

JUL 31 1972  
M - 239,949  
S - 350,303

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Soc. 4.01.2 Politics of Heroin in S.E. Asia

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CIA 4.01.2 Drug Traff

# Opinion

## U.S. aid for the drug traffickers?

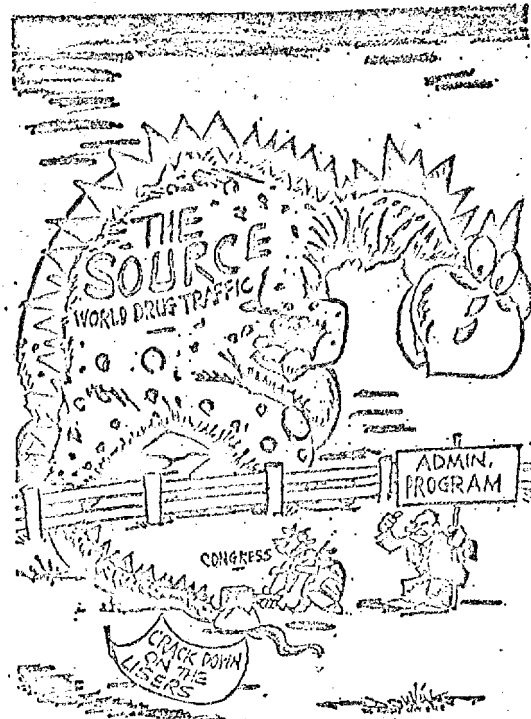
AS PART OF the effort to combat drug abuse—which, according to President Nixon last summer, has “assumed the dimensions of a national emergency”—the administration is committed to an all-out attack on the international narcotics trade. This involves not just the breaking up of the syndicates that process and import the heroin to the United States, but persuading other governments, particularly in Southeast Asia where most of the world’s heroin now originates, to come down hard on the growers and marketeers. But is the Nixon administration trying as hard as it could to cut off this profitable trade at its source?

Disturbing evidence is accumulating that it may not be. There is *The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia*, to be published this fall but excerpted in the July issue of *Harper's* by a young Yale graduate student specializing in Southeast Asian history and politics. This documents the involvement of high government and military officials in Laos and Thailand in the narcotics trade; it even charges complicity by the Central Intelligence Agency. The CIA has challenged all the author’s allegations, asserting that most of them are without foundation.

### ‘Lever’ is hard to use

But there is also the study made last winter by top-level officials of the CIA, the State Department and the Pentagon, and just now disclosed. This report concludes that there is no prospect of cutting off the smuggling of narcotics from Southeast Asia because of “the corruption, collusion and indifference at some places in some governments, particularly Thailand and South Vietnam.” This conclusion, too, is being discounted by administration officials, who argue that it is out of date and that “substantial progress” has been made in the past four months.

Yet it would be naive to assume that a situation that was so bad could have improved as significantly and as swiftly as all that. Certainly the administration is nowhere near repeating the success it scored last year when it was able to persuade the Turkish government to



Dowling in The Kansas City Star

“The place to start is the other end.”

of the opium poppy. In Turkey’s case the United States is to help in compensating the thousands of peasant farmers for whom poppy-growing has been an innocent livelihood for centuries and who now must switch to other cash crops. Whether the Turkish government or anyone else is compensating the many middlemen who have grown fat off the opium trade is not discussed publicly.

But the United States has another way of persuading reluctant governments to join the anti-drug campaign. Congress tacked on a provision to last year’s foreign aid bill permitting the President to suspend aid to any country that doesn’t take action against the drug traffic. The only problem is that suspending aid to the governments of Southeast Asia would virtually end the Vietnam war overnight.

It’s a dilemma, to be sure. But it’s worth recalling that last winter, when President Nixon was vehemently reiterating this country’s commitment to keeping President Thieu in power in Saigon, even though this was the main obstacle to serious negotiations in Paris, the same regime was one of the major factors being blamed by U.S. officials for the continuation of our own “national emergency” in drugs. And that’s why we ask: Is the anti-war effort, or must that effort still rank way below a certain view of a solution for Vietnam?