

The Politics of Heroin and the Afghan US Pullout. Private Mercenary Occupation

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The Biden Administration has announced an Afghanistan US troop withdrawal date of September, 11, 2021, symbolically exactly two decades after the game-changing 911 attacks in New York and Washington. However the Pentagon and White House are saying nothing about one of the main reasons the powers that be who control Washington have remained in Afghanistan since the fake chase after a former CIA contract employee named Osama bin Laden.

What is clear is that the US Administration is not being straightforward with its plans for Afghanistan and the so-called pull-out. The previously agreed May 1 date versus September 11 is clearly not about making a more graceful exit after a two decade war that has cost US taxpayers more than \$2 trillion. The argument by some US Democrats that a full pullout will endanger the rights of Afghan women with the brutal Taliban culture of misogyny is clearly not what US and NATO soldiers have been protecting with their presence. What then is at stake?

Private Mercenary Occupation

While the Pentagon has been sly about giving any direct answer, it seems that what the Team Biden neo-cons are planning is a “privatized” US military presence. According to a report by Jeremy Kuzmarov, “over 18,000 Pentagon contractors remain in Afghanistan, while official troops number 2,500. Joe Biden will withdraw this smaller group of soldiers while leaving behind US Special Forces, mercenaries, and intelligence operatives — privatizing and down-scaling the war, but not ending it.” Already there are seven private military contractors in Afghanistan for [every single US soldier](#).

Use of private military contractors allows the Pentagon and US intelligence agencies to avoid serious Congressional oversight. Typically they are special forces veterans who earn vastly more as private security contractors or mercenaries. Their work is simply classified so there is almost no accountability. The New York Times reports, citing current and former US officials, that Washington “will most likely rely on a shadowy combination of clandestine Special Operations forces, Pentagon contractors and covert intelligence operatives” to conduct operations inside Afghanistan.

The current Afghan government led by Ashraf Ghani, like that of Hamid Karzai is a creation

of the United States. Ghani will remain Washington's proxy in Kabul. His military is funded by the United States at a cost of around [\\$4 billion per year](#). For what?

What is missing from the public discussion of Afghan troop presence is the 800 pound gorilla in the room: drugs, specifically heroin.

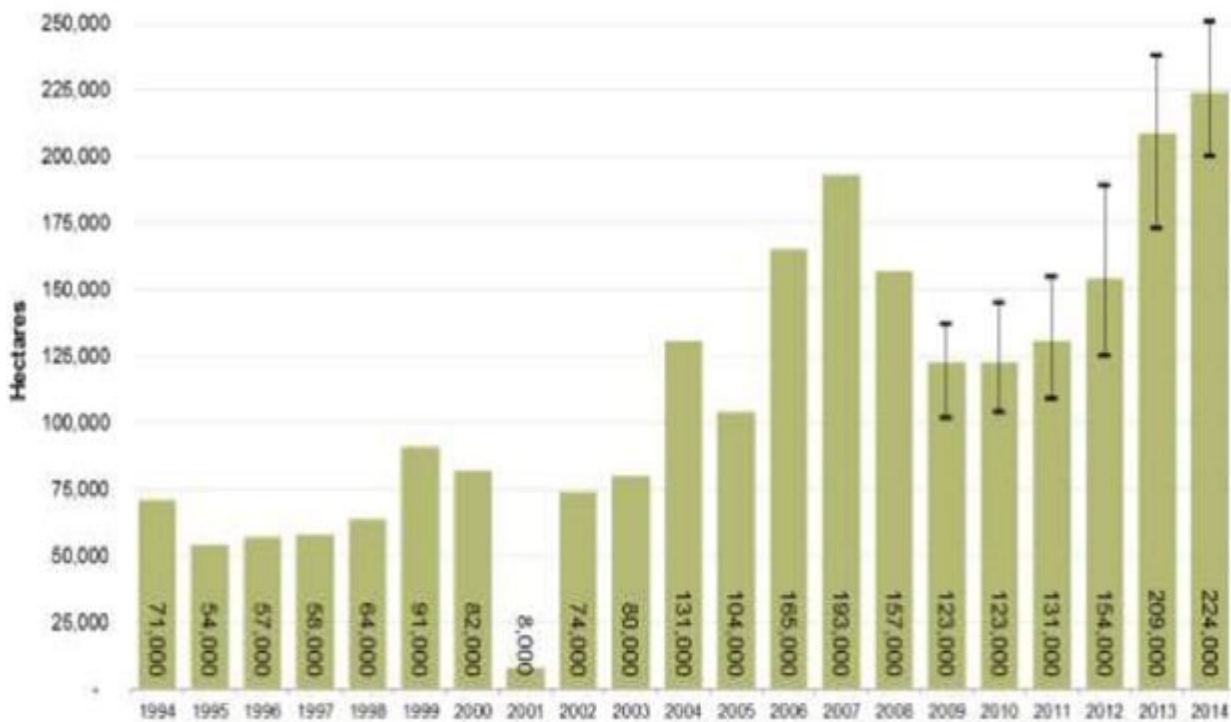
The 800 Pound Gorilla

Some of these private soldiers of fortune are not doing nice things. DynCorp is one of the largest contractors there. As of 2019 DynCorp had gotten over \$7 billion in government contracts to train the Afghan army and manage military bases in Afghanistan. One of the publicized tasks of DynCorp and other US mercenary personnel in Afghanistan has been to "oversee" destruction of Afghan poppy fields that supply an estimated 93% of world heroin. Yet the clear evidence is that that opium and its global distribution has been a major province of the CIA along with the US military who guarantee secure air transport via airbases in Kyrgyzstan as well as Afghanistan into the western heroin markets. DynCorp has little to show for that drug eradication, or were they doing something else?

CIA, Mujahideen and Afghan Opium

When the US first occupied Afghanistan, claiming retribution for the Taliban role in aiding Osama bin Laden in the 911 US attacks, a severe anti-opium policy of Taliban had reduced harvests to almost zero. By October, 2001, just before the US invasion, the UN acknowledged that the Taliban reduced opium production in Afghanistan from 3300 tons in 2000 to 185 tons in 2001. According to Canadian economist and historian Michel Chossudovsky, "immediately following the October 2001 invasion, opium markets were restored. Opium prices spiraled. By early 2002, the domestic price of opium in Afghanistan (in dollars/kg) was almost 10 times higher than in 2000." The Anglo-American invasion of Afghanistan successfully restored the drug trade. The Guardian reported that, "In 2007 Afghanistan had more land growing drugs than Colombia, Bolivia and Peru [combined](#)." That was six years into the US military occupation.

Figure 1: Opium cultivation in Afghanistan, 1994-2014 (Hectares)



Source: UN

Within several years of US occupation under Karzai, opium crops were at all-time record levels. One of the largest Afghan opium warlords then was the brother of Karzai. In 2009 the New York Times, citing unnamed US officials, wrote that,

“Ahmed Wali Karzai, the brother of the Afghan president and a suspected player in the country’s booming illegal opium trade, gets regular payments from the Central Intelligence Agency, and has for much of the [past eight years...](#)”

In 2011 Ahmed Karzai was gunned down, mob-style, at his home in Helmand by one of his bodyguards. Helmand is the largest opium province in Afghanistan. If Helmand were a country it would be the largest opium producer worldwide. Was it accident that the CIA paid money to Karzai for at least eight years or did The Company have a stake in the business of Karzai?

While Washington and the CIA have denied supporting the huge Afghan opium trade, the CIA history since the Vietnam War with drug warlords suggests otherwise. As Alfred W. McCoy documented during the Vietnam War era in his ground-breaking book, *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, the CIA was deeply involved with Hmong tribesmen in Laos who were involved in opium trade. They claimed it was necessary to twin their support. Later it was found the CIA Air America was involved in secretly shipping opium from the Golden Triangle.

During the 1980’s US-financed Mujahideen war against the Soviet Red Army in Afghanistan, the CIA allegedly turned a blind eye as Osama bin Laden and thousands of “Afghan Arabs” he recruited. Afghan warlords such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar were enriching themselves along with the Pakistani ISI intelligence with vast drug trade profits. To imagine that the CIA, and private mercenary armies such as DynCorp closely tied to the agency, are today involved in the world’s largest opium and heroin source requires no great leap of faith.

In 2018 Alfred McCoy made a damning indictment of the US war in Afghanistan. He asked,

“How could the world’s sole superpower have battled continuously for more than 16 years – deploying more than 100,000 troops at the conflict’s peak, sacrificing the lives of nearly 2,300 soldiers, spending more than \$1trillion on its military operations, lavishing a record \$100bn more on ‘nation-building’, helping fund and train an army of 350,000 Afghan allies – and still not be able to pacify one of the world’s most impoverished nations?”

His reply was that the US presence was not about nation-building or democracy. It was about heroin:

“Throughout its three decades in Afghanistan, Washington’s military operations have succeeded only when they fit reasonably comfortably into central Asia’s illicit traffic in opium,” he charged. “Its opium production surged from around 180 tons in 2001 to more than 3,000 tons a year [after the invasion](#), and to more than 8,000 by 2007.

By 2017 the opium production reached a record 9,000 tons. After more than 16 years of US military occupation. Somewhere here is a very dirty and criminal story and the CIA as well as related private military contractors such as DynCorp appear to be in the middle of it.

This is maybe the real reason Washington refuses to honestly leave Afghanistan. As Pepe Escobar points out, contrary to the narrative in Western media that the Taliban control the Afghan opium trade,

“this is not an Afghan Taliban operation. The key questions — never asked by Atlanticist circles — are who buys the opium harvests; refines them into heroin; controls the export routes; and then sell them for humongous profit...”

He points to NATO, noting that Russian citizens are “collateral damage” of the Afghan heroin ratline as much as Americans. “The Russian Foreign Ministry is tracking how tons of chemicals are being illegally imported into Afghanistan from, among others, ‘Italy, France and the Netherlands’, and how the US and NATO are doing absolutely nothing to contain the [heroin ratline](#).”

The US operations in Afghanistan, the world’s largest opium producer, is far from ending. It is merely changing form.

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