

# افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مېاد      بدین یوم ویر زنده یک تن مېاد  
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم      از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/watchdog-afghanistans-lapis-lazuli-conflict-mineral-054046673.html>

## Afghanistan's lapis lazuli seen as 'conflict mineral'

June 6, 2016



In this March 28, 2016 photo, lapis lazuli is seen for sale inside a shop in the city of Kabul, Afghanistan. An international anti-corruption watchdog says Afghanistan's war is being fueled by the country's mining sector, with the Taliban earning up to \$20 million a year from illegal mining of lapis lazuli.

Afghanistan's president has thrown his support behind a push to classify lapis lazuli as a "conflict mineral" after a global advocacy group said Monday that militants — including the Taliban — earn up to \$20 million a year from illegal mining of the rare blue stone.

Such a move would force Afghanistan to regulate its troubled mining sector, which now provides the Taliban with its second biggest source of income after drugs.

The London-based corruption watchdog Global Witness said in its report that Afghanistan's northern Badakhshan province, where the mines are concentrated, has been "deeply destabilized" by violent competition among Taliban insurgents and local strongmen.

The stone is prized for its rich blue color and used in jewelry and other ornaments. It's been mined in Afghanistan and traded along the Silk Road since ancient times.

Afghanistan's mineral assets could earn the government up to \$2 billion a year, according to Global Witness. But authorities lack the money and expertise to fully develop the sector, and international firms are deterred by the deteriorating security situation.

The report says the government lost at least \$17.5 million in revenue from lapis lazuli in 2014 and \$10 million in 2015. Armed groups earned an estimated \$19.9 million in 2014, and a local strongman identified as Abdul Malek has paid nearly \$5 million in protection money to the Taliban over the last two years from his mining proceeds, the report said.

Global Witness said the Badakhshan mines have also become a "strategic priority" for a local Islamic State affiliate, which emerged over the past year mostly in the country's east, along the border with Pakistan.

"Unless the Afghan government acts rapidly to regain control, the battle for the lapis mines is set to intensify and further destabilize the country, as well as fund extremism," Global Witness said.

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, an independent Kabul-based think tank, said in a recent report that there are up to 10,000 mines "outside of government control and subject to looting." It says there are "currently over 300 trucks full of illegally extracted lapis," or around 6,000 tons, in Badakhshan awaiting export.

"The most conservative estimates for this amount to about \$300 million," it said.

It said Taliban commanders also operate government-owned marble mines in Helmand province, where the Taliban earn \$10 million annually from extraction at 25 to 30 sites close to the Pakistan border.

Ghani told reporters late Sunday that "any mistake we have made in the management of our natural resources we will pay for, for the next 200 years."

He compared Afghanistan to the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the race for minerals has fueled conflict for decades, and said he would urge parliament to classify lapis lazuli as a conflict mineral.

The international classification indicates that a product's sale contributes to war and human rights abuses. The best-known example is "blood diamonds," long used to fund wars across Africa. A U.N. resolution in 1988 proposed measures that could trace diamonds from their origin to point of sale.

Should Afghanistan's lapis lazuli be classified as a conflict mineral, it would oblige Kabul to regulate the mines and possibly set up a central bourse to ensure accountability and transparency for each stone, a proposal made by Afghanistan's former minister of mines, Daud Saba, who resigned earlier this year.

The government banned lapis lazuli mining in early 2015 because the mines could not be secured. But the mining continued with impunity, with local police and politicians reportedly benefiting from the illegal extraction and export of the stone. The Global Witness report identifies warlords, police chiefs and politicians who it says benefit from the trade.

Much of the illegal lapis lazuli exports go to China, Global Witness said. "The fact that Chinese lapis sales are funding the Taliban comes in contrast to the Chinese government's official position as peace-broker on Afghanistan in regional security talks."

Beijing is part of four-country consultations with Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States aimed at bringing the Taliban into a peace dialogue to end the war.

The Taliban are expected to step up attacks this year as their new leader, Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada, moves to consolidate his position after his predecessor, Mullah Akhtar Mansour, was killed in a U.S. drone strike in Pakistan last month.

If Kabul cannot secure the nation's vast mineral assets — which also include coal, iron ore, copper, gold, chromite, lithium, onyx, marble, rubies and emeralds — there are fears they will continue fall into the hands of armed groups, prolonging the war.

But Ghani said "it is not too late," citing contract review and public scrutiny as key to securing the sector.