

Documentation

Dataset A13. Drug Trading Routes Interviews in Nangarhar and Nimroz provinces and the Role of Commanders as Brokers along those Routes

Data collection resulting from information gathering, actor mapping and face-to-face questionnaire interviews along two drug trafficking routes, from Shirzad in Nangarhar to Pakistan, and from Bakwa and Khashrod in Nimroz to Iran. Interviews used bilingual paper forms, in Pashto and English. Handwritten responses were noted by the field researchers in Pashto. Responses were then written out in Word and later translated to English.

Dataset owner: Organization for Sustainable Development and Research (OSDR)

Context

In Afghanistan, the goal of the research is to develop a robust and dynamic understanding of the actors, commodities and events that shape the borderlands of Nangarhar and Nimroz. For the last year of research (2021), the focus has been on investigating drug trading routes from start to finish. They either originate, or end in one of our three target provinces. The commodity is followed along the trade route and the role of various actors is assessed, including the organisations they form, the formal and informal institutions that constrain them along the route and how this governance environment of the trading route keeps defining the value and risks of the commodity along the way. A special focus is on the roles of and functions provided by commanders of armed groups along the trading route, specifically in terms of brokerage functions provided between farmers, traders and political patrons (governmental or Taliban).

Along the first drug route studied, opium is traded from Shirzad, the main opium cultivating district in Nangarhar, towards Pakistan (Figure 1). Entry into Pakistan is via informal border crossings in Durbaba and the main official border crossing at Torkham, which at the time being was mostly under Taliban control. Most "official informal" border crossings are now closed or more tightly monitored on the Pakistani side. In 2020 Tabai seems to have developed into the main informal crossing point for drugs in Durbaba. Trafficking via the official crossing at Torkham seems to involve either high-level connections for larger deliveries or is done as a high-risk operation hiding smaller packages in trucks and cars with otherwise legal agricultural products.

Along the second drug route, opium and crystal meth, and possibly also heroin, are traded from Bakwa district in Farah province and Khashrod district in Nimroz into Iran (Figure 2). There seem to be two main routes here. One via route 606 Delaram-Zaranj either to the Melak official border crossing (B) or via smaller roads along that way into Kang district via informal border crossings (A). The second route (C) via the Margo desert to Roudbar of Charburjak then to Bahramcha of Desho in Helmand and into Pakistan and then onwards to Iran.

Different from Nangarhar, Nimroz still seems to be a main transit district for old and new drugs. Drug cultivation and production is vibrant in the Taliban-controlled areas of Khashrod (Nimroz) and bordering Bakwa. It is alleged that ANA soldiers stationed along the main highway earn some extra money on the poppy fields around their checkpoints during harvest season. Chrystal meth is produced in Bakwa and apparently also in Khashrod. Iranian infrastructure measures have been limiting open access to the other side over the past years, but drugs are still trafficked in large quantities and Kang districts still plays an important role, whilst not being a drug producing district.

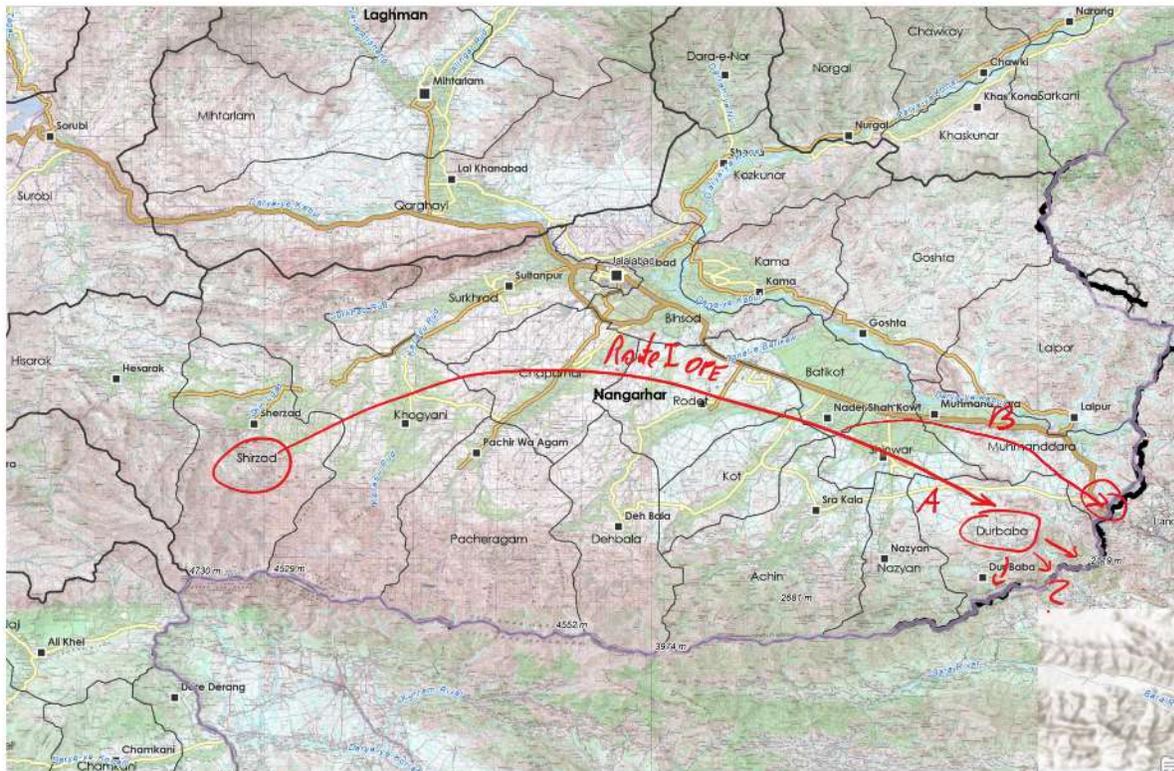


Figure 1. Drug trafficking route from Shirzad (Nangarhar) to Pakistan

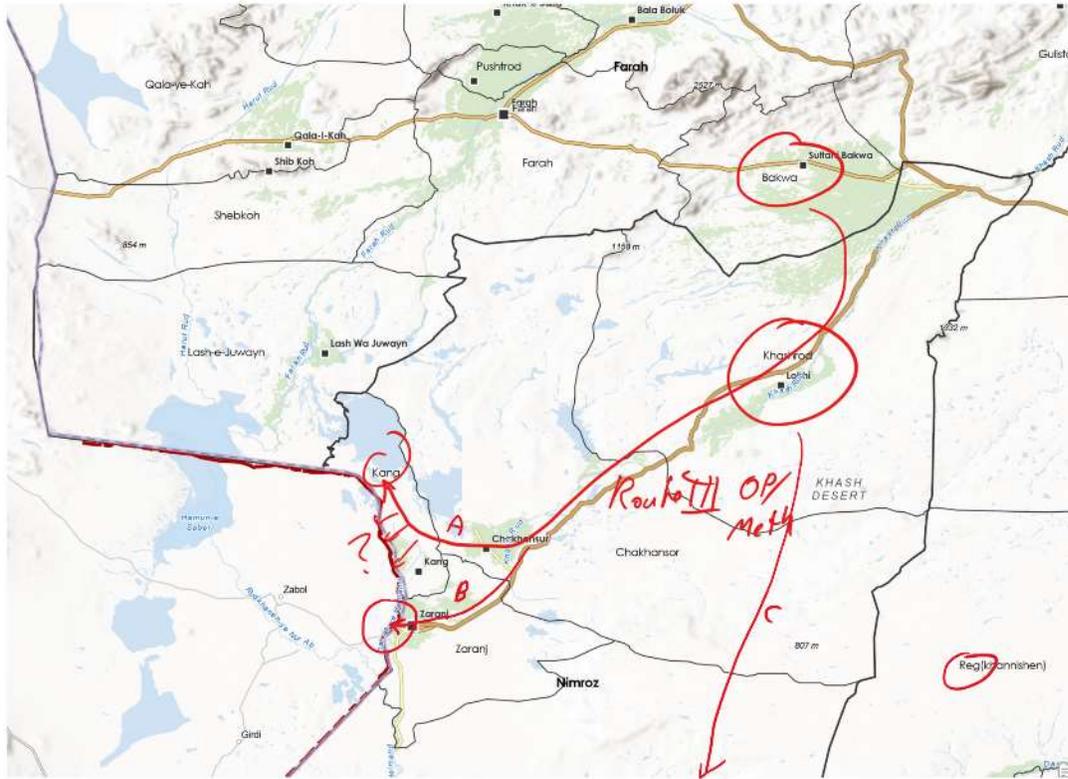


Figure 2. Drug trafficking route from Bakwa (Farah) and Khashrod (Nimroz) to Iran

Methodology

Seven different guideline questionnaires were developed, to carry out interviews with seven categories of actors in drug trafficking: wholesalers, local traders, farmers, refiners, store managers, transporters and militia commanders. Questionnaires were developed in a SOAS – OSDR collaboration in English and Pashto.

For the Nangarhar drug route, four life histories interviews were carried out with militia commanders and 46 interviews were conducted with the following actors:

- 4 militia commanders
- 12 backup interviews on the commanders with people close to him or opposed to him
- 8 drug transporters
- 5 drug wholesalers (traders)
- 5 local drug traders
- 3 drug producers/refiners
- 1 financial services provider
- 2 storage managers
- 6 cultivators (farmers)

For the Nimroz drug route, four life history interviews with influential people were conducted, and 36 interviews with the following actors:

- 8 drug transporters
- 10 drug wholesalers (traders)
- 6 local drug traders
- 2 drug producers/refiners in Farah province
- 2 financial services provider
- 2 storage managers
- 6 cultivators (farmers)

Location

Field work was conducted in Nangarhar province, districts Shinwar, Nazyan, Dur Baba and Shirzad district; in Nimroz province, districts Kang, Khashrood and Zaranj; and in Bakwa district, Farah province.

Time period

Field work was carried out during May – July 2021 in Nangarhar and during October – November 2021 in Nimroz.

Sample selection

Snowball sampling was used to identify people to interview, starting from key informers previously interviewed in the area, and local connections / suggestions for people with knowledge about the trade along the route.