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CIA helps to curb, not aid, dope trade

It is still not common knowledge that in 1971 President Nixon ordered the CIA to join the fight against the international narcotics trade, or that, according to John E. Ingersoll, director of the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, "much of the progress we are now making in identifying overseas traffic can, in fact, be attributed to CIA cooperation."

It seems, at first glance, a strange choice. The CIA has no executive powers at home or abroad, and no expertise in narcotics or in criminal police work. Why, then, was it deployed on this particular firing line, and what contribution has it made?

The answers can be found in the complex nature of the drug trade.

Most of the world's raw opium originates in Turkey or in the "Golden Triangle" of the Burma-Thailand-Laos border. Tightly organized and constantly changing channels bring it to such diverse areas as Vientiane, Bangkok, Hong Kong or Marseille for processing, and equally complex routes via still other countries bring it to the borders of America.

The current attack on the trade is two-pronged: By diplomatic pressures to reduce raw opium and finished heroin production, and, since production can never be eliminated entirely, to increase

the effectiveness of the U.S. Customs Bureau by timely forewarning of specific smuggling shipments.

None of the countries touched by the trade can do this alone. The Turkish government can move against raw opium production; French, British and Thai police can crack down on processing and smuggling, with varying degrees of success.

Some powerless

Some countries can do little or nothing; the opium areas in Burma and Thailand are controlled by autonomous insurgent groups depending on the opium for economic survival, while no government in Laos — there are several — has any real control over the landscape. Other countries, used for transshipment, may not be aware of what is going on.

But, sophisticated or not, what these countries cannot do is coordinate their activities, because with the best will in the world the liaison mechanisms on the proper levels do not exist.

The French police, for example, can be as effective as any in the world. But if they are operating against a processing installation in Marseille with an input from Izmir, they simply cannot get in touch with the local Turkish police to coordinate their plans. They have neither the funds, manpower, nor charter to do so. They can only report within their own government, until at the proper level their information is passed to the Turks through diplomatic channels, after which it must filter down on the other side.

The CIA is made to order to broker such exchanges. CIA stations and bases throughout the world have direct liaison contact with local security forces, and they maintain a superb communications network. The agency can serve as a link between countries and organizations which have never been in touch with each other before, and which would have formidable problems if they tried, passing timely and accurate intelligence to the exact level where it is required.

The CIA also can collect operational intelligence on the sprawling ramifications of the trade, especially in countries which cannot do this for themselves.

From raw production through processing to the final smuggling attempt, a narcotics chain may involve scores of people in a dozen countries, and because security is at a premium, its organization parallels that of a clandestine intelligence network.

The techniques employed to penetrate both are identical, and the CIA's stock-in-trade is its skill in spotting, developing, recruiting and managing agent assets for the collection of intelligence.

The French and the British, of course, can do this work themselves, and CIA entry into their domestic criminal work is out of the question. Other, less developed countries, however, cannot manage such activities themselves without the training that CIA liaison can provide.

The CIA also has the requisite headquarters establishment to support and coordinate such a world-wide

*The CIA does
serve to fund
Air America,
but it cannot
practically
detect all the
narcotics taken
aboard, some
by immune
high officials*

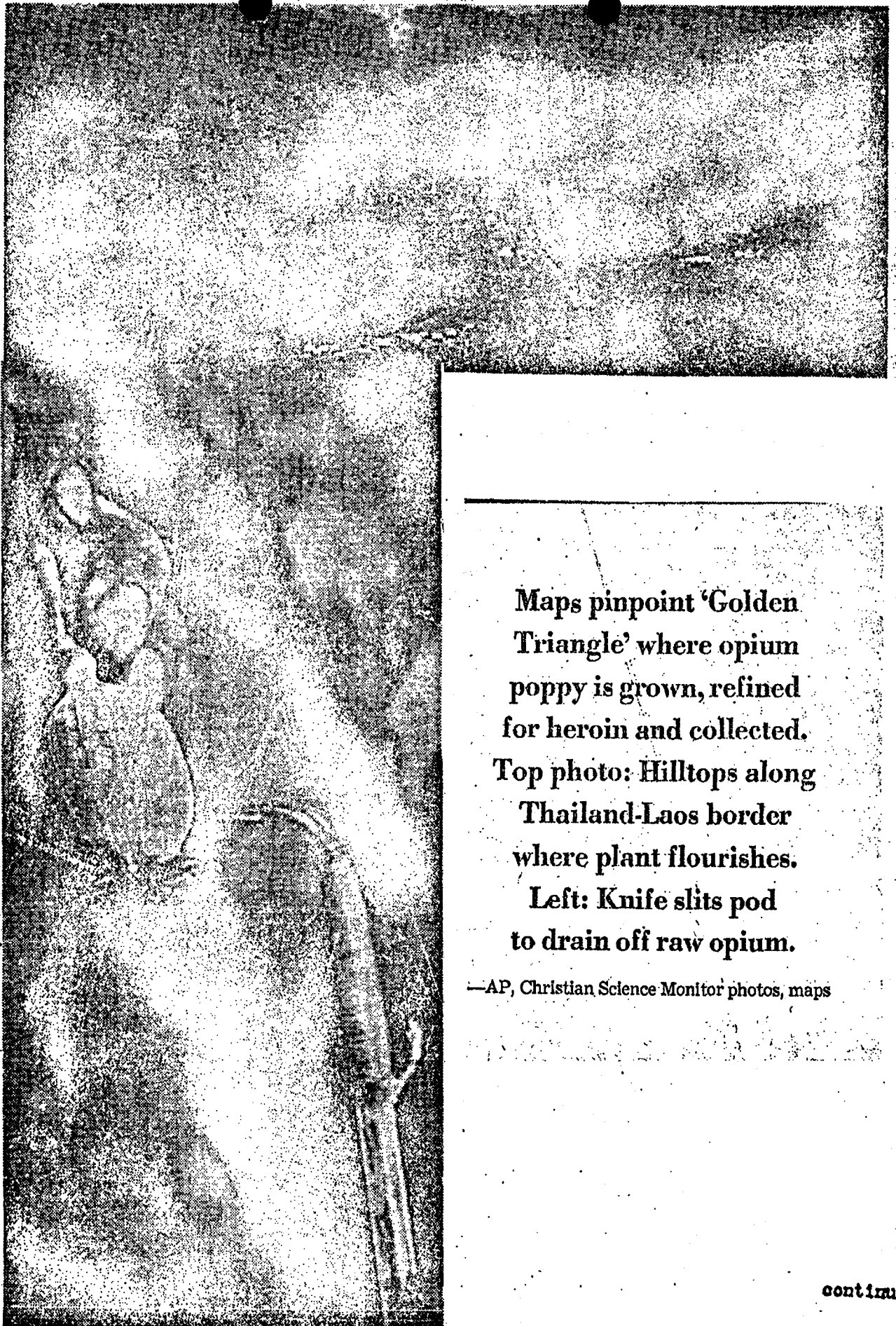
program, setting up and maintaining the multi-national files involved, running traces and analyzing and collecting the raw information so that finished intelligence can be passed to appropriate authorities for action.

Coordination

The CIA, in fact, probably is the only organization in the world that can do such a job, and it has recently established a special headquarters branch to coordinate the work. The field stations were long ago ordered into the battle.

One of the first fruits of CIA labor has been a lengthy report to the Cabinet Committee on International Narcotics Control, which promises to become the guide book on which the fight will rest.

In considerable detail, it covers the entire world opium situation country by country, tracing out licit and illicit opium production, processing and distribution, as well as summarizing the problems faced by the individual countries and the multilateral control efforts. The report is unclassified.



Maps pinpoint 'Golden Triangle' where opium poppy is grown, refined for heroin and collected.
Top photo: Hilltops along Thailand-Laos border where plant flourishes.
Left: Knife slits pod to drain off raw opium.

—AP, Christian Science Monitor photos, maps

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