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U.S. Fears Increased Flow Of Heroin From New Sources

By Stanley Karnow
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American narcotics specialists are privately expressing concern at the prospect of an increase in the illegal flow of heroin into the United States from South and West Asia as the supply of drugs from other foreign sources dwindles.

Confidential studies prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency and other U.S. government bureaus warn that the halt in Turkish opium cultivation may spur international drug traders to tap fresh sources of narcotics in India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran.

Turkey's legal opium production is scheduled to end this year as a result of U.S. subsidies aimed at encouraging Turkish farmers to grow other crops. Most heroin reaching the United States is refined in France from opium of Turkish origin.

The CIA studies, made available to The Washington Post by columnist Jack Anderson, estimate that about half of the total world raw opium supply of 2,500 tons is produced in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Iranian output has jumped to 156 tons in 1971 from eight tons in 1969, when Iran legalized opium production.

Until now, little of the opium grown in South and West Asia has served as the raw material for heroin smuggled into the United States. But according to the CIA "the withdrawal of Turkey from the illicit world market" threatens to attract narcotics merchants seeking new sources of supply.

The U.S government studies calculate that India produces about 200 tons of illegal opium per year. Most of this opium enters a domestic black market serving some 300,000 Indian addicts. So far, the studies say, India has not been a significant narcotics exporter.

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The studies caution, however, that India could become a supplier of the U.S. market unless the New Delhi government acts to suppress its internal narcotics trade. Or as one of the reports puts it:

"India is frequently cited in United Nations bodies as a model for controlled opium production and distribution. From the U.S. standpoint, this myth has been detrimental even though India is not a source of U.S. heroin supply.

"Because the myth absolves New Delhi from dealing seriously with its own addiction and traffic, it has been able to strike a pose of moral superiority internationally. This blocks U.S.-Indian cooperation on narcotics matters and diverts India from a potentially useful role in developing effective multilateral programs in the United Nations which is a focal point of U.S. policy strategy."

The U.S. report urges that actions be undertaken by the Nixon administration to "expose the existence of India's illicit markets," adding that "the United States might lose some good will in the process of exposure but not on a scale to offset the likely gains."

Turning to Pakistan and Afghanistan, the CIA studies assert that "laxities in law enforcement" in those countries "appear to offer a trafficker easier access to tribal producers" of opium than in other parts of the world.

According to another classified U.S. government report, Pakistan produces about 175 to 200 tons of illicit opium per year, most of it cultivated in the country's northwest tribal regions.

The report blames the Pakistan government's failures to suppress the drug trade on inefficiency and "official corruption." It also points out [illegible] are unwilling to tackle the

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drug problem because they fear "a hostile response from the politically sensitive frontier tribal areas."

Recalling that "a number of diplomatic representations" made by the United States to the Pakistan government have had no "apparent effect," the report recommends that the Nixon administration apply "pressures and inducements" including a halt in U.S. aid to persuade the Pakistanis to deal with their drug output.

According to the U.S. studies, Afghanistan produces between 100 and 125 tons of opium a year, cultivated mainly by Pushtun tribesmen in the eastern parts of the country. Most of Afghanistan's narcotics output, a study states, is exported illegally. "Smuggling is a way of life in Afghanistan," it says.

The study further warns that drug networks operating out of Afghanistan are ripe to be taken over by international traffickers because the Afghan authorities take a benign attitude toward narcotics traders.

The U.S. study attributes the continuation of the Afghan narcotics trade to "official corruption" as well as to a lack of interest on the part of the country's authorities.

The report warns against vigorous U.S. actions that might increase Afghan dependence on the Soviet Union. It further concludes: "It is unrealistic to expect Afghanistan, which suffers little from the narcotics problem itself, to give its solution the highest priority in view of the extremely limited human and financial resources of the country."

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A CIA memorandum issued on June 9, meanwhile, voices alarm at the growth of opium production and addiction in Iran.

The memorandum stresses that Iran could become a transit area for illegal drugs moving from South Asia toward Western Europe and the United States. Some 170 tons of illicit Afghan and Pakistan opium are currently smuggled into Iran every year. According to the document, an Iranian prince who accompanied Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi was recently charged by the Swiss authorities with carrying opium to Geneva.

After a 14-year ban on opium output, the Shah legalized the production of drug in 1969, partly in order to stop a drain on the country's foreign currency reserves through smuggling. His decision was denounced by the United Nations at the time as "tragic" for both Iran and other nations.

Since then, says the CIA memorandum, Iran has registered about 90,000 narcotics addicts. But this represents only one-fourth of the estimated 400,000 drug users in the country.

This year, the memorandum calculates, the demand for opium in Iran will total about 350 tons—roughly two-thirds of which will come from domestic production and the rest from contraband supplies.

The CIA document estimates, however, that Iranian opium production should soon satisfy and even exceed internal needs. At that point, the memorandum warns, the country could become a narcotics exporter and also a drug transit channel.

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