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Italian police seize record haul of amphetamine drugs worth €1bn



Watch: Italian police seize 14 tonnes of 'jihad drug' pills worth €1 billion after they were shipped from Syria

The discovery of the amphetamine Captagon pills from Syria has been described as one of the world's largest single hauls of the drug

By Telegraph Video; Nick Squires ROME and James Rothwell JERUSALEM

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Italian police have intercepted more than €1 billion (£903 million) worth of a so-called “jihadi drug”, in what they called the biggest seizure of amphetamines in the world.

The Guardia di Finanza border police said the drugs were produced by the Islamic State, but offered no evidence for the claim, which was immediately disputed by regional experts.

The drugs, which came from Syria, were more likely to have been produced in regime-held territories, said Charles Lister, a director of the Middle East Institute in Washington DC.

The depleted Islamic State would not have been able to manufacture narcotics at this scale, he said.

The drugs, in the form of 84 million Captagon tablets that together weighed 14 tonnes, [were found concealed](#) inside industrial cylinders of paper that had arrived in the port of Salerno, near Naples. The 6ft-high cylinders were found inside three shipping containers.

When officers cut into the giant rolls of paper with chainsaws, the pills came tumbling out in their millions.



The Naples branch of the Italian Guardia di Finanza (GdF) seized a 14-ton haul of amphetamines, in the form of around 84 million tablets bearing the 'captagon' symbol | CREDIT: CIRO FUSCO/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock/Shutterstock

Captagon is one of several brand names for fenethylamine hydrochloride, a drug compound belonging to the family of amphetamines which can inhibit fear and ward off tiredness.

“It’s the biggest seizure of amphetamines in the world,” the police said in a statement.

“It’s well known that IS finances its terrorist activities with drug trafficking.”

They said the drugs had been produced in Syria but did not say exactly where.

“No way they have the capacity to produce and smuggle something on this magnitude right now,” Brody McDonald, an expert on Middle East politics and extremism, wrote on Twitter.

Captagon was originally produced in Lebanon in the 1990s and then Saudi Arabia before being seized on by IS as a way of making money.

Over 80 million tablets were discovered | CREDIT: GUARDIA DI FINANZA HANDOUT/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock/Shutterstock

The pills were taken by IS fighters to suppress fear and pain during combat – hence its nicknames, the “jihad drug”.

The drugs were probably destined for a “consortium of criminal groups”, police said, possibly clans belonging to the Camorra mafia of Naples.

Production of synthetic drugs had “practically stopped” [during Europe’s coronavirus lockdown](#) so criminal groups were looking to Syria for supplies, the Italians said.

According to IHS Markit, a global risk consultancy, drugs once accounted for 7% of Islamic State's total income.

The production cost of 200,000 illegally-produced Captagon pills has been estimated at a few thousand US dollars, but the market price can exceed \$1.2m, according to Łukasz

Kamieński, the author of *Shooting Up: A Short History of Drugs and War*.

"This huge seizure of Captagon is just the latest example of synthetic drugs fueling conflict from Syria to Myanmar," said Antony Loewenstein, the author of *Pills, Powder and Smoke: Inside the Bloody War on Drugs*.

"Captagon has long been accused of allowing jihadi fighters the mental and physical ability to feel euphoric before and during conflict and not feel fear. What's concerning about the rise in synthetic drugs is how easy they are to produce and distribute by militant groups and non-state actors."

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