

23 MAY 1971

Approved For Release 2001/03/04 : CIA-RDP80-01601R00

Is the CIA Involved In Opium Traffic? We Should Find Out

DENVER:

A LLEN GINSBERG, the poet, made a bet this month with Central Intelligence Agency chief Richard Helms, that he (Ginsberg) would soon present incontrovertible evidence of CIA involvement in international opium smuggling.

The Helms-Ginsberg exchange comes at the early stages of what may yet be one of the year's big political furors. For months rumors of government dope privateering have circulated in underground press and political channels. Ginsberg is among the principal figures behind the speculation.



Steven Levine, 18

The first in-depth investigation was "The New Opium War," an article published in the May issue of Ramparts magazine. The authors are Frank Browning and Banning Garrett.

For centuries, write the investigators, opium has been a staple cash crop of the Meo tribesmen living in northern Laos, Burma and Thailand. Originally exported solely for intra-Asian use, it has, since World War II, become a salable commodity on the world market. For a time Sicilian Mafiosi purchased it directly from local warlord smugglers, but the politicization of Indochina has brought in competition.

The opium trade is now in the hands of Chinese mercenaries, Vietnamese, Laotian and Thai racketeers and the CIA, say Browning and Garrett. During the Dulles period, it was decided that the opium growing area was of strategic importance, demanding clandestine American involvement. This involvement took the form of equipping and training certain prominent military factions in the region as anti-Chinese counterinsurgents. The Meos, the Thai border patrol police and the Kuomintang, the 93d division of Chiang Kai-shek's army now exiled in northern Laos, all come under the protective and supportive wing of the CIA. The oil that keeps everything in this alliance running smoothly is opium money. With the Thai border patrol police looking the other way the Meos grow the stuff, the KMT deals it to smugglers who, in turn, deal it to the Viet, Lao and Thai gangsters who process it either as straight smoking opium or injectible smacks, and export it to Taiwan or Hong Kong from whence it proceeds to the United States.

According to Garrett and Browning, 80 percent of the American heroin supply comes in through these channels. They charge that the CIA lends technical and logistical support, alleging that harvested opium collected at Long Cheny in Laos is flown to processing and dealing installations in Laos, Thailand and Vietnam in Air America and U. S. military planes. All the parties to the action are equipped with CIA supplied ordnance.

If ever there was a public issue which commands a full airing and immediate action commensurate with what that airing brings to light, I would submit, this is the issue. We all need to know the outcome of Allen Ginsberg's bet.

STATOTHR