2014 in Nangarhar Province.

The second data set, eradication data, contains the GPS coordinates of the field locations where the Poppy Eradication Force (PEF) and Governor-Led Eradication programs eradicated opium poppy crops from 2006 to 2014. The

data were provided to SIGAR by Alcis, a private contractor that maintained an inventory of eradication data, based on data collected by UNODC, the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics, and the PEF. In Helmand, there were 29,385 eradication points collected from 2006 to 2014, 24,841 of which were GLE efforts and 4,544 of which were PEF efforts. In Nangarhar, there were 14,781 eradication points, all collected by GLE.

The third data set, coordinates of projects funded by GPI, was provided by INL. INL regularly reported on the status of GPI projects, which included photographs with embedded GPS coordinates of each GPI project. This dataset was used to map the GPI effort on a national map.

One significant challenge to our GIS analysis was the quality of data U.S. agencies had and were willing to share. Problems with the specificity of the GPS data for rural development programs due, in part, to limitations of the data collection system, precluded a closer inspection of the outputs and impact of individual projects. For example, Afghan Info, a database that USAID uses to track development projects, does not provide the specific geographic coordinates of the projects implemented. Through a drop-down menu, Afghan Info only allows those entering GPS data to provide a province, district, and village name. Once a village name is entered, coordinates are automatically assigned. The design of Afghan Info means that only the GPS coordinates of the village center are recorded, even though the implementing partner may have the true coordinates of the irrigation system, orchard, or greenhouse provided by a project. This limitation of Afghan Info prevents the kind of detailed GIS analysis that could be conducted if GPS coordinates were collected directly and accurately from implementing partners.

We further recognize that the alternative development data do not constitute an exhaustive list of the development programs implemented in a given area. First, it is unclear whether all of the individual projects completed by implementing partners are included in the GPS data provided to us by USAID. Second, our analysis did not include alternative development projects implemented by other countries.

The rural development data in Nangarhar also have omissions. For example, they do not include some of the rural development programs funded by the EU, which was a major contributor to such programs in Nangarhar. Additional data omissions include DOD's CERP projects, which were excluded because of security classification.

The GIS crop mapping analysis used key locations within Helmand and Nangarhar. This analysis mapped the crop levels and patterns before, during,

and after counternarcotics interventions took place to identify trends in poppy cultivation in the area. To minimize bias in selecting sites for our analysis, a grid layer was generated over areas in Helmand and Nangarhar—where each grid needed to contain at least some agriculture—of 1000m by 1000m, or 100 hectares in size. Next, a weighting system that integrated different intervention combinations was generated and applied to the grid. To better understand the causal factors that led to changes in opium poppy cultivation, sites were then prioritized based on the presence of alternative development projects or eradication sites. The availability of high-resolution imagery for each site during appropriate time frames was assessed, further limiting the grids available for analysis.

Once a site was selected for analysis, the available imagery was formatted and examined to identify crop patterns within the grid. The six crop classes identified were poppy, wheat, orchard, vineyard, other crops, and prepared fields. To identify poppy, the analysts looked at many key indicators, including color, texture, image date versus crop cycle, presence of other crops in the area, eradicated fields in the area, and fields behind courtyard walls. After the fields were delineated, each field was reviewed multiple times in a rigorous, quality-controlled process, until analysts and subject matter experts reached consensus on which fields were, in fact, poppy.

The goal of the provincial intervention maps was to chart the spatial distribution of alternative development projects, poppy eradication locations, and coalition security sites. More than 14,000 poppy eradication points were plotted. Each year's eradication data were used to generate maps showing the density of points across the province, with red areas containing the highest number of eradication points and green areas containing the least. Each of the alternative development projects shown on the map were categorized by sector: agriculture, orchards, agribusiness, infrastructure, irrigation, education, and gender/micro-enterprise. Multiple and duplicate points per project were reduced wherever possible to approximately one point per project for better mapping clarity. The location of all known security sites, such as bases and checkpoints, were displayed on each provincial map with either an active or inactive/transferred symbol.

The goal of the national GPI map was to chart the spatial distribution of GPI projects from 2008 through 2015. Due to multiple and duplicate points per project, the original 520 points that contained GPS coordinate data were reduced to 292 data points, or approximately one point per project. Project sectors were agriculture, health, transportation, infrastructure, irrigation, education, and gender/micro-enterprise.

BUDGETARY ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY

This report also analyzes U.S. government budget data to better understand how the counternarcotics effort in Afghanistan was resourced across the U.S. government and how the allocation of resources changed over time. The data that serve as the basis for this analysis were provided to SIGAR by the four agencies responsible for the majority of counternarcotics programming in Afghanistan—DOD, State, USAID, and DEA—through quarterly data calls. The data were supplemented by written communications and meetings with relevant government agencies, as well as agency-produced funding documents such as Congressional Budget Justifications. Additionally, during the course of our research, we worked closely with each agency and solicited their feedback to ensure our budgetary figures and analysis accurately reflected true funding levels.

This report's budgetary analysis attempts to capture all funds that were appropriated through a counternarcotics-specific funding line, such as State's International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement and DOD's Drug Interdiction and Counter-Drug Activities (DOD CN) fund. Our analysis also includes funds appropriated through non-counternarcotics funding lines, such as the Economic Support Fund, but which went toward programs that demonstrated an explicit counterdrug focus. To compare funding across the whole of the U.S. government, SIGAR used the term "allocated," for consistency and to incorporate sources that did not always clearly distinguish between appropriations, obligations, and disbursements. INCLE budget figures are based on obligations reported by INL, as well as Congressional Budget Justifications, and information provided by INL according to the first year in which funds were made available. For USAID, budget figures are based on the total obligations reported for selected programs divided by the program's total months and spread over the lifespan of the project. DOD figures reflect the agency's position that reported DOD CN fund figures are the same for both obligation and disbursement. Finally, DEA figures are intended to reflect funding from the DEA budget line, as well as transfers from State's South and Central Asia account. All figures are intended to capture obligation rather than disbursement or appropriations in order to best reflect the point at which funding decisions were made at the agency level.

DOD, State, USAID, and DEA provided SIGAR with funding data in varying formats, including differences in activity type, reporting style, and budget terminology. This report's analysis focused solely on those programs implemented from FY 2002 through the end of FY 2017. Because the report's scope did not include an exhaustive review of contract documents from the 16-year period studied, we did not consider whether money was routed to

unreported activities; the data provided by the agencies were taken at face value. Additionally, while the report recognizes counternarcotics appropriations contributed to non-counterdrug programs, SIGAR used the data provided by agencies rather than attempting to determine what portion of a program's funding was directed toward achieving counternarcotics goals, and what portion was used for another purpose.

The research team organized the budgetary data into the four strands of effort that characterized U.S. counternarcotics activities: interdiction and counternarcotics law enforcement, eradication, alternative development, and mobilizing Afghan political support and building institutions. Together, these four strands accounted for more than 97 percent of the \$7.28 billion dollars specifically allocated for counternarcotics programming.

While the four strands align closely with the five pillars of counternarcotics (public information, alternative development, eradication, interdiction, and justice reform) identified by State in 2005, there are important differences. For example, because one of the goals of drug interdiction is a successful prosecution and conviction of drug traffickers, the justice reform pillar was examined as part of a holistic interdiction and counternarcotics law enforcement strand. Additionally, while the Good Performers Initiative was sometimes presented as an alternative development program, SIGAR's analysis shows it often served a more political purpose, attempting to motivate provincial governors to achieve drug-crop reductions rather than directly working to develop new livelihood sources for farmers. For this reason, GPI-related funding was considered to be part of the mobilizing political support strand.

The U.S. counternarcotics strategy was not static, but changed over time. SIGAR's analysis of the strands recognizes this evolution; the strands are intended to serve as useful categories through which to examine the programming and policies that characterized the U.S. counterdrug effort from 2002 throughout 2017.

APPENDIX C: ABBREVIATIONS

Acronym	Definition
ACE	Agriculture Credit Enhancement
ADF	Agriculture Development Fund
ADP	Alternative Development Program
AEF	Afghan Eradication Force
AIU	Air Interdiction Unit
ALP	Alternative Livelihoods Program
ALP	Afghan Local Police
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANDSF	Afghan National Defense and Security Forces
ANP	Afghan National Police
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
ASFF	Afghan Security Forces Fund
ASNF	Afghan Special Narcotics Force (or TF-333)
ATFC	Afghan Threat Finance Cell
AVIPA	Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture
BADILL	Boost Alternative Development Intervention through Licit Livelihoods
CDP	Community Development Program
CHAMP	Commercial Horticulture and Agriculture Program
CJIATF-Shafafiyat	Combined Joint Interagency Task Force-Shafafiyat
CJIATF-Nexus	Combined Joint Interagency Task Force-Nexus
CNAT	Counter Narcotics Advisory Team
CNC	Crime and Narcotics Center (CIA)
CND	Counter Narcotics Directorate
CNIK	Counter Narcotics Infantry Kandak
CNJC	Counter Narcotics Justice Center
CNPA	Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan
CNTF	Counter Narcotics Trust Fund
COIN	Counterinsurgency
CPDAP	Colombo Plan Drug Advisory Program
CPEF	Central Poppy Eradication Force
CRS	Congressional Research Service
CSTC-A	Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan
CT	Counterterrorism
DASD	Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense

Acronym	Definition
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
DEA	Drug Enforcement Administration
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
DOD	Department of Defense
DOD CN	DOD Drug Interdiction and Counter-Drug Activities Fund
DOJ	Department of Justice
EU	European Union
FAST	Foreign-Deployed Advisory and Support Teams (DEA)
FinTRACA	Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Center for Afghanistan
FIU	Financial Investigative Unit
FY	Fiscal Year
G8	Group of Eight
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GIS	Geographic Information System
GLE	Governor-Led Eradication
GPI	Good Performers Initiative
HFZ	Helmand Food Zone
HVT	High-Value Target
IDEA-NEW	Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives for the North, East, and West
INCSR	International Narcotics Control Strategy Report
INL	Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (State)
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JNAC	UK Joint Narcotics Analysis Centre
KFZ	Kandahar Food Zone
LOTFA	Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan
MAATP	Marjah Accelerated Agricultural Transition Program
MAIL	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock
MCN	Ministry of Counter Narcotics
MOI	Ministry of Interior
MOPH	Ministry of Public Health
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development

Acronym	Definition
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NIU	National Interdiction Unit
NPP	National Priority Program
NSC	National Security Council
ONDCP	Office of National Drug Control Policy
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense
OSD/CNGT	Office of the Secretary of Defense, Counternarcotics and Global Threats
OSDR	Organization for Sustainable Development and Research
PEF	Poppy Eradication Force
PEP	Poppy Elimination Program
PMP	Performance Management Plan
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
RADP	Regional Agricultural Development Program
RAMP	Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program
SHCDC	State High Commission for Drug Control
SIKA	Stability in Key Areas
SIU	Sensitive Investigative Unit
SMW	Special Mission Wing
SRAP	Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TF-333	Afghan Special Narcotics Force
TIU	Technical Investigative Unit
TMAF	Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework
UNDCCP	UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USFOR-A	U.S. Forces-Afghanistan
USIP	U.S. Institute of Peace

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138. Acting Assistant Secretary of State McGlynn, letter to Antonio Costa, Executive Director of the UNODC, June 11, 2010, p. 1; Acting Assistant Secretary of State McGlynn, letter to Yury Fedotov, Executive Director of the UNODC, September 24, 2010, p. 1; Assistant Secretary of State Brownfield, letter to Fedotov, June 10, 2013, p. 1.
139. CRS, *Afghanistan: Drug Trafficking and the 2014 Transition*, R43540, May 9, 2014, p. 16; International Narcotics Control Board, *2012 Report*, March 5, 2013, p. 96; Government of Afghanistan, MCN, *Afghanistan Drug Report 2012*, November 2013, p. 22.
140. State, email to SIGAR, March 6, 2018.
141. Former Afghan deputy minister, SIGAR interview, April 13, 2016.
142. GAO, *Plan Colombia: Drug Reduction Goals Were Not Fully Met, but Security Has Improved; U.S. Agencies Need More Detailed Plans for Reducing Assistance*, GAO-09-71, October 6, 2008, pp. 1–2.
143. "Illicit Drugs," CIA World Factbook website, accessed May 9, 2018.
144. Assistant Secretary of State for INL Anne Patterson, testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programs, hearing on "Afghan Drug Eradication and Rebuilding Programs," September 12, 2006, pp. 20–21.
145. USAID, Asia and Near East Bureau, *USAID Counternarcotics Programs: Colombian Applications to Afghanistan*, Andrew Natsios Archives, Georgetown University Library, November 18, 2004.
146. "I would go so far as to call it something tantamount to a Plan Afghanistan, which has parallels to the Plan Colombia effort." Assistant Secretary of State for INL Robert B. Charles, "Counternarcotics

- Initiatives for Afghanistan,” on-the-record briefing at the U.S. Department of State, November 17, 2004.
147. Steve Coll, *Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2018), pp. 266–267, 270–273; Phillip A. Berry, “Allies at War in Afghanistan: Anglo American Friction over Aerial Poppy Eradication (2004–2007),” *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, vol. 29 issue 2 (2018) p. 287.
 148. Chris Kraul, “Calling in the Drug Cavalry,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 6, 2006; State, *U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy*, August 2007, p. 51; Mansfield, SIGAR interview, April 11, 2018.
 149. “Plan Colombia was seen as a success, so it starts to be seen as part of the solution. But it had very different conditions: (i) Uribe was a credible leader and linked insurgency and drugs; (ii) the Colombian military was competent; (iii) there was U.S. commitment, as the final product [cocaine] was going to the United States.” Former NSC Senior Director for Afghanistan John Wood, SIGAR interview, June 17, 2015. “I believe the United States tried to make comparisons and transfer the CN model from Colombia but couldn’t. There was no ownership of counternarcotics by the Afghans, unlike in Colombia.” Senior U.S. government official, SIGAR interview, March 14, 2016.
 150. Mohammed Ehsan Zia, former Minister for Rural Rehabilitation and Development, correspondence with SIGAR, August 20, 2017.
 151. Neil Fantom and Umar Serajuddin, “The World Bank’s Classification of Countries by Income,” policy research working paper 7528, World Bank Group, January 2016, pp. 40, 42.
 152. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, “Fact Sheet: Peace Colombia—A New Era of Partnership between the United States and Colombia,” press release, February 4, 2016.
 153. The IMF estimated that “as much as 50 percent of the GDP of Afghanistan is derived from narcotics,” while the total value of coca production in Colombia for 2008 was estimated at about 0.21 percent of Colombia’s GDP. Assistant Secretary of State for INL Robert B. Charles, “Afghanistan: Are the British Counternarcotics Efforts Going Wobbly?,” testimony before the House Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources of the Committee on Government Reform, hearing on “British Counternarcotics Efforts in Afghanistan,” April 1, 2004, p. 11; Daniel Mejía, “Plan Colombia: An Analysis of Effectiveness and Costs,” Brookings Institution, 2016, p. 7.
 154. William Wechsler, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Counternarcotics and Global Threats, SIGAR interview, November 1, 2016.
 155. Lt. Gen. David W. Barno (U.S. Army, Ret.), quoted in “Planning and Directing a Campaign: General Barno in Afghanistan,” *Enduring Voices: Oral Histories of the U.S. Army Experience in Afghanistan, 2003–2005*, ed. Christopher N. Koontz (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 2008), p. 29.
 156. SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, October 30, 2014, p. 11.
 157. USAID Office of Inspector General, *Audit of USAID/Afghanistan’s Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives for the North, East, and West Program*, Audit Report No F-306-12-004-P, June 29, 2012, p. 5; David Mansfield, *Examining the Impact of IDEA-NEW on Opium Production: Nangarhar, a Case Study*, USAID, January 11, 2015, p. 67.
 158. Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, pp. 31, 116, 229.
 159. Schweich, testimony before the House Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia and the Oversight and Investigations of the Committee on International Relations, hearing on “Afghanistan: Progress Report,” (March 9, 2006); State, *U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan*, August 2007, p. 29.
 160. State, *U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan*, August 2007, p. 13.
 161. Dr. Barnett Rubin, correspondence with SIGAR, September 18, 2017.
 162. CNC produces the poppy crop estimates that are used by U.S. agencies, including the State Department, and presents those estimates to Congress. CNC uses high-resolution imagery to conduct a comprehensive review of Afghanistan’s poppy-growing areas to classify each field by poppy and non-poppy crop types. Former congressional staffer, SIGAR interview, September 16, 2016.
 163. Prior to 2002, the UNODC national estimate was based on aggregating surveyors’ visual estimates of the level of cultivation in each village in which opium poppy was reported. Consequently, it was impossible to establish a margin of error for the UNODC survey or make meaningful comparisons over time. J. C. Taylor and A. L. Stocker, *Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan: Report to UNODC*, (Cranfield University, October 2003), p. 6; UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016: Cultivation and Production*, December 2016, p. 43.
 164. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2002*, October 2002, p. 4; Crime and Narcotics Center (CNC), data provided to SIGAR, October 15, 2015.
 165. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007*, October 2007, p. 9; CNC, data provided to SIGAR, October 15, 2015.
 166. “UNODC didn’t like the poppy survey being verified by Cranfield. They also didn’t understand why the UK was verifying while also giving UNODC money to verify. Essentially we didn’t believe UNODC’s cultivation or eradication figures were of high quality.” Former UK government official, SIGAR interview, May 11, 2016. “The UK believed the poppy survey was poor, so they got Cranfield in and used this as [the] basis for negotiating with UNODC on the survey.” Former senior UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office official, SIGAR interview, April 5, 2016.
 167. Former UK government contractor, SIGAR interview, May 10, 2016.
 168. Former congressional staffer, SIGAR interview, September 16, 2016. Part of the explanation for the discrepancies at the provincial level lay with

- the different approaches adopted by the two organizations, including how they calculated the full extent of the agricultural areas, how samples were selected, and the number of satellite images collected. Taylor and Stocker, *Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan*, p. 5.
169. "The trust [General] Allen placed in the virtue of these lengthy sessions belied the presence of a key defect. The data always seemed suspect. Many metrics hung on things that defied numbers. How did you measure the annual poppy cultivation? This illegal activity provided spending money for Pashtun subsistence farmers and, incidentally, financed the Taliban. It wasn't like the locals registered their illicit crops. Analysts resorted to guesses based on aerial surveillance and patrol reports. Then they rolled them up. Over time the numerals gained a certainty not present when the inputs were gathered." Daniel Bolger, *Why We Lost: A General's Inside Account of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars* (Boston, MA: Eamon Dolan Books, 2014), p. 389.
 170. Former senior NSC official, SIGAR interview, June 23, 2016.
 171. For examples of U.S. agencies and officials referring to the concept of eradicating 25 percent of the poppy crop as a sufficient or credible deterrent to future planting, see State, *U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan*, August 2007, p. 52; and Ambassador William Wood, statement to the Policy Advisory Group, August 1, 2007, p. 4.
 172. Former eradication contractor, SIGAR interview, November 2, 2016.
 173. Former UK government contractor, SIGAR interview, May 10, 2016.
 174. Former UNODC official, SIGAR interview, June 15, 2016.
 175. "UNODC Director General Costa has said many times that, to be a deterrent to cultivation, eradication must reach at least 25 per cent of the crop. . . . We will advocate a clear target for the 2008 harvest year, in line with DG Costa's recommendation: 25 percent of this year's 200,000 hectares, or 50,000 hectares." Ambassador Wood, statement to the Policy Advisory Group, pp. 4–6.
 176. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007*, October 2007, p. iii.
 177. Thomas Schweich, "Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?" *New York Times*, July 27, 2008. As Coordinator for Counternarcotics and Justice Reform in Afghanistan, Schweich was accorded the rank of Ambassador by President George W. Bush. At that time, the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan was Ronald Neumann.
 178. Former senior UK government official, SIGAR interview, March 18, 2016; State, "Afghanistan Counternarcotics Coordinator Schweich Briefs New U.S. CN Strategy in Kabul, London, Berlin, and Vienna: Support for Forceful Poppy Eradication Emerging in Unexpected Quarters," State 138384 cable, October 1, 2007. See also: Coll, *Directorate S*, pp. 274, 277.
 179. UNODC, *Thematic Evaluation of the Technical Assistance Provided to Afghanistan by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, Illicit Crop Monitoring Program, Volume 6, May 2008, pp. 12, 52; Rubin and Sherman, *Counter-Narcotics to Stabilize Afghanistan*, pp. 50–56.
 180. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003*, October 2003, p. 53; State, "Joint UK-U.S. Demarche to President Karzai on Counternarcotics," State 141383 cable, July 23, 2002.
 181. Former UK government contractor, SIGAR interview, May 10, 2016.
 182. Mansfield, SIGAR interview, April 11, 2018.
 183. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005*, November 2005, pp. 9, 53. "In 2005, UNODC didn't want to get involved in eradication verification, as it would get in the way of the survey. They said they didn't even want to be associated with any planning around eradication. They wanted nothing to do with it. UNODC eventually agreed to set up a separate project to verify eradication and bought a lot of imagery." Former UK government contractor, SIGAR interview, May 10, 2016.
 184. Former UK government contractor, SIGAR interview, May 10, 2016; former UK government official, SIGAR interview, May 11, 2016.
 185. Mansfield, SIGAR interview, April 11, 2018; former UK government contractor, SIGAR interview, May 10, 2016.
 186. Patterson, testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programs, hearing on "Afghan Drug Eradication and Rebuilding Programs," September 12, 2006, p. 26.
 187. In his support for aerial eradication, scholar David Kilcullen went further, claiming that "even the harshest efforts to eradicate the poppy would be highly unlikely to alienate anything like the majority of the population, except in the areas that already firmly support the Taliban and are therefore already alienated anyway." David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 63.
 188. "Stuart Jones, the twenty-eight-year-old Treasury Department attaché in Kabul, recalled spending an excruciating day at ISAF headquarters trying to come to a collective agreement on how much money the Taliban raised each year, and where it came from. The soldiers and civilians made broad assumptions based on scant evidence. The final conclusion was somewhere in the hundreds of millions. 'It was a guess in the end,' Jones said." Joshua Partlow, *A Kingdom of their Own: The Family Karzai and the Afghan Disaster* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2016), p. 87.
 189. Mansfield, *From Bad They Made It Worse*, AREU, pp. 75–76. One example of an influential report that portrayed ushr as a flat 10 percent tax by the Taliban on poppy farmers, and likely overstated the revenue that the Taliban receives from farmers, was a 2014 report by the Financial Action Task Force. Financial Action Task Force, *FATF Report: Financial flows linked to the production and trafficking of Afghan opiates*, June 2014, pp. 42–43.

190. INL Director for the Office of Asia, Africa, Europe, and Newly Independent States William Bach, testimony before the Committee on Government Reform U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources, hearing on "The Taliban, Terrorism, and the Drug Trade," (October 3, 2001).
191. Prime Minister Tony Blair, "Statement to the House of Commons, London, UK, October 4, 2001, transcript from CNN.
192. DEA Administrator Karen Tandy, "Drug Enforcement Administration Testimony," testimony before the House Committee on International Relations, hearing on "United States Policy towards Narcoterrorism in Afghanistan," February 12, 2004.
193. Former DOD official, SIGAR interview, May 17, 2016.
194. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007*, October 2007, pp. iii–iv.
195. State, INL, "Fighting the Opium Trade in Afghanistan: Myths, Facts, and Sound Policy," March 11, 2008.
196. Coll, *Directorate S*, pp. 266–270.
197. Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 63.
198. UN Security Council, "First report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Implementation Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 1988 (2011) concerning the Taliban and associated individuals and entities," September 5, 2012, pp. 13–14.
199. Nicholson, "Department of Defense Press Briefing by General Nicholson in the Pentagon Briefing Room," December 2, 2016.
200. Combating Terrorism Archive Project, "Interview with Kirk Meyer, Former Director of the Afghan Threat Finance Cell," April 2, 2014.
201. DOD, email to SIGAR, March 13, 2018.
202. Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, pp. 158, 160.
203. "When we were in Helmand there was a lot more internal disputes about how to conduct the counternarcotics effort. . . . You had the military, in large numbers and at senior levels, saying we must not stir things up with counternarcotics." Berry, "Allies at War in Afghanistan," p. 284.
204. Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 296.
205. Peters, *How Opium Profits the Taliban*, p. 14.
206. Barbara Crossette, "Taliban's Ban on Poppy a Success, U.S. Aides Say," *New York Times*, May 20, 2001; Barry Bearak, "At Heroin's Source, Taliban Do What 'Just Say No' Could Not," *New York Times*, May 24, 2001; Andrew Tully, "Afghanistan: Analysts Ponder Why Taliban Banned Poppy Cultivation," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, June 14, 2001; Luke Harding, "World's opium source destroyed," *Guardian*, March 31, 2001; Preston Mendenhall, "Afghanistan's cash crop wilts," *NBC News*, May 23, 2001.
207. Barnett Rubin, *Road to Ruin: Afghanistan's Booming Opium Industry*, Center for American Progress and the Center on International Cooperation, October 7, 2004, p. 4.
208. Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 127.
209. Donor Mission of the UN International Drug Control Programme, "The Impact of the Taliban Prohibition on Opium Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan," May 25, 2001, pp. 4, 8–9; Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 126.
210. Rubin, *Road to Ruin*, p. 5.
211. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2002*, October 2002, p. 26; UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003*, October 2003, p. 5.
212. Charles, "Counternarcotics Initiatives for Afghanistan," November 17, 2004. "The United States was happy to see the UK take the lead on counternarcotics—it was one less thing for them to do." Former UK official, SIGAR interview, April 6, 2016.
213. U.S. Embassy official, SIGAR interview, March 15, 2016; Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, pp. 147–148.
214. "The UK was keen to keep the UN on the side at this stage; the United States was less bothered. . . . There was some increase in confidence with Costa's arrival, but not much. . . . Initially, UNODC went through a hurt phase, upset that counternarcotics had been taken away from them. In recognition of the fact that they didn't have a great reputation, the penny then dropped. They were dealing with powerful countries and they didn't have any responsibility." Former UK official, SIGAR interview, April 6, 2016. "UNODC's policy influence was zero. The lead nation didn't want interference and UNODC didn't have skills or personality to gain influence." Former senior UN adviser, SIGAR interview, May 20, 2016; former senior UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office official, SIGAR interview, April 5, 2016.
215. State, "Joint UK-U.S. Demarche to President Karzai on Counternarcotics," State 141383 cable, July 23, 2002.
216. Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Counterinsurgency Counternarcotics, and Illicit Economies in Afghanistan: Lessons for State-Building" in *Convergence: Illicit Networks and National Security in the Age of Globalization* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2013), p. 190; Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Peacekeepers among Poppies: Afghanistan, Illicit Economies and Intervention," *International Peacekeeping*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2009): p. 106. The decree announcing compensated eradication was dated April 3, 2002 and outlined a payment of \$250 per jerib, stating, "Given the prevalence of drought and poverty in the last four years, we have decided to assist the farmers in the following manner: the sum of \$250 per jerib will be given to the farmer after the destruction of his crop has been witnessed by a special government delegation. The money will be given to the farmer on the spot without any intermediaries. The price that will be paid to each farmer will exceed the revenue he would have received from growing wheat and the costs associated with growing opium. It should be clear that this is a one-time assistance. The ban on cultivation will be strictly enforced from now on." The payment was subsequently increased from \$250 to \$350 per jerib during the course of the compensated eradication campaign. U.S. Mission to the UN in Vienna, "UNDCP Status Report on Afghanistan for Major Donors, April

- 9 in Vienna" Vienna 000559 cable, April 12, 2002; Philip Berry, "From London to Lashkar Gah: British Counter Narcotics Policies in Afghanistan (2001–03)," *International History Review* (2017), p. 10.
217. Former Afghan minister, SIGAR interview, April 12, 2016; former Afghan deputy minister, SIGAR interview, April 13, 2016; Khalilzad, *The Envoy*, p. 205; former senior DOD official, SIGAR interview, May 16, 2016; Cowper-Coles cited in Shapiro, "Politics of Poppy," p. 16; Rubin, *Road to Ruin*, p. 15; Cawkwell, *UK Communication Strategies for Afghanistan*, p. 90.
218. Rubin, *Road to Ruin*, p. 15.
219. Peter Osborne, "A Victory for Drug Pushers," *The Spectator*, May 31, 2003.
220. "Long term elimination of opium cultivation, with the aim of seventy percent reduction by the year 1386, and complete elimination by the year 1391." Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, "National Drug Control Strategy: 5-Year Strategy (1381–1386) for Tackling Illicit Drug Problems in Afghanistan," May 18, 2003, p. 8.
221. A UK official at the time referred to the United States as "very quiet on counternarcotics, even in early 2003." Former UK senior official, SIGAR interview, May 4, 2015; former senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 6, 2016; Lisa Curtis, "U.S. Counternarcotics Policy: Essential to Fighting Terrorism in Afghanistan," Heritage Foundation, Backgrounder No. 2845, September 30, 2013, p. 2.
222. Former senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 6, 2016.
223. Khalilzad, *The Envoy*, p. 206.
224. Khalilzad, *The Envoy*, p. 206.
225. Michael G. Waltz, *Warrior Diplomat: A Green Beret's Battles from Washington to Afghanistan*, (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2011), pp. 29, 39; James Risen, *State of War: The Secret History of the CIA and the Bush Administration*, (New York, NY: Free Press, 2006), pp. 161–162; former UK senior official, SIGAR interview, May 4, 2015.
226. Andre Hollis, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, SIGAR interview, May 16, 2016.
227. Former NSC official, SIGAR interview, June 28, 2016; senior DOD official, SIGAR interview, June 23, 2016; former senior official, Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan, SIGAR interview, September 21, 2016.
228. Lt. Gen. Barno in "Chapter 2, Planning and Directing a Campaign: General Barno in Afghanistan," *Enduring Voices*, p. 29.
229. Senior DOD official, SIGAR interview, June 23, 2016. In terms of analysis, however, the CIA's Crime and Narcotics Center (also known as the Counter Narcotics Center, CNC) has produced annual estimates of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.
230. James Risen, "An Afghan's Path from U.S. Ally to Drug Suspect," *New York Times*, February 2, 2007; former UK senior official, SIGAR interview, May 4, 2015.
231. Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan, "National Drug Control Strategy: 5-Year Strategy (1381–1386)," May 18, 2003, p. 17.
232. "President Karzai had sent an official letter to create the CND, but Elahi and the State High Commission for Drug Control carried on. They had no salaries from the government, but got them from Elahi. He had his own sources. We worked on getting SHDC staff to move to CND. Eventually the SHDC disappeared." Former Afghan deputy minister, SIGAR interview, April 13, 2016.
233. Senior UK official, SIGAR interview, August 31, 2016.
234. Former senior UN adviser, SIGAR interview, May 19, 2016.
235. Former UK Her Majesty's Customs and Excise official, SIGAR interview, May 11, 2016.
236. DEA Administrator Karen Tandy, testimony before the House Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources for the Committee on Government Reform, hearing on "Afghanistan: Law Enforcement Interdiction Efforts in Transshipment Countries to Stem the Flow of Heroin," February 26, 2004, p. 3.
237. SIGAR, *Counternarcotics Police of Afghanistan: U.S. Assistance to Provincial Units Cannot Be Fully Tracked and Formal Capability Assessments Are Needed*, SIGAR 15-12-AR, October 29, 2014, p. 1.
238. UK Her Majesty's Customs and Excise official, correspondence with SIGAR, February 28, 2018. "The UK national agenda was, 'do it quicker, do it bigger and make it happen.' But they couldn't get recurrent costs for anything. The Germans really didn't get the issue of recurrent costs. They provided VW cars but no fuel and repairs." UK Her Majesty's Customs and Excise official, SIGAR interview, April 7, 2016.
239. "In October 2003, we travelled from Islamabad to Kabul via Torkham. We visited the CNPA in Jalalabad. They made a seizure of 25 kg, but had to pay for the information with 5 kg of the seizure to do their job." Former UK Her Majesty's Customs and Excise official, SIGAR interview, April 6, 2016.
240. CRS, *War in Afghanistan: Strategy, Military Operations, and Issues for Congress*, R40156, December 3, 2009, p. 50; BBC News, "Panorama," program transcript, October 10, 2005; CRS, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy*, RL32686, August 12, 2009, p. 41.
241. UK Ministry of Defence official, SIGAR interview, May 11, 2016.
242. DEA, *Intelligence Assessment for Afghanistan*, June 2005, pp. 6, 23, and 62.
243. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "INL Program in Afghanistan: A Revised, Accelerated and Integrated Approach," Kabul 002566 cable, September 14, 2003.
244. Former senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 6, 2016; USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 1, 2016.
245. J. Michael Deal, "Lessons from Drug Crop Elimination," December 13, 2001.
246. Elisabeth Kvitashvili, former senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 6, 2016.
247. Kvitashvili, SIGAR interview, June 6, 2016.
248. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Karzai Sees Downside of GOA Wheat Price Support Proposal," Kabul 003459

- cable, August 29, 2005; Chemonics International, Inc., “Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program (RAMP) Afghanistan,” quarterly progress report, prepared under contract for USAID, October 30, 2004, pp. 4–5; Chemonics International, Inc., “Afghanistan RAMP Rebuilding Agricultural Markets in Afghanistan: Cotton Production Assessment,” prepared under contract for USAID, July 2004; Chemonics International, Inc., “Afghanistan RAMP Rebuilding Agricultural Markets in Afghanistan: Trip Report—Dried Fruit and Nuts Conference,” prepared under contract for USAID, March 2004; USAID Office of Inspector General, *Audit of USAID/Afghanistan’s Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program*, Audit Report No. 5-306-06-002-P, March 28, 2006.
249. U.S. Embassy Kabul, “INL Program in Afghanistan: A Revised, Accelerated and Integrated Approach to Counternarcotics through Rural Development and Law Enforcement,” Kabul 002566 cable, September 14, 2003; Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, “Inception Report: Alternative Agricultural Livelihoods Programme (AALP) Strategy, Logical Framework and 2006 Workplan,” version 1.4, November 5, 2005; Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN Afghanistan, “Development of Sustainable Agricultural Livelihoods in the Eastern Hazarajat (Saleh),” mid-term review report, September 23, 2006, pp. 16, 33.
 250. Senior DOD official, SIGAR interview, June 23, 2016.
 251. “Lead nations were failing. The Germans had eight mentors for national support. The Italians were worse.” Senior DOD official, SIGAR interview, September 12, 2016. “Even if things lined up with the lead nation, none of them were moving at the same pace. The Italians and justice were particularly slow but there were growing frustrations with the UK approach to counternarcotics.” Former NSC Senior Director for Afghanistan John Wood, SIGAR interview, June 17, 2015; Douglas Feith, *War and Decision: Inside the Pentagon and the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2008), pp. 153–155; George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York, NY: Crown Publishing Group, 2010), p. 211.
 252. Bush, *Decision Points*, p. 211.
 253. Feith, *War and Decision*, p. 154.
 254. Former U.S. Embassy official, SIGAR interview, March 15, 2016; Charles, “Counternarcotics Initiatives for Afghanistan,” November 17, 2004; Charles, “State Department’s Air Wing and Plan Colombia,” on-the-record briefing at the U.S. Department of State, October 29, 2003.
 255. Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, p. 149; Charles, testimony before the House Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources of the Committee on Government Reform, hearing on “British Counternarcotics Efforts in Afghanistan,” April 1, 2004, pp. 16, 20, 21.
 256. Khalilzad, *The Envoy*, pp. 192, 206.
 257. Former senior DEA official, SIGAR interview, April 19, 2016.
 258. Former senior DEA official, SIGAR interview, April 19, 2016; former eradication contractor, SIGAR interview, November 2, 2016.
 259. Former senior DEA official, SIGAR interview, April 19, 2016.
 260. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005*, November 2005, p. 1; Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, p. 141.
 261. “Let me be clear: If it is true that there is some foot dragging by the British in this complex matter [of counternarcotics], the U.S. Department of Defense comes off far worse.” Charles, testimony before the House Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources of the Committee on Government Reform, hearing on “British Counternarcotics Efforts in Afghanistan,” April 1, 2004, p. 2.
 262. Waltz, *Warrior Diplomat*, p. 36.
 263. U.S. Embassy official, SIGAR interview, March 15, 2016.
 264. U.S. Embassy official, SIGAR interview, March 15, 2016.
 265. State, *U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy*, August 2007, pp. 21, 49.
 266. Former senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 6, 2016.
 267. USAID/Afghanistan, “Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5,” 2016, pp. 14–15.
 268. USAID/Afghanistan, “Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5,” 2016, pp. 15–16.
 269. USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 1, 2016; former Congressional staffer, SIGAR interview, September 16, 2016; USAID official, SIGAR interview, May 17, 2016; former senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 6, 2016; former Afghan minister, SIGAR interview, April 12, 2016.
 270. USAID/Afghanistan, “Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5,” 2016, p. 14.
 271. USAID/Afghanistan, “Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5,” 2016, p. 4.
 272. Doug Wankel, former director of the Kabul Counter Narcotics Task Force at U.S. Embassy Kabul, SIGAR interview, April 19 2016.
 273. Felbab-Brown, *Shooting Up*, p. 141; CRS, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy*, RL32686, December 7, 2004, p. 31. Felbab-Brown points to greater DOD willingness to engage in counternarcotics efforts by 2004 and 2005; however, the CRS report cites evidence of ongoing DOD reluctance.
 274. DEA Chief of Operations James L. Capra, testimony before the Caucus on International Narcotics Control, hearing on “Future U.S. Counternarcotics Efforts in Afghanistan,” January 15, 2014, p. 1; Chandrasekaran, *Little America*, p. 66.
 275. Senior DOD official, SIGAR interview, June 23, 2016; senior DOD Senior official, SIGAR interview, September 12, 2016.
 276. “There was \$25 million in funding and State said, ‘No, we are going to use it for eradication.’ There was a huge fight. DOD said it would not do interdiction. But eradication won and State said it could not do both. Dumb, dumb, dumb. It wanted a spray program. Karzai and Khalilzad said no. It couldn’t be forced down their throats and no PRT wanted

- it in their region.” Senior DOD official, SIGAR interview, June 23, 2016; “We agreed to disagree with Bobby Charles on eradication. At deputies meetings, the discussion focused on what to do with \$25 million. Should it go to the judicial system or eradication? It went to eradication.” Senior DOD official, SIGAR interview, September 12, 2016.
277. Berry, “Allies at War in Afghanistan,” p. 283; Peter Holland and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “AFG 04 Memorandum from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office,” March 2, 2006, accessed December 1, 2017. Further examples of the UK’s reinvigorated CN effort include the establishment of the UK Afghan Drugs Inter-Departmental Unit and the British Embassy Drugs Team. UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “Afghan Drugs Inter-Departmental Unit,” April 2006, p. 1.
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 279. UNODC, “International Counter Narcotics Conference on Afghanistan,” February 8–9, 2004; Government of Afghanistan, “National Drug Control Strategy,” January 2006; UNODC, *Afghanistan, 2006–2010: Strategic Programme Framework*, September 2006.
 280. Mansfield, SIGAR interview, April 11, 2018.
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 283. CRS, *NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance*, RL33627, December 3, 2009, p. 15.
 284. One senior military official noted that in 2004, “There was a massive communication challenge caused by the U.S. bureaucracy—a function of the competitive environment in the U.S. for raising resources and the number of different agencies who felt they had a role to play. The result was that the DEA would not speak to CFC Alpha Command Intelligence Centre. The UK would pass some information through. INL had different information and each institution felt they had a hand to play. It was a dog’s breakfast with no chance of working.” Former senior official, Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan, SIGAR interview, September 21, 2016.
 285. Former senior official, Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan, SIGAR interview, September 21, 2016.
 286. “The DEA were not there in the early stage. They worked cross border. It was unclear what they were doing, but it was not capacity building. It was not until the Attaché arrived in late 2002. His immediate reaction was that we couldn’t do anything. We convinced him to help build capacity and argued you can’t run before you can walk.” UK Her Majesty’s Customs and Excise official, SIGAR interview, April 7, 2016.
 287. Former senior DEA official, SIGAR interview, November 3, 2016.
 288. Office of Inspectors General for DOJ and State, “A Special Joint Review of Post-Incident Responses by the Department of State and Drug Enforcement Administration to Three Deadly Force Incidents in Honduras,” Oversight and Review 17-02, ESP-17-01, May 2017, p. 17.
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 290. World Bank, “Treating the Opium Problem in World Bank Operations in Afghanistan,” 2006.
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 293. “About Us,” CART-F website, accessed March 3, 2017.
 294. Berry, “Allies at War in Afghanistan,” pp. 274–275, 281, 285; former senior DEA official, SIGAR interview, April 19, 2016. The European Commission’s Francisco Bataler Martin opposed aerial spraying, arguing the “‘indiscriminate’ nature of [aerial eradication] would affect the weakest members of society,” and that “eradication should only take place when farmers have alternative legitimate sources of income.” U.S. Mission to the UN in Vienna, “Paris Pact Experts Round Table on Afghanistan and Neighboring Countries,” Vienna 000683 cable, November 13, 2007.
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 296. Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul*, p. 84–87; Berry, “Allies at War in Afghanistan,” pp. 284–285.
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 298. Charles, “Counternarcotics Initiatives for Afghanistan,” November 17, 2004.
 299. State, *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR)*, 2008, p. 238.
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304. Jeffrey Dressler, *Counterinsurgency in Helmand: Progress and Remaining Challenges*, *Afghanistan Report 8*, Institute for the Study of War, January 2011, pp. 9, 29.
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318. "The U.S. government stepped back due to the Holbrooke decision on counternarcotics. Then, in 2011, when INL did reengage, it went in the direction of the Food Zones times eight." Former UK official, SIGAR interview, June 17, 2015.
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602. Government of the United States of America, "Governor Led Eradication Implementing Instructions for the Letter of Agreement on Police Criminal Justice and Counter Narcotics Support Programs," letter to Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, signed March 9, 2006 and amended April 2009; Government of the United States of America, "Governor Led Eradication Implementing Instructions for the Letter of Agreement on Police Criminal Justice and Counter Narcotics Support Programs," letter to Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, signed March 9, 2006 and amended February 2011.
603. Government of the United States of America, "Governor Led Eradication Implementing Instructions for the Letter of Agreement on Police Criminal Justice and Counter Narcotics Support Programs," letter to Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, signed March 9, 2006 and amended April 2009.
604. Mansfield, SIGAR interview, April 11, 2018.
605. Former UK government contractor, SIGAR interview, May 10, 2016.

606. Mansfield, SIGAR interview, April 11, 2018; UNODC, MCN, *Periodical Report on Poppy Eradication Verification in Afghanistan*, March 2008; CRS, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy*, RL32686, August 12, 2009, p. 40.
607. Former UK government contractor, SIGAR interview, May 10, 2016.
608. Former UK government contractor, SIGAR interview, May 10, 2016.
609. Mansfield, SIGAR interview, April 11, 2018.
610. Former UK government contractor, SIGAR interview, May 10, 2016; Mansfield, SIGAR interview, April 11, 2018.
611. "In 2005 UNODC didn't want to get involved in eradication verification, as it would get in the way of the survey. They said they didn't even want to be associated with any planning around eradication. They wanted nothing to do with it. UNODC eventually agreed to set up a separate project to verify eradication and bought a lot of imagery." Former UK government contractor, SIGAR interview, May 10, 2016; Mansfield, SIGAR interview, April 11, 2018.
612. "The Afghan authorities reported a total of 21,430 ha eradicated. The present survey neither monitored, nor assessed the effectiveness of the eradication campaign, but the timing of the survey and the methodology employed ensure that the results presented in this report are post-eradication and reflect the net amount of opium poppy which was harvestable." UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003*, October 2003, p. 10.
613. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2003*, October 2003, p. 10.
614. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2004*, November 2004, p. 6.
615. SIGAR analysis of budget data by year of allocation and strand of effort, based on agency data calls, budget documentation, and correspondence from State in response to SIGAR data call, January 17, 2018.
616. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "PRT/Helmand: Helmand Eradication Wrap Up," Kabul 002008 cable, May 3, 2006.
617. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "PRT/Helmand: Helmand Eradication Wrap Up," Kabul 002008 cable, May 3, 2006.
618. State, "Moving Forward on Herbicide Eradication," State 190725 cable, November 22, 2006. "This year the AEF utilized exclusively the UK targeting criteria and were able to more than double all previous year's eradication efforts combined. Therefore the AEF had no problem with the concept of Targeting Criteria or even how it is developed. There is cultivation in all the places where the targeting criteria indicate and there is also cultivation in areas outside of those areas, which have been determined to fit within the targeting model. The real issue this year was the British Embassy Drugs Team's decision to disregard the criteria, which had been established by their home office and attempt to embroil the AEF in counterinsurgency and extension of governance in areas outside the targeted areas, which also did not fit within the areas that are deemed permissible. This was evident in Helmand province both in the Dishu district and Sangin which obligated the AEF to bypass and ignore poppy rich priority one targeted areas and create security situation that UK forces now are complaining that they are left to deal with." U.S. Embassy Kabul AEF, *A Critical Review of Support and Delivery to Illicit Crop Eradication Programs in the Periods of 2005 and 2006*, p. 28.
619. "But the head of the British Embassy Drugs Team wanted to promote big numbers as did the United States and the UN. They wanted to be seen doing something. UNODC show eradication in 2006 and 2007 at their highest levels. 2006 eradication in Helmand was a photos debacle. UNODC were using GPS photos but they were carefully taken to allow exaggeration. We were reporting GLE over-reporting. There were huge rows with UNODC regarding data. UNODC were trying to dismiss it as not representative, as classified. Even in 2006, PEF eradication was exaggerated but the UK drugs team wouldn't have it. INL didn't want to hear that the numbers were exaggerated. There was systematic over-reporting and intimidation but no one wanted to hear it. We ended up with absurd numbers." Former UK government contractor, SIGAR interview, May 10, 2016.
620. Ronald E. Neumann, *The Other War: Winning and Losing in Afghanistan*, 1st ed. (Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2009), p. 10.
621. Former UK government contractor, SIGAR interview, May 10, 2016.
622. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2006*, September 2006, p. 1.
623. Alcis, "GLE Tractor Tracking and GIS Support to CN Team, Helmand PRT, Final Report," May 2013.
624. Former UK official, SIGAR interview, June 17, 2015.
625. Government of the United States of America, "Governor Led Eradication Implementing Instructions for the Letter of Agreement on Police Criminal Justice and Counter Narcotics Support Programs," letter to Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, signed March 9, 2006 and amended February 2011.
626. Government of the United States of America, "Governor Led Eradication Implementing Instructions for the Letter of Agreement on Police Criminal Justice and Counter Narcotics Support Programs," letter to Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, signed March 9, 2006 and amended April 2014.
627. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017*, November 2017, p. 36.
628. CRS, *Afghanistan: Drug Trafficking and the 2014 Transition*, R43540, May 9, 2014, p. 12.
629. Mansfield, SIGAR interview, April 11, 2018.
630. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016: Cultivation and Production*, December 2016, p. 29. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2014: Cultivation and Production*, November 2014, p. 26.
631. Paul Fishstein, *A Little Bit Poppy-Free and a Little Bit Eradicated: Opium poppy cultivation in Balkh and Badakhshan Provinces in 2011–2012*, AREU, May 2013, p. 43.

632. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2016: Cultivation and Production*, December 2016, p. 6.
633. Cawkwell, *UK Communication Strategies for Afghanistan*, p. 92. "The Push for spraying started in 2004. Karzai resisted and this resistance built over time as other frictions started to grow. Karzai was more strident in his opposition in 2007, probably emboldened by the British." John Wood, Former National Security Council Senior Director for Afghanistan, SIGAR interview, May 19 2016; Berry, "Allies at War in Afghanistan," pp. 275, 277–278.
634. U.S. Embassy Kabul, Embassy Interagency Planning Group, "U.S. Counternarcotics Implementation Action Plan: Short Term Plan, September 2004–September 2005," electronic p. 13.
635. U.S. Embassy Kabul, Embassy Interagency Planning Group, "U.S. Counternarcotics Implementation Action Plan: Short Term Plan, September 2004–September 2005," electronic pp. 2.
636. Jonathan Landay, "U.S. Ignores Angry Reaction to secret poppy Spraying Test," *McClatchy Newspapers*, October 25, 2007; BBC News, "Afghan Concern at Opium Spraying," November 30, 2004.
637. Senior agriculturalist, correspondence with SIGAR, August 6, 2016.
638. Khalilzad, *The Envoy*, p. 207.
639. Risen, *State of War*, pp. 159–161.
640. To ensure that aerial eradication was not pursued unilaterally the U.S. Senate report on the FY 2005 supplemental appropriation Bill (Senate 109-52) specified that 'none of the funds recommended by the Committee may be available for aerial eradication programs within Afghanistan absent a formal request by the President of Afghanistan seeking such support.' State, INL, "Environmental Impact Statement: Ground-Based Herbicide Eradication of Opium Poppy in Afghanistan," November 2006, p. 2–8.
641. Senior DOD official, SIGAR interview, June 23, 2016.
642. Former senior official, Combined Forces Command–Afghanistan, SIGAR interview, September 21, 2016.
643. Representative Mark Kirk stated, "I think we even sacked [Robert Charles] on that subject because he was a little out of control, wanting aerial spraying. And the policy of the U.S. government wasn't." Representative Mark Kirk, testimony before the House Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs of the Committee on Appropriations, hearing on "Afghanistan Drug Eradication and Rebuilding Programs," September 12, 2006, p. 39.
644. Senior DOD official, SIGAR interview, June 23, 2016; Risen, *State of War*, p. 162.
645. "From 2006 to 2008 there were increased discussions on aerial. I believe there was a deliberate attempt to inflate numbers and costs to say ground based eradication was not efficient." Former UK government contractor, SIGAR interview, May 10, 2016. "The 2007 Helling review was 'front end loaded.' It was designed to show PEF did not work. I believe he was there to justify aerial spraying." Former eradication contractor, SIGAR interview, November 2, 2016.
646. GAO, *Afghanistan Drug Control: Despite Improved Efforts, Deteriorating Security Threatens Success of U.S. Goals*, GAO-07-78, November 15, 2006, p. 10.
647. GAO, *Afghanistan Drug Control: Strategy Evolving and Progress Reported*, GAO-10-291, March 2010, p. 15.
648. Former UK government contractor, SIGAR interview, May 10, 2016.
649. State, "INL A/S Anne Patterson's Meeting with UNODC Executive Director Costa," State 109683 cable, July 3, 2006.
650. State, "INL A/S Anne Patterson's Meeting with UNODC Executive Director Costa," State 109683 cable, July 3, 2006; "The Ambassador or other senior embassy officer should seek an appropriate early opportunity to broach with President Karzai the development of ground-spray eradication capability within the Afghan Eradication Force for potential use in 2007." State, "Developing Options for Enhanced Eradication," State 128156 cable, August 4, 2006.
651. State, "INL A/S Anne Patterson's Meeting with UNODC Executive Director Costa," State 109683 cable, July 3, 2006.
652. U.S. Embassy Kabul AEF, *A Critical Review of Support and Delivery to Illicit Crop Eradication Programs in the Periods of 2005 and 2006*, pp. 56–57.
653. State, "Moving Forward on Herbicide Eradication," State 190725 cable, November 22, 2006.
654. State, INL, "Environmental Impact Statement," November 2006.
655. "Lastly I hope we do move in the interagency to see if we can get President Karzai to approve a manual pilot spraying program, because I think we've really underscored how that is the essential step that then convinces other farmers in the region to embrace [USAID]'s alternative development program and move forward." Kirk, testimony before the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs, p. 58 (September 12, 2006).
656. State, "Moving Forward on Herbicide Eradication," State 190725 cable, November 22, 2006.
657. State, "Helping GOA Formulate Its CN Plans," State 12958 cable, December 6, 2006; former eradication contractor, SIGAR interview, November 2, 2016.
658. Former DOD official, SIGAR interview, November 3, 2016.
659. "The use of backpack sprayers, which would be associated with less chance of off-target drift, would be preferred in fields that are intercropped with non-poppy plants or along the edges of fields that are adjacent to field or legal crops. The section of equipment that minimizes drift while meeting operation needs and the use of backpack sprayers in sensitive areas, are expected to control the overall potential impact of herbicide use on non-target vegetation." State, INL, "Environmental Impact Statement," November 2006, Chapter 4, pp. 18–19. This was a point the U.S. government later agreed

- to. For example, “Embassy Kabul reporting subsequent to the IG assessment team’s departure from Afghanistan indicated that GBS is less promising than hoped for. Field tests revealed a number of problems with the equipment that resulted in taking longer to spray each hectare of poppy than would be the case with manual eradication (about 75 minutes per hectare as opposed to about 12 minutes using manual eradication.” Inspectors General for State and DOD, *Interagency Assessment of the Counternarcotics Program in Afghanistan*, State Report No. ISP-I-07-34, DOD Report No. IE-2007-005, July 2007, p. 35, footnote 36.
660. State, INL, “Environmental Impact Statement,” November 2006, pp. 4–14.
 661. U.S. Embassy Kabul AEF, *A Critical Review of Support and Delivery to Illicit Crop Eradication Programs in the Periods of 2005 and 2006*, p. 56.
 662. U.S. Embassy Kabul AEF, *A Critical Review of Support and Delivery to Illicit Crop Eradication Programs in the Periods of 2005 and 2006*, p. 56.
 663. Berry, “Allies at War in Afghanistan,” pp. 284–286.
 664. State, “Moving Forward on Herbicide Eradication,” State 190725 cable, November 22, 2006.
 665. Berry, “Allies at War in Afghanistan,” p. 286; Neumann, SIGAR interview, June 18, 2015.
 666. Former UK senior official, SIGAR interview, May 4, 2015.
 667. Neumann, *The Other War*, p. 148.
 668. Wankel, SIGAR interview, April 19 2016.
 669. Neumann, *The Other War*, p. 148.
 670. Neumann, SIGAR interview, June 18, 2015.
 671. Neumann, correspondence with SIGAR, February 21, 2018.
 672. Coll, *Directorate S*, p. 271.
 673. “Ron Neumann was replaced by Bill Wood. This changed the demand on the CN effort. Aerial spraying was seen as a route to ‘quick results’ Aerial spraying was seen as ‘demonstrable action’ and evidence of money spent.” Former NSC official, SIGAR interview, June 17, 2015; see also: Coll, *Directorate S*, pp. 272–273.
 674. Wood, statement to the Policy Advisory Group, August 1, 2007, pp. 5–6.
 675. Wood, statement to the Policy Advisory Group, August 1, 2007, pp. 4, 6.
 676. Schweich, “Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?” *New York Times*, July 27, 2008.
 677. Former senior UK government official, SIGAR interview, May 4, 2015.
 678. Antonio Maria Costa, “Counter-narcotics policy in Afghanistan,” NATO, September 5, 2007.
 679. State, “Afghanistan Counternarcotics Coordinator Schweich Briefs New U.S. CN Strategy in Kabul, London, Berlin, and Vienna: Support for Forceful Poppy Eradication Emerging in Unexpected Quarters,” State 138384 cable, October 1, 2007.
 680. Schweich, “Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?” *New York Times*, July 27, 2008.
 681. Schweich, “Is Afghanistan a Narco-State?” *New York Times*, July 27, 2008.
 682. State, *U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy*, August 2007, p. 53.
 683. State, *U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy*, August 2007, p. 53.
 684. Ambassador Ronald Neumann, correspondence with SIGAR, April 23, 2017.
 685. Former eradication contractor, SIGAR interview, November 2, 2016.
 686. William Byrd, *Afghanistan and the International Drug Control Regime: Can the ‘Tail’ Wag the ‘Dog’?* USIP, April 16, 2003, p. 3.
 687. Byrd, *Afghanistan and the International Drug Control Regime*, USIP, April 16, 2003, p. 3.
 688. Berry, “Allies at War in Afghanistan,” p. 290.
 689. Berry, “Allies at War in Afghanistan,” p. 290.
 690. Former Afghan deputy minister, SIGAR interview, April 14, 2016.
 691. Former senior UK Government Official, SIGAR interview, May 4, 2015.
 692. Former senior UK Government Official, SIGAR interview, May 4, 2015; Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul*, p. 51.
 693. Kirk Semple and Tim Golden, “Afghans Pressed by U.S. on Plan to Spray Poppies,” *New York Times*, October 8, 2007.
 694. Khalilzad, *The Envoy*, p. 208.
 695. During the course of the research for early Lessons Learned reports, SIGAR held several roundtables with more than three dozen civilian and military experts on lessons learned from U.S. reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. Former senior NSC official, SIGAR roundtable, January 14, 2015.
 696. Former NSC official, SIGAR interview, June 17, 2015.
 697. Former DOD official, SIGAR interview, May 17, 2016. Condoleezza Rice suggests, “[Karzai] did not want to even acknowledge the possibility of dramatic measures such as crop destruction thorough aerial spraying,” saying, “the issue would be a source of tension between our two countries for the remainder of the President’s term.” Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York, NY: Broadway Paperbacks, 2011), p. 446.
 698. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2017*, November 2017, p. 36; UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2013*, December 2013, p. 35; UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007*, October 2007, p. 86.
 699. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2013*, December 2013, p. 35.
 700. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2014*, November 2014, pp. 6, 34.
 701. U.S. Embassy Kabul, “PRT/Helmand—Helmand Eradication Wrap Up,” Kabul 002008 cable, May 3, 2006.
 702. SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, October 30, 2014, p. 11.
 703. SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, October 30, 2014, p. 11.
 704. Patterson, testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programs, hearing on “Afghan Drug Eradication and Rebuilding Programs,” September 12, 2006, p. 4.

705. "UNODC calculates that eradicating 25% of the opium crop will introduce sufficient fear of future eradication into farmers' minds to prevent planting next year." State, *U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy for Afghanistan*, August 2007, p. 52.
706. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015*, October 2015, p. 65.
707. INL, programmatic response to SIGAR data call, October 2014.
708. David Mansfield, "Briefing Paper 3: Central Helmand in the 2011/12 Growing Season," report for the British Embassy Kabul, p. 3.
709. Mike Martin, *An Intimate War: An Oral History of the Helmand Conflict* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014) p. 249; David Mansfield, *Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risks: Explaining the Reductions in Opium Production in Central Helmand Between 2008 and 2011*, AREU, August 2011, p. 3.
710. Mansfield, *Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risks*, p. 3.
711. GAO, *Afghanistan Drug Control: Strategy Evolving and Progress Reported*, GAO-10-291, March 2010, p. 13.
712. Senior U.S. government official, SIGAR interview, March 14, 2016; Former senior DOD official, SIGAR interview, May 16, 2016; former DOD official, SIGAR interview, May 17, 2016; senior DOD official, SIGAR interview, June 23, 2016; former senior DOD official, SIGAR interview, November 1, 2016.
713. General the Lord Richards, Former ISAF Commander, SIGAR interview, September 21, 2016.
714. Former UK government official, SIGAR interview, May 11, 2016.
715. Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, "Losing Afghanistan to Opium?" *Washington Times*, February 15, 2007.
716. "INL is responsible for controlling the amount of poppy crop and therefore pushed spraying." Senior U.S. government official, SIGAR interview, March 14, 2016.
717. Former senior DOD official, SIGAR interview, September 20, 2016.
718. SIGAR analysis of counternarcotics funding, January 24, 2018; State, response to SIGAR data call, January 17, 2018; DOD, response to SIGAR data call, January 11, 2018, and March 8, 2016; USAID, response to SIGAR data call, January 18, 2018 and January 17, 2018; DOJ, response to SIGAR data call, June 30, 2017; State, INL, *FY 2004 Budget Justification*, June 2003; State, INL, *FY 2005 Budget Justification*, April 2004, State, INL, *FY 2006 Budget Justification*, April 2005.
719. CRS, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy*, RL32686, August 12, 2009, p. 44.
720. Pragma Corporation, "Afghanistan Alternative Development Options Assessment," p. 9.
721. EastWest Institute, *Afghan Narco Trafficking: Finding an Alternative to Alternative Development*, July 2016, p. 13; USAID/Afghanistan, "Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5," 2016, pp. 21, 54.
722. USAID/Afghanistan, "Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5," 2016, p. 27; CRS, *Afghanistan: Narcotics and U.S. Policy*, RL32686, August 12, 2009, p. 44.
723. Pragma Corporation, "Afghanistan Alternative Development Options Assessment," pp. 9–10.
724. USAID/Afghanistan, "Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5," 2016, p. 4; Pragma Corporation, "Afghanistan Alternative Development Options Assessment," p. 10.
725. Former senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 6, 2016.
726. Former senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 6, 2016.
727. Former USAID official, SIGAR interview, May 17, 2016; former USAID staff member, SIGAR interview, April 19, 2016.
728. J. Michael Deal, "Lessons from Drug Crop Elimination," December 14, 2001.
729. "There also aren't any examples we know of where we were denying development assistance due to conditionality." SIGAR meeting with USAID, March 13, 2018.
730. Kvitashvili, SIGAR interview, June 6, 2016.
731. Former alternative development contractor, SIGAR interview, June 8, 2016.
732. European Commission, "Development in a Drugs Environment: Clarifying Policy Positions and Mainstreaming Counter Narcotics in the European Commission's Programme in Afghanistan," 2005, p. 10.
733. European Commission, "Development in a Drugs Environment," 2005, p. 10.
734. USAID/Afghanistan, "Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5," 2016, p. 57.
735. For example, in the 2005 Opium Survey for Afghanistan Costa called for "A commitment by farming communities to refrain from drug cultivation as a condition for the receipt of future development assistance." UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005*, November 2005, p. iv.
736. A number of papers making this point were introduced at the Working Group Session of the Alternative Livelihoods Technical Working Group meeting on "Counternarcotics Mainstreaming" and "Conditionality," June 22–23, 2004, pp. 15, 22, 29. These include papers on the problems of conditionality written by participants from the World Bank, GIZ, the UK, and the MRRD AL adviser.
737. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Update on Status of Work Plan Update for Embassy Kabul Short-Term Counternarcotics Strategy," Kabul 002205 cable, July 14, 2004.
738. For a detailed review of UNODC's experience of conditionality in the 1990s see: David Mansfield, *Alternative Development in Afghanistan: The Failure of Quid Pro Quo*, August 2001.
739. Anthony Fitzherbert, "Conditionality: Some Thoughts on 'Conditions for Conditionality,'" presentation for the Working Group session of the Alternative Livelihoods Technical Working Group, 2004, p. 31.
740. Zia, SIGAR interview, April 12, 2016.
741. State, INL, *FY 2004 Budget Justification*, June 2003.

742. State, INL, *FY 2004 Budget Justification*, June 2003.
743. Pragma Corporation, "Afghanistan Alternative Development Options Assessment," p. 37; USAID/Afghanistan, "Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5," 2016, p. 61.
744. Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc., "Impact Evaluation: Rebuilding Agriculture Markets Program (RAMP)," prepared for USAID, 2007, p. 3.
745. Former senior USAID official, SIGAR interview, June 6, 2016.
746. Chemonics International, Inc., "Alternative Income Project (AIP): Helmand, Afghanistan," final report prepared for USAID/Afghanistan, September 2005; USAID Office of Inspector General, "Audit of USAID/Afghanistan's Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program," Audit Report No. 5-306-06-002-P, March 28, 2006, p. 15.
747. Chemonics International, Inc., "Agricultural Input Supply Programme (AISP)," p. 1.
748. Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc., "Impact Evaluation: Rebuilding Agriculture Markets Program (RAMP)," prepared for USAID, 2007.
749. David Radcliffe and Erick Zeballos, "How to Tackle Illicit Narcotics in Afghanistan: Alternative Livelihoods in Afghanistan," Department for International Development 2004.
750. Working Group Session of the Alternative Livelihoods Technical Working Group "'Counternarcotics Mainstreaming' and 'Conditionality,'" June 22–23, 2004, p. 17.
751. The papers for this meeting contain a number of papers on mainstreaming counternarcotics into development programming. Working Group Session of the Alternative Livelihoods Technical Working Group "'Counternarcotics Mainstreaming' and 'Conditionality,'" June 22–23, 2004.
752. World Bank, "Technical Annex for a Proposed Grant in the Amount of SDR \$71.4 Million (US \$112 Million Equivalent) to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for a National Emergency Rural Access Project (NERAP)," Sustainable Development Department, Afghanistan Country Management Unit, South Asia Region, November 14, 2007, pp. 148–157; World Bank, "Treating the Opium Problem in World Bank Operations in Afghanistan," 2006, p. 7.
753. Government of Afghanistan, MCN, "National Drug Control Strategy," January 2006, pp. 7, 31.
754. Government of Afghanistan, "Afghan National Development Strategy: A Strategy for Security, Governance, Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction (2008–2013)," 2008, p. 143.
755. The Alternative Livelihoods program was later retitled Alternative Development Program.
756. SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, October 30, 2014, p. 14.
757. USAID/Afghanistan, "Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5," 2016, pp. 15–16.
758. The objectives were to: "Help accelerate licit economic growth and business activity in areas where poppy is thriving," and to "provide an immediate alternative source of income to poor households whose livelihoods depend on the 'temporary' opium economy." Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc., "Evaluation Report for Alternative Development Program (ADP) Southern Region by USAID in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," p. 1.
759. Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc., "Evaluation Report for Alternative Development Program (ADP) Eastern Region by USAID in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," p. 12.
760. Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc., "Evaluation Report for Alternative Development Program (ADP) Southern Region by USAID in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," pp. 25, 77–78.
761. Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc., "Evaluation Report for Alternative Development Program (ADP) Southern Region by USAID in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," p. 50. The project completion report for ADP North also refers to the fact that "Conditionality may be imposed in the second year of project implementation." USAID, "Alternative Development Plan for Northeastern Afghanistan (ADP/N)," p. 5.
762. Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc., "Evaluation Report for Alternative Development Program (ADP) Southern Region by USAID in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," pp. 5–6.
763. Pragma Corporation, "Afghanistan Alternative Development Options Assessment," p. 9.
764. EastWest Institute, *Afghan Narco Trafficking: Finding an Alternative to Alternative Development*, July 2016, p. 13; USAID/Afghanistan, "Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5," 2016, p. 54.
765. USAID/Afghanistan, "Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5," 2016, p. 4.
766. USAID/Afghanistan, "Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5," 2016, p. 4.
767. USAID, response to SIGAR data call, June 30, 2014.
768. Mansfield, *Examining the Impact of IDEA-NEW on Opium Production*, pp. 54–59.
769. The USAID OIG reported that "In addition, in December 2010 USAID/Afghanistan reportedly directed DAI to focus only on expanding the licit economy, in keeping with the emphasis of the mission's new performance management plan (PMP) for the agriculture sector. (Neither DAI nor USAID could provide a written copy of this significant instruction.) As a result, two intermediate goals (termed 'intermediate results') that dealt with assistance to the voluntary opium poppy eradication community and to farms in the aftermath of opium poppy eradication/destruction programs were deleted from the program PMP. By dropping these intermediate results, the mission not only shifted focus but also deprived itself of information needed to make sound programming decisions. It has indicated that the underlying objective of the program remains dissuading Afghans from growing poppies and that the program continues to attempt to reduce poppy production. Nevertheless, the current PMP does not include performance measures such as intermediate results, and performance indicators and targets linked to those results, to identify and facilitate the program's contribution to either that underlying objective or to reducing

- poppy production. As a result, the mission was unable to provide evidence of its progress in either of these areas.” USAID Office of Inspector General, *Audit of USAID/Afghanistan’s Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives for the North, East, and West Program*, Audit Report No. F-306-12-004-P, June 29, 2012, p. 5.
770. USAID/Afghanistan, “Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5,” 2016, p. 6.
771. USAID/Afghanistan, “Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5,” 2016, pp. 22–23.
772. USAID/Afghanistan, “Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5,” 2016, pp. 23–24.
773. USAID/Afghanistan, “Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5,” 2016, pp. 7, 55.
774. Pragma Corporation, “Afghanistan Alternative Development Options Assessment,” p. 9.
775. Pragma Corporation, “Afghanistan Alternative Development Options Assessment,” p. 11.
776. Mansfield and Fishstein, *Time to Move On*, AREU, p. 1.
777. Mansfield and Fishstein, *Time to Move On*, AREU, p. 3.
778. Pragma Corporation, “Afghanistan Alternative Development Options Assessment,” p. 43; Mansfield, *Examining the Impact of IDEA-NEW on Opium Production*, pp. 50–51.
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780. Byrd and Mansfield, *Afghanistan’s Opium Economy*, World Bank, p. 129.
781. Mansfield, SIGAR interview, April 11, 2018; Sopko, testimony before the Caucus on International Narcotics Control, hearing on “Future U.S. Counternarcotics Efforts in Afghanistan,” January 15, 2014, p. 13.
782. Mansfield and Fishstein, *Time to Move On*, AREU, p. 38.
783. Byrd and Mansfield, *Afghanistan’s Opium Economy*, World Bank, pp. 114–116.
784. Mansfield and Fishstein, *Time to Move On*, AREU, p. 2.
785. For more on UNODC’s argument that there was no relationship between poverty and poppy, see Appendix C of Rubin and Sherman, *Counter-Narcotics to Stabilize Afghanistan*, pp. 50–56. This offers a detailed critique of UNODC’s claim that there is no relationship between opium poppy and poverty. “USAID’s assistance does not reach one fourth of what farmers are currently earning from poppy production. Similarly, one jerib (1/5 hectare) of poppy will earn an estimated \$4,000 (\$2,000 after labor cost) whereas one jerib of wheat will only earn a farmer \$ 400. . . . Poppy will always be a more lucrative crop until farmers decide that the risk of growing poppy outweighs the financial benefit. . . . Alternative livelihoods cannot have a significant impact on poppy reduction as a stand-alone activity. Without sustained enforcement and eradication campaigns it is not likely that farmers will cease poppy cultivation and chose livelihoods in the licit economy.” U.S. Embassy Kabul, “Alternative Livelihoods Programs in Afghanistan Require Strong Eradication and Law Enforcement to Achieve Impact,” Kabul 001970 cable, May 2, 2006.
786. This consists of 24,308 hectares under ALP East, 89,500 hectares under ALP South. See: Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc., “Evaluation Report for Alternative Development Program (ADP) Eastern Region by USAID in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,” prepared for USAID, January 10 – April 18, 2010, p. 12; Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc., “Evaluation Report for Alternative Development Program (ADP) Southern Region by USAID in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,” prepared for USAID, January 11 – April 19, 2010, p. 7.
787. Former USAID staff member, SIGAR interview, April 19, 2016.
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792. USAID/Afghanistan, “Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5,” 2016, pp. 61–62.
793. Management Systems International, “Community Development Program: Final Performance Evaluation,” prepared for USAID, February 12, 2014, p. 17.
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797. State, *U.S. Counternarcotics Strategy*, August 2007, p. 47.
798. Wood, statement to the Policy Advisory Group, August 1, 2007, p. 2.
799. USAID/Afghanistan, “Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5,” 2016, p. 17.
800. U.S. Mission Afghanistan, “U.S. Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan: Post Performance Management Plan, 2011–2015,” pp. 1, 5.
801. The USAID/Afghanistan Plan for Transition 2015–2018, August 2, 2016 makes only four references to poppy (pp. 4, 8) in a 29-page report.
802. USAID Office of Inspector General, *Audit of USAID/Afghanistan’s Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives for the North, East, and West Program*, Audit Report No. F-306-12-004-P, June 29, 2012, p. 5.
803. USAID/Afghanistan, “Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5,” 2016, p. 62.

804. Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc., *Commercial Horticulture and Agriculture Marketing Program (CHAMP) Mid-Term Evaluation*, final report prepared for USAID Office of Agriculture, March 31, 2012.
805. Pragma Corporation, "Afghanistan Alternative Development Options Assessment," p. 40.
806. USAID/Afghanistan, "Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5," 2016, pp. 45–51.
807. Pragma Corporation, "Afghanistan Alternative Development Options Assessment," p. 40.
808. Former USAID staff member, SIGAR interview, April 19, 2016.
809. Pragma Corporation, "Afghanistan Alternative Development Options Assessment," p. 40.
810. USAID/Afghanistan, "Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5," 2016, p. 45.
811. Greenfield, Crane, Bond, Chandler, Luoto, Olikar, "Reducing the Cultivation of Opium Poppies in Southern Afghanistan," pp. 181–182.
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813. David Mansfield, *Truly Unprecedented: How the Helmand Food Zone supported an increase in the province's capacity to produce opium*, AREU, October 31, 2017, p. 5.
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815. Greenfield, Crane, Bond, Chandler, Luoto, Olikar, "Reducing the Cultivation of Opium Poppies in Southern Afghanistan," p. 182.
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819. Former UK government official, SIGAR interview, June 17, 2015.
820. USAID official, SIGAR interview, May 17, 2016; former congressional staffer, SIGAR interview, September 16, 2016.
821. Senator Dianne Feinstein, "Support Afghan Farmers, Cut off Taliban's Drug Funding," letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, February 7, 2012.
822. Former USAID staff member, SIGAR interview, April 19, 2016; USAID official, SIGAR interview, May 17, 2016; USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 1, 2016.
823. Former USAID staff member, SIGAR interview, April 19, 2016.
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825. USAID/Afghanistan, "Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5," 2016, pp. 40–41.
826. USAID official, SIGAR interview, November 1, 2016.
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828. "Irrigation projects should provide more affordable water for farmers in poppy-producing areas. This should decrease poppy cultivation so long as communities stay true to their social contract with the government." Management Systems International, "Kandahar Food Zone: Mid-Term Performance Evaluation," March 2015, p. 25.
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830. NPR, "Opium Poppy Growth Booming in Afghanistan," January 14, 2014; USAID/Afghanistan, "Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5," 2016.
831. USAID/Afghanistan, "Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5," 2016, p. 54.
832. USAID/Afghanistan, "Agricultural Sector Assistance Strategy, Annex 5," 2016, p. 57.
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834. UNODC, *Quarterly Report, INL Funded Alternative Development Programme, Boost Alternative Development Intervention through Licit Livelihoods (BADILL), Period covered: July-September 2017*, p. 1.
835. UNODC, *UNODC Sub-Program 3—Alternative Development, INL Proposal, Strengthen and Diversify Licit Livelihoods through Alternative Development Interventions, September 2016–August 2020*.
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838. For a detailed critique of the limitations of attitudinal surveys in conflict affected areas see: David Mansfield, *Effective Monitoring and Evaluation in Conflict-Affected Environments: Afghanistan Post-2014*, USIP, November 12, 2015, pp. 7–10.
839. Mansfield, *Effective Monitoring and Evaluation in Conflict-Affected Environments*, USIP, pp. 6–7.
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841. Pragma Corporation, "Afghanistan Alternative Development Options Assessment," p. 39.
842. Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc., "Evaluation Report for the Alternative Development Program (ADP) Southern Region by USAID in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan," pp. 44, 45.
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844. The USAID assessment states that "AVIPA Plus South and SRAD projects appear to have contributed to the abrupt decline in poppy recorded for 2009–11 (presumably along with the major increase in wheat prices and the influence of the

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845. Pragma Corporation, “Afghanistan Alternative Development Options Assessment,” pp. 42–43.
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 849. Middlebrook, Miller, Kramer, and Stone, *Review of the Afghan Counter Narcotics Trust Fund (CNTF)*, pp. 1, 9, 10, 13; “Strengthening Counter-Narcotics Institutions in Afghanistan,” Adam Smith International website, accessed on May 11, 2018.
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 854. State, “Follow-Up on British Request for Counternarcotics Contributions to Afghanistan,” State 058810 cable, March 30, 2005.
 855. UNODC coined this term in 2007 and used it to categorize those provinces with less than 100 hectares of cultivation. UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2007*, October 2007, pp. 36, 135.
 856. Middlebrook, Miller, Kramer, and Stone, *Review of the Afghan Counter Narcotics Trust Fund (CNTF)*, pp. viii, 11, 13.
 857. Gerald Andersen (Acting Director, USAID Office of Economic Growth), Action Memorandum to Carl Rahmann (Deputy Mission Director), February 13, 2007, pp. 1, 5.
 858. Khan, “Afghanistan: Next Steps on Counter Narcotics Work,” p. 2.
 859. Khan, “Afghanistan: Next Steps on Counter Narcotics Work,” p. 2.
 860. Middlebrook, Miller, Kramer, and Stone, *Review of the Afghan Counter Narcotics Trust Fund (CNTF)*, pp. 15, 26.
 861. Former senior UN adviser, SIGAR interview, May 19, 2016; former World Bank Official, SIGAR interview, April 18, 2016.
 862. “Donors have their own priorities and ministries were introducing their own projects. MCN was only managing the money; implementation was with ministries. But they were just existing projects that were not funded, [they] did not consider CN effect.” Former Afghan Deputy Minister, SIGAR interview, April 14, 2016; Zia, SIGAR interview, April 12, 2016.
 863. Mansfield, SIGAR interview, April 11, 2018; former World Bank Official, SIGAR interview, April 18, 2016.
 864. Middlebrook, Miller, Kramer, and Stone, *Review of the Afghan Counter Narcotics Trust Fund (CNTF)*, pp. 26–27.
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 867. Zia, SIGAR interview, April 12, 2016.
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 876. Former senior UN adviser, SIGAR interview, May 20, 2016.

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888. Government of the United States of America, "Amendment to the Letter of Agreement on Police Criminal Justice and Counter Narcotics Support Programs of March 9, 2006," letter to Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, September 23, 2010.
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891. State, INL, "Program Review of INLs Afghanistan Counternarcotics Efforts," 2014, electronic p. 5.
892. U.S. Department of State, email to SIGAR, March 6, 2018.
893. Neumann, correspondence with SIGAR, April 23, 2017.
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896. Former senior UN adviser, SIGAR interview, May 20, 2016; former DOD official, SIGAR interview, May 17, 2016. However, State Department officials maintained that "governors approved GPI project proposals but had no part in bid evaluation or contractor selection." State, email to SIGAR, March 6, 2018.
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901. Rubin and Sherman, *Counter-Narcotics to Stabilize Afghanistan*, p. 49.
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903. "GPI is being turned off as the MCN has no capacity to implement. GPI had five-year funding. The money was put in a pot and INL worked through GPI architecture to spend the money. Early on, it built buildings but INL was not so keen and wanted to do more interventions in rural areas. The problem lay with the government's capacity to solicit and review quality programs and then implement them. Eventually, they ran into the problem of expiring funds, so the program was cancelled." INL officials, SIGAR interview, April 14, 2016; SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, April 30, 2017, p. 195.
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910. UNODC, *The Impact and Effectiveness of Various Counter Narcotics Media Campaigns*, October 2008, p. 13.
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933. Mansfield, SIGAR interview, April 11, 2018.
934. Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, pp. 77, 162, 188.
935. David Mansfield, *All Bets Are Off? Prospects for (B)reaching Agreements and Drug Control in Helmand and Nangarhar in the Run up to Transition*, AREU, January 2013, pp. 13, 37. For additional analysis on eradication undermining popular support for the Afghan government and facilitating the penetration of insurgent, see Vanda Felbab-Brown, “No Easy Exit: Drugs and Counternarcotics Policies in Afghanistan,” Brookings Institution, 2016, pp. 7, 13.
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943. U.S. Embassy Kabul, "INL Assistant Secretary Brownfield visit, April 14–16, 2011," Kabul 002360 cable, April 24, 2011; U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Moving Forward on the Kandahar Food Zone," Kabul 000360 cable, January 24, 2013; U.S. Mission to the UN in Vienna, "Afghan Counternarcotics: UN Efforts Energized by December 7–8 Paris Pact Consultative Group," Vienna 000524 cable, December 20, 2011; U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Senator Kirk's Meeting with Minister of Counternarcotics Osmani," Kabul 006256 cable, September 1, 2011; U.S. Embassy Kabul, "Afghanistan: Discussion with UNODC on Making Counternarcotics a National Priority," Kabul 007464 cable, October 23, 2011.
944. Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, pp. 211, 228–229; UNODC, *Afghanistan Opium Survey 2013*, October 2013, p. 99; former congressional staffer, SIGAR interview, September 16, 2016. INL has drawn on GIS data to argue for the deterrent effect of eradication, claiming "geospatial analysis indicates 90 per cent less poppy was planted in 2011 on land within half kilometer radius of poppy fields that were eradicated in 2010 in the Helmand Food Zone." State, INL, response to SIGAR data call, October 2014.
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946. Mansfield, *A State Built on Sand*, pp. 238–239.
947. Mansfield, *Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risk*, p. 3.
948. Martin, *An Intimate War*, p. 249.
949. Mansfield, *Managing Concurrent and Repeated Risk*, p. 3. For additional analysis on corruption around eradication contributing to resentment toward the Afghan government, see Byrd and Buddenberg, *Afghanistan's Drug Industry*, UNODC and the World Bank, p. 20.
950. Clark, "Farmers transition to different crops." "The policy of offering payments for clearing the land of opium poppy and preparing it for a summer crop was also subject to problems. For example, with the harvest beginning in Marjah on 12/13 April 2010 and disease drying the opium capsule (allowing only two to three lancements) and shortening the harvest season to only 7–10 days for each plot of land, many farmers would have finished the harvest by around 23 April 2010. Consequently were fields not verified promptly after the harvest had finished it would have been possible for farmers to lance their opium crop, clear their land and receive a payment. Furthermore were fields not verified as having been cultivated with opium poppy during the winter season farmers could claim payments for land that had previously been wheat or another winter crop other than opium poppy. While during the course of fieldwork there were reports of fields having been harvested prior to being cleared, it is unclear to what extent this took place. However, it would seem that rumors of the provision of payments to undeserving recipients under this program, as well as under other initiatives, are serving to undermine confidence in the integrity of the wider effort in Marjah." David Mansfield, *Helmand Counter Narcotics Impact Study*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, May 2010, p. 10.
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As required by the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2018 (P.L. 115-91), this report has been prepared in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency.

Source: P.L. 110-181, "National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2008," January 28, 2008; P.L. 115-91, "National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2018," December 12, 2017.

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