

George Bush's opium war

by Joseph Brewda

Shortly after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Reagan-Bush administration launched a massive covert war against Soviet troops in Afghanistan, through arming, training, and financing the Pakistan-based Afghan mujahideen. That war is directly responsible for the vast increase of opium and heroin production in Western Asia since that time, and has played a major role in criminalizing the former Soviet Central Asian republics and the Caucasus, through which heroin-trafficking routes to western Europe and the United States now pass. The mujahideen spawned by that war, which the White House then feted as "anti-Communist heroes" in numerous banquets in their honor, constitute the most important narco-terrorist labor-pool in the world today, responsible for bombings from Algeria, to India, to Europe, and even, as in the 1993 bombing of the New York World Trade Center, in the United States.

The U.S. conduct of the Afghan war was shaped by a British strategy to spread Islamic anti-Communist insurgency into the Soviet Union, as the supposed means of bringing down that regime. Implemented as the so-called "Arc of Crisis" card under Carter administration National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, the strategy provided the cynical rationale for the British-mandated and Carter administration-implemented overthrow of the Shah of Iran and the installation of Ayatollah Khomeini; the ensuing instigation of the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, in which the West massively armed both sides; and support for narco-terrorist kingpin President Hafez al-Assad of Syria, who, together with Ariel Sharon-led elements of Israeli intelligence, has kept the Middle East in flames. This policy, launched by the Trilateral Com-

mission's Brzezinski, was continued, without interruption, on a vastly expanded scale, during the Reagan administration, under the overall direction of Vice President George Bush.

Drugs to fund the Afghan War

There are two features of the Reagan-Bush Afghan War policy, and its embrace of the Brzezinski Arc of Crisis plan, which caused the explosive growth in opium and heroin production in Western Asia and the Middle East in the 1980s, and which continue to have a dire impact on the world today.

First, the Reagan-Bush administration secret team encouraged the mujahideen to grow opium and refine heroin, to supplement billions of dollars of U.S. government funds provided for the war. (Unlike the "secret war" in Central America, the Afghan War was heavily funded by the U.S. Congress, with strong bipartisan support; however, the official funds covered only an estimated 10% of the costs of the decade-long war against the Soviet Red Army.) In so doing, the Reagan-Bush administration also helped to create an apparently semi-independent narcotics and terrorist network, as typified today by a former U.S. protégé, Osama bin Laden.

Second, the Reagan-Bush administration hoped to use this heroin to spread addiction among Soviet troops to demoralize them, and to help spread drug use into adjacent Soviet regions,

FIGURE 1
The 1980s Golden Crescent heroin and weapons route

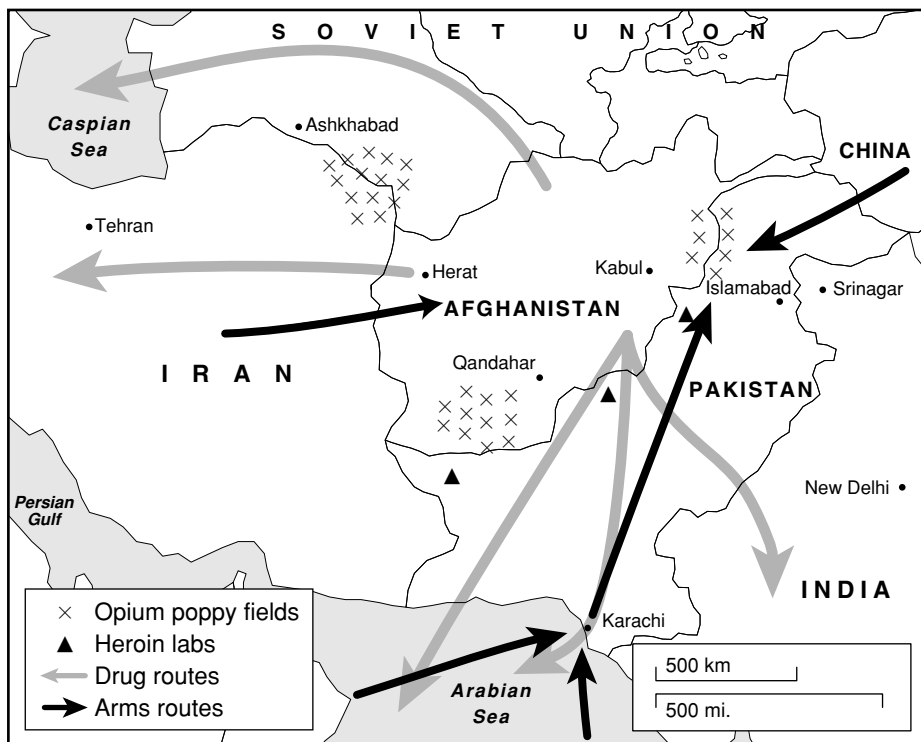
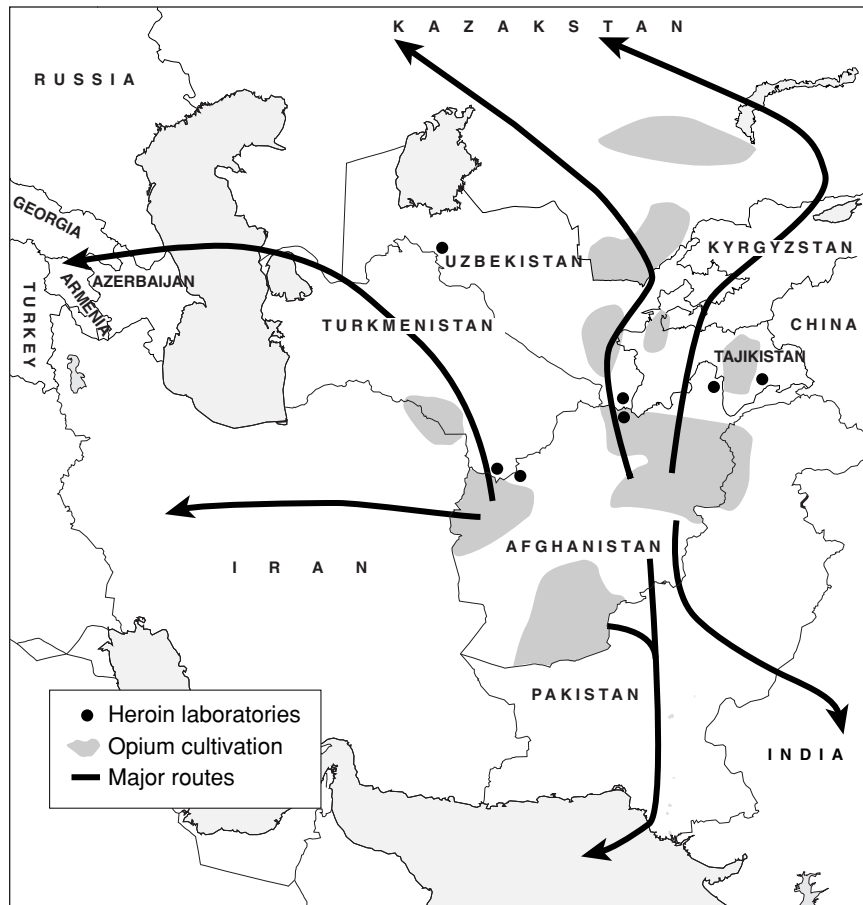


FIGURE 2

Opium and heroin trafficking from the 'Golden Crescent' today



Sources: INCSR; UN International Narcotics Control Board; EIR.

and the United States, providing funds and criminal allies for the growing mujahideen warlord gangs. The total potential value of the crop by 1989 had reached \$22 billion, enough to supply war needs or terrorist operations for a long time to come.

The rest of this opium and heroin was consumed regionally. Typifying the legacy of the war, Pakistan today has more than 3.5 million heroin addicts, the highest heroin-addict population per capita in the world. Before 1980, there was virtually no heroin addiction in the country. Similarly, heroin use in former Soviet Central Asia, which had been nonexistent before 1980, is now skyrocketing.

The mujahideen narcotics business continued after Soviet troops left Afghanistan, without any let up. Competition over the trade is one of the main reasons for the continuing civil war in Afghanistan, pitting the Taliban, which controls most of the country today, against the Northern Alliance of Gen. Ahmad Massoud, both of which provide heroin to the West. Control over heroin-trafficking routes is also the cause of most of the ongoing gang warfare in Pakistan and the bloody clan war in neighboring Tajikistan, and is an important factor in the wars in the nearby Caucasus, where competing armies and militias often depend on the Afghan heroin trade to buy arms.

thereby creating the convulsive social conditions needed to spread insurgent movements there. The administration was successful in both objectives. **Figure 1** shows the heroin and weapons routes into and out of Afghanistan in the 1980s. **Figure 2** shows these heroin routes today, with nations that were part of the former Soviet Union now probably the most important route for heroin being transported out of Afghanistan.

As a deliberate result of British and U.S. policy, opium and heroin production in Afghanistan and Pakistan rapidly increased during the 1980s, especially beginning in 1984. By the time that Soviet troops withdrew from Afghanistan in 1988, the two countries were producing an estimated 955 tons of opium annually (**Figure 3**), of the 3,164 tons produced worldwide. An estimated 160 tons of that opium, refined into 16 tons of heroin, were sold on the streets of western Europe

Bush's Syrian connection

The Middle East proper was another target of the Arc of Crisis policy, and here, too, the encouragement and protection of drug lords and narco-terrorist gangs, as well as ruinous wars, further destabilized the region. A central feature of this policy was the Reagan-Bush administration decision to continue Nixon administration Secretary of State Sir Henry Kissinger's patronage of narco-terrorist kingpin Hafez al-Assad's Syria, especially by giving Syria a free hand over neighboring Lebanon. As a result, beginning in the 1980s, Lebanon became one of the world's biggest poppy plantations, a primary refiner of Afghan mujahideen opium, and a safe haven for all the narco-terrorist gangs charged with smuggling heroin and hashish into Europe, and carrying out the terrorist operations needed to keep the region in turmoil.

FIGURE 3

Afghanistan and Pakistan: opium production
(metric tons)

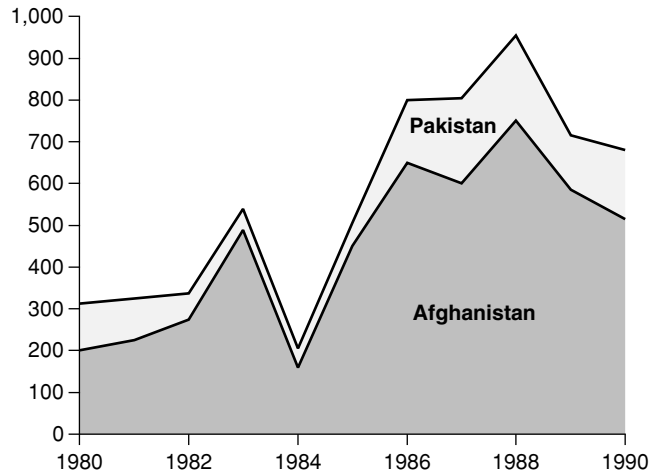
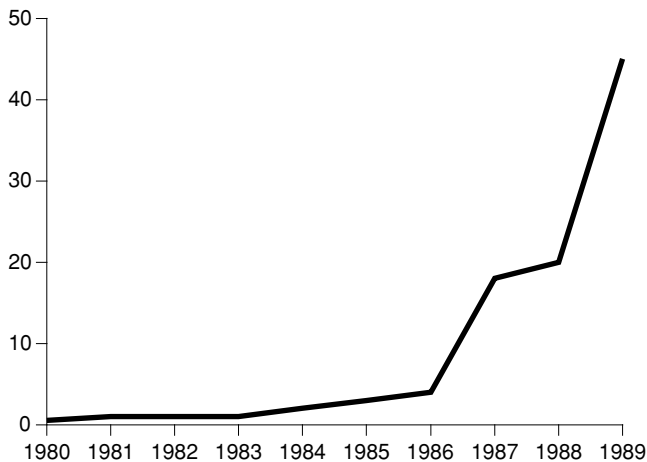


FIGURE 4

Opium production in Lebanon
(metric tons)



Under these policy guidelines, Lebanese opium production zoomed from 0.5 tons in 1980, to an estimated 45 metric tons in 1989 (Figure 4). The Syrian Army, which invaded Lebanon in 1976, began introducing extensive cultivation of opium poppy into the Lebanese Bekaa Valley in 1983. All of the opium was refined into heroin, with 20% smuggled to the United States, and the rest to Europe. The Syrian Army also increased marijuana cultivation by half, in order to produce hashish bound for Europe. If

all the heroin and hashish produced in Lebanon in 1989 were sold, Syria would have reaped \$7.9 billion in profits, more than enough to pay for terrorist assassinations to provoke tensions and wars.

No single individual personified this Bush-Assad narco-terrorist alliance more than did Mansour Al-Kassar. The son of Syria's former ambassador to Egypt and a member of the Assad inner circle, Mansour Al-Kassar was known to U.S. law enforcement agencies as one of the world's leading illegal arms traffickers, with offices throughout the Middle East and the Warsaw Pact. Official CIA records had Al-Kassar listed as a KGB agent.

The Drug Enforcement Administration, also, knew Al-Kassar as the kingpin of the "Syrian Connection." His Marbella, Spain villa was the scene of secret meetings between leaders of the Syrian mafia, including Rifaat Assad, brother of President Assad, and leaders of both the Medellín and Cali cartels in Colombia. Indeed, Al-Kassar spent time in a British jail for drug smuggling, and was labelled as the secret backer of Palestinian terrorist Abu Abbas, who was responsible for the 1985 *Achille Lauro* ship-hijacking, in which an American passenger was killed.

Despite all of this, Bush's underling, Oliver North, hired Al-Kassar to work for "The Enterprise" in 1984, and, according to the official records of the Congressional Iran-Contra panel, paid him at least \$1.5 million to deliver Soviet bloc weapons to the Contras. Al-Kassar was also used as the "second channel" to the Lebanese-based terrorists who had taken American hostages in Beirut.

By the time Pan Am Flight 103 was destroyed by a terrorist bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland in December 1988, then-President-elect Bush was wedded to Syria's Assad—narco-terrorists and all! It is no wonder that Bush and his British nanny, Margaret Thatcher, agreed that, under no circumstances, would the Syrians be held responsible for the Lockerbie massacre, despite massive evidence that Syria played an important role.

In 1990, President Bush gave Assad the go-ahead to oust anti-Syrian Lebanese President Michel Aoun, thereby completing Syria's takeover of all of non-Israeli-controlled Lebanon. In return, Syria participated fully in the 1991 Anglo-American war on Iraq. Since that time, the U.S. government has repeatedly claimed that Syria has ceased all opium production and heroin refining in Lebanon. However, off the record, U.S. government officials report that opium production continues there on the same level as in 1989, and that heroin refining is continuing full steam.

And, since the mid-1990s, a new source of heroin into the United States has rapidly come on stream from Colombia, where the cocaine cartels were used by the Reagan-Bush administration in its Iran-Contra operations, and where the Reagan-Bush team had worked hand-in-glove with Syria's cartel boss, Mansour Al-Kassar.