

covert action alliances with some of Asia's key opium traffickers, inadvertently contributing to an initial expansion of opium production.[4]

In time, the opium-heroin business, being very lucrative and as well more or less "sanctioned" by the American cold war establishment, have come to possess an autonomous economic life and dynamics of its own. The impoverishment of Burma resulting from "socialism" — imposed by the military after Ne Win's 1962 coup — contributed to the entrenchment of opium and its value-added product, heroin, as a commodity that played an important role in the "development" or semi-industrialization of the United State's foremost ally in the region, Thailand. The trade in, and demand for opium and heroin — together with the demand in Burma for contraband goods (ranging from daily necessities, to luxuries), and demand elsewhere (Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, the United States, Europe, and so on) for Burmese gems, jade, teak, mineral ores, art/cultural artifacts (and antiques)[5] — thus created a narcotics- contraband business that was truly global.

It was a business that yielded high profit and enriched those in position to exploit opportunities of the borderless and the "free-est" of free market, one free of legal constraints and regulations (except those "enforced" by local business culture and godfathers, warlords, and corrupt generals, ministers, politicians and so on). It might be added that the "underground" opium-heroin market, with trans-border "underworld" elements figuring largely in it as financiers and enforcers constituted one of the main engines of growth in Southeast Asia. It also contributed to the development and the consolidation of free-market economies in the region.

Of note is the fact that with the growth of the opium-heroin business and the expansion of the market from Burma and Southeast Asia to distant shores, there also grew in tandem, an "industry" to fight the billion dollars, transnational heroin business. This is a multibillion dollars "industry" fueled by tax dollars of individual and corporate citizens in what one might call "end-user" countries, mainly in the affluent West (or as the case may be, the wealthy North). The war against narcotics was institutionalized as a global undertaking in the 1970s, following President Nixon's call for a national and global "war" on drugs. Since then, there has come about concerted efforts by governments,

international bodies, and law-enforcement agencies of almost all countries to combat trafficking and trade in narcotics — heroin, cocaine, marijuana, and other addictive substances considered harmful or damaging to society (with the exception of certain addictive substance like cigarettes and alcohol).[6]

The Global War on Drugs Since the Early 1970s

The "war against drugs" may be analyzed as having two main components: One, "war" waged in the "upstream" end of the opium-heroin industry — in the countries that produce the raw material and where it is refined or processed into narcotic substance. Two, "war" waged in countries "downstream" — in the heroin market place. Other dimensions of the "war against drugs" are those that focused on the transit aspect of the business and the business of laundering "black" money, which is also global in scope.

The upstream "war against drugs" involves financial and other aid to, and cooperation with, host governments to eradicate poppy and coca fields; wean cultivators away from growing opium (etc.) via crop substitution program and other development projects; seizures of the raw material (opium) and chemicals used for processing the raw material; the search for and destruction of refineries or processing "plants", and the punishment of those involved, i.e., mainly, cultivators of the raw material, addicts (for possession of drugs), petty (street) pushers and, theoretically, drug "kingpins", money launderers, narcotics tycoons- financiers, corrupt government officers, politicians, and power-holders involved in narcotics.

The problem however with the upstream "war" on drugs is that, as often as not, powerful figures in host governments, and in the military, police and other law-enforcement agencies, prominent politicians, and respectable businessmen, even pillars of the community, are corrupt. Moreover these elements are involved (directly or indirectly) in the drug business. Most host elements are interested only in manipulating the "war on drugs" (and aid, financial or otherwise, thus obtained) to achieve goals unrelated to narcotics suppression. The manipulation of the "war on drugs" by host elements (especially in the state or government, or in