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DRUG TRAFFICKING TRENDS IN THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE AND THE  
THREAT TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA FROM 1948 TO 2008



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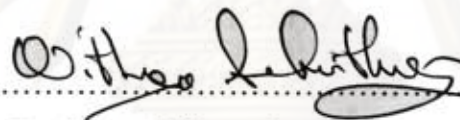
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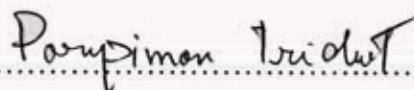


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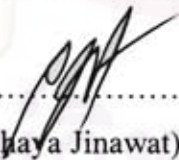
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การค้ายาเสพติดในดินแดนสามเหลี่ยมทองคำซึ่งครอบคลุมพื้นที่ของประเทศพม่า ลาว และ  
ไทย ถือได้ว่าเป็นภัยคุกคามที่ใหญ่หลวงของภูมิภาคนี้ แนวโน้มการเปลี่ยนแปลงและการขยายตัว  
อย่างต่อเนื่องของภัยคุกคามจากสามเหลี่ยมทองคำได้ส่งผลกระทบต่อเสถียรภาพของพม่า ลาว ไทย  
และสหรัฐอเมริกา สหรัฐอเมริกานั้นมีส่วนพัวพันในภูมิภาคนี้มาเป็นเวลานานแล้ว ความสัมพันธ์  
ของสหรัฐอเมริกากับภูมิภาคนี้ได้ทำให้ปัญหาขายเสพติดขยายตัว จนกระทั่งสามารถมีผลกระทบต่อ  
สหรัฐอเมริกา อย่างไรก็ตาม ปัญหาขายเสพติดในเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ได้ลดน้อยลงก่อนเริ่ม  
สงครามเย็น

หลังสิ้นสุดสงครามโลกครั้งที่สอง สหรัฐอเมริกาได้เพิ่มการให้ความช่วยเหลือแก่กลุ่มต่างๆ  
ที่ต่อสู้กับการแพร่ขยายของลัทธิคอมมิวนิสต์ในเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ กลุ่มเหล่านี้ใช้ “ฝิ่น” เป็น  
แหล่งสนับสนุนทางการเงินเพื่อทำสงครามกับรัฐบาล ฝิ่นกลายเป็นแหล่งรายได้ซึ่งใช้ในการซื้อ  
อาหาร อาวุธ และเครื่องมือต่างๆ ในที่สุด กองกำลังต่อต้านรัฐบาลได้เปลี่ยนการต่อสู้กับลัทธิ  
คอมมิวนิสต์มาเป็นการรวมศูนย์อยู่ที่การค้ายาเสพติด จากการเพิ่มจำนวนทหารของสหรัฐอเมริกา  
ในเวียดนามและไทย ตลาดเฮโรอีนแห่งใหม่จึงได้เริ่มขึ้น เฮโรอีนในกลุ่มของ จีไอ ได้แผ่ขยายมาก  
ขึ้นและมีผลต่อการเพิ่มการผลิตที่สามเหลี่ยมทองคำ หลังจากทหารอเมริกันเดินทางกลับประเทศ  
ปัญหาเฮโรอีน ได้ติดตามทหารอเมริกันกลับบ้านไปด้วยและกลายเป็นภัยคุกคามที่รุนแรงใน  
สหรัฐอเมริกา ดังนั้น ภายหลังจากสงครามเวียดนาม สหรัฐอเมริกาได้เข้ามาแสดงบทบาทในภูมิภาค  
เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ที่แตกต่างออกไป นั่นก็คือ การทำสงครามครั้งใหม่กับยาเสพติด

ในขณะที่ ฝิ่นและเฮโรอีนค่อยๆ ลดลงในพม่า ลาวและไทย ภัยคุกคามใหม่ได้วิวัฒนาการ  
ขึ้นในกลางปี พ.ศ. 2533 ได้แก่ การแพร่ระบาดของแอมเฟตามีนหรือยาบ้า ซึ่งกลายเป็นปัญหาที่  
ร้ายแรงยิ่งกว่าฝิ่นหรือเฮโรอีน แอมเฟตามีนได้กลายเป็นภัยคุกคามที่รุนแรงขึ้นอย่างต่อเนื่องใน  
ดินแดนสามเหลี่ยมทองคำและสหรัฐอเมริกา



สาขาวิชา เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา      ลายมือชื่อนิสิต..... *Jessie Earl Ockum*  
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KEY WORD: AMPHETAMINE TYPE STIMULANTS /CORRUPTION /GOLDEN TRIANGLE/HUMAN TRAFFICKING/ ILLEGAL MIGRATION/ JUNTA OPIUM / NATIONAL SECURITY/ ORGANIZED CRIME/RURAL DEVELOPMENT/ TERRORISM/ TRANSNATIONAL CRIME

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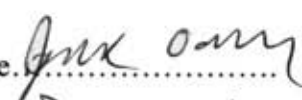
Drug trafficking in the Golden Triangle region of Burma, Laos, and Thailand is an evolving threat. The trends have continued to change in the Golden Triangle and the threat continues to grow. The threat from the Golden Triangle threatens the stability of Burma, Laos, Thailand, and the United States. The United States has been involved in the region for quite some time. Ironically, the involvement of United States in the region escalated the drug problem and brought the drug problem to the United States. The drug problem in Southeast Asia was minimal before the beginning of the Cold War.

After the end of World War II, the United States increased support for different groups that were fighting against the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia; these various groups used opium to finance their insurgencies. Opium became a source of income used to buy food, weapons, and equipment. Eventually, the insurgent groups transitioned from fighting communism and focused of drug trafficking. With the increase of United State troops in Vietnam and Thailand, a new market for heroin was opened up. The GI heroin boom, led to the creation of the Golden Triangle. After United States troops went back to the United States, the heroin problem followed and became a major threat to the United States. The United States then became involved in Southeast Asia in a different role. The post Vietnam War role of United States government was to fight the new War on Drugs.

As opium and heroin were gradually reduced in Burma, Laos, and Thailand, a new threat evolved in the mid 1990's. The new threat was Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS). ATS proved to be a much larger problem in the region and more of a problem than opium or heroin ever were. ATS continues to be the major threat in the Golden Triangle region and the United States.

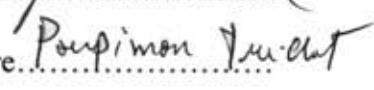
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## ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
ATS	AMPHETAMINE TYPE STIMULANTS
BLO	BORDER LIASON OFFICE
BPP	ROYAL THAI BORDER PATROL POLICE
CCDAC	CENTRAL COMMITTEE FOR DRUG ABUSE CONTROL
CPB	COMMUNIST PARTY OF BURMA
CPT	COMMUNIST PARTY OF THAILAND
CIA	UNITED STATES CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
DARE	DRUG ABUSE AND RESISTANCE EDUCATION
DDSI	DIRECTORATE OF DEFENSE SERVICES INTELLIGENCE
DEA	UNITED STATES DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION
DKBA	DEMOCRATIC KAREN BUDDHIST ARMY
DTO	DRUG TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION
ESSA	EASTERN SHAN STATE ARMY
GOB	GOVERNMENT OF BURMA
GOL	GOVERNMENT OF LAOS
HIDTA	HIGH INTENSITY DRUG TRAFFICKING AREA
ILEA	INTERNATIONAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACADEMY
ICC	INTERNATIONAL CONTROL COMMISSION
KKY	KA KWE YE (HOME GUARD UNIT)
KNU	KAREN NATIONAL UNION
KOWI	KOKANG AND WA INITIATIVE
KMT	KUOMINTANG
LCDC	LAO NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR DRUG CONTROL AND SUPERVISION
LDC	LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRY
LOA	LETTER OF AGREEMENT
MNDAA	MYANMAR NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE ARMY
MTA	MONG TAI ARMY
NCCD	NATIONAL COMMAND CENTER FOR COMBATTING DRUGS
NDA	NEW DEMOCRATIC ARMY



NGO	NON GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION
NDF	NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT
NLD	NATIONAL LEAGUE FOR DEMOCRACY
NVA	NORTH VIETNAM ARMY
ONCB	OFFICE OF NARCOTICS CONTROL BOARD
PNSB	POLICE NARCOTICS SUPPRESSION BUREAU
RTA	ROYAL THAI ARMY
RTG	ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT
RTP	ROYAL THAI POLICE
SLORC	STATE LAW AND ORDER RESTORATION COUNCIL
SPDC	STATE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL
SNA	SHAN NATIONAL ARMY
SNUF	SHAN NATIONAL UNITED FRONT
SSA	SHAN STATE ARMY
SSIA	SHAN STATE INDEPENDENCE ARMY
SSA-S	SHAN STATE ARMY SOUTH
SUA	SHAN UNITED ARMY
SURA	SHAN UNITED REVOLUTION ARMY
UWSA	UNITED WA STATE ARMY
UN	UNITED NATIONS
UNLF	UNITED LAO LIBERATION FRONT
UNODC	UNITED NATIONS OFFICE OF DRUGS AND CRIME
U.S.	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
WADP	WA DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Rationale of the Study

This report will examine the history of opium reduction in the Golden Triangle, the emergence of heroin and most recent trend of Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS). The most common ATS in the Golden Triangle area is ya-ba; Ice, the more expensive version of ATS from China has increased. The study will examine the links between drug trafficking and transnational organized crime, which are being propagated by the same drug lords who have controlled the opium, heroin, and ATS trade. This report will examine historical events that have allowed the drug problem to develop in the Golden Triangle region, the development of the problem, and new trends of drug traffickers as opium in the Golden Triangle declines and the threat of ATS and other organized criminal activities linked with drug trafficking emerge. This study will examine the involvement of the United States in the region and the threat the problem poses to the United States.

Opium production and supply have been drastically reduced in the Golden Triangle; however, opium, heroin, and ATS remain a threat to the countries in the Golden Triangle and the United States. Drug traffickers in the region have only become more powerful. The decline in opium and heroin has not slowed down business for drug traffickers. The decline in opium and heroin have been supplemented with the rise in ATS, which is much easier to produce and easier to smuggle. In addition to the ATS increase, drug lords use migrants to smuggle their drugs and work in networks that support the drug trade in the Golden Triangle and on the streets of America. The drug traffickers, like any good business, have diversified and shifted supply according to demand. As opium and heroin become less profitable and more risky to traffic, drug lords have shifted to ATS and other criminal activities.

This study will examine the involvement of the United States in Burma, Laos, and Thailand during the Cold War until the present. United States policy during the Cold War and several wars throughout Southeast Asia, led to the increase of the drug problem in Southeast Asia and in the United States. United States policy and actions

during the Cold War have helped create the major drug problem that exists in the Golden Triangle today. Once these problems began to threaten the United States, the role of the United States as a Cold War leader changed to focus on combating illegal drugs in the region. The United States now works with several countries in the region to eradicate drugs before they can be shipped to the United States. Unfortunately, due to current foreign policy, the level of assistance that the United States government gives to Burma is limited. This is unfortunate, since Burma is the number one drug threat to Southeast Asia and the United States.

It is suspected that drug lords and international syndicates are involved with the human trafficking and smuggling operations; however, the link is difficult to prove. It is certain that the high level leaders of organized crime manage drugs, human trafficking, and other crimes. Drug lords and criminal groups in Southeast Asia have links to criminal organizations operating in the United States. These gangs are involved with the sale of opium and ATS used to finance other forms of illegal activity in the United States. Drug trafficking is a complicated business that is only the gateway to the world of transnational organized crime.

By looking at the drug eradication reports and seeing that the threat of Golden Triangle opium and heroin is declining is not necessarily good news. Golden Triangle opium and heroin are still being produced and shipped to the United States and around the world. With the decline of opium, the drug war has only become more serious. The days of simply having to deal with opium or heroin were much less complicated than the situation faced today. With the decline of opium and heroin production and the rise of ATS and other transnational crime, the drug war is becoming even more of a threat to the United States than before. The United States is a primary destination for Golden Triangle narcotics.

These drugs become even more dangerous, especially as traffickers diversify to more dangerous drugs and drug trafficking becomes more linked to other international transnational organized crime and terrorism. The United States suffers from increased drug addiction rates, which lead to increased crime rates. In today's modern world, traffickers are trafficking drugs, humans, weapons, terrorism, and other kinds of crime to the United States. Once their drugs and illegal migrants reach the United States illegally, they continue to support the cycle of illicit crime run by

the ethnic criminal organizations and financed by selling illegal Golden Triangle drugs to the citizens of the United States.

This study will focus of the Golden Triangle region. Countries of concern are: Burma, Laos, and Thailand. Burma and Laos are primary production states. Thailand is a primary trafficking route for Golden Triangle drugs shipped internationally. Laos has now developed into a new international transit route in addition to a production state. As the Thai government eliminated most of their opium crops by developing the Hill Tribes in the north of Thailand, many of the production centers simply moved across the border to Burma and Laos. Part of the Thai government's development strategy of developing roads and infrastructure, ended up making Thailand the country of choice as a primary smuggling route to the United States. The well maintained roads, the relatively open border, and the fact that many Hill Tribes ,of whom many still do not have citizenship and legitimate means to make money, make Thailand the most attractive choice of an international transit point for Golden Triangle traffickers. Another primary route from Burma is through China.

Secondary routes go through Cambodia, India, Laos, and Vietnam. Traffickers in all of these countries have ties to organized criminal organizations in the United States, especially in California. Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodians in the United States form major street gangs in the United States and are linked to drug trafficking. These Southeast Asian gangs have ties to traffickers and producers in Southeast Asia.

This study will also focus on why these problems exist. The reasons for the drug problem differ in each of the three Golden Triangle countries. Burma is the most extreme case and the major source of drug production in the region. Burma suffers from political problems as well as socio-economic problems. The reasons for drugs in Laos are primarily socio-economic today, but were originally political. Thailand's involvement is mostly socio-economic.

Burma has not had a peaceful and stable government since their independence. They have been in a constant state of civil war even before independence. Ceasefires have now been reached with most ethnic groups, however, some still fight. Also, the ceasefire can end at any moment. The ceasefire has made drug trafficking even worse in Burma. The ethnic rebellion groups use drug trafficking as a primary source of

income. Many of these groups eventually gave up the ideology and focused purely on drug trafficking.

The environment of unrest, an unstable political environment, and the lack of legitimate opportunities to make income have led to the major problem of drug trafficking in Burma, Laos, and Thailand. The United States policies in the past have contributed to many of these problems. Many of the drug problems today are the result of cold war policy and wars in Southeast Asia. The problem today is not only in the Golden Triangle, it is on the streets of America. Drug traffickers today are diversified and involved in all sorts of organized crime. Drug traffickers are strongly linked to other transnational crimes.

## **1.2. Objectives of the Study**

This research aims to:

- Examine the threat to the United States that drug trafficking in the Golden Triangle presents.
- Examine the changing drug trafficking trends in the Golden Triangle.
- Examine the role of the United States involvement regarding drug trafficking in the Golden Triangle.

## **1.3. Significance of the Study**

- This research can help government and non-governmental agencies gain a better understanding of the problems in the Golden Triangle for future development and suppression work.
- Further development and suppression can reduce other crimes and relieve poverty and suffering for people in the Golden Triangle region.
- Findings in this report may contribute to future policy development regarding drug suppression and alternative development in drug producing areas.

## **1.4. Scope of the Study**

- The study reviews literature written by subject matter experts as well as official reports. The material covers the important periods in drug trafficking development in the Golden Triangle. The study analyzes drug related event in Burma, Laos, and Thailand from 1948-2008. Interviews have also been

conducted with professionals working in the region and U.S. law enforcement officials.

## **1.5. Conceptual Framework**

This research was analyzed using several different theories. The theories provided the framework to analyze the historical events and understand the actions of the states involved.

### **1.5.1 National Interest in International Relations Theory**

When dealing with international relations, the National Interest Theory is quite common. The National Interest Theory is connected to the Realist view of international relations. Under this theory, all countries act in international relations according to the best interests of their own state in economic, military, and political issues. States who act according to National Interest, act according to what is best for their country. The actions that a state takes in the interest of National Interest often ignore regional or international goals.

This theory can be used when examining the historical development of the narcotics problem in the Golden Triangle. The problem began with the National Interest of England and France, as they colonized Burma, Laos, and Vietnam. The Colonialists used the region to promote the opium trade. These actions were taken in national interest, without realizing the damage that would be caused in the future. As we can see today, the self centered actions of the British and the French have caused a major drug problem in the region and the world today.

The United States acted on matters of national interest during the Cold War era. United States policy during the Cold War was to suppress Communism at all costs. These policies were implemented by the CIA. The CIA supported the Kuomintang (KMT) Army in Burma and later used the Hmong in Laos. The CIA violated the sovereignty of the central Burmese government and facilitated the growth of the opium trade, in the name of suppressing Communism. The KMT acted in the name of national interest to use opium to finance a reinvasion of China. Today, the Burmese central government acts on national interest. This can be seen, as the Burmese government's primary objective is national security, not drug suppression.

Drugs are a secondary factor, while controlling the insurgency is the primary objective. This policy allows drug armies in Burma to conduct business with little interference.

National interest is not necessarily a negative concept. National interest is a necessary element for any country; however, if the drug problem in the Golden Triangle and the region is going to be solved, regional and international cooperation is necessary. Drug trafficking is not merely a national problem; it is an international problem that requires international solutions and cooperation. National interest must be balanced with regional and international goals.

### **1.5.2 Socio-Economic Theory**

The Socio-Economic theory is an appropriate theory to use when analyzing the development of the narcotics situation in the Golden Triangle region. This theory is a combination of the Social Theory and the Economic Theory. In this case, the Socio-Economic theory would examine what economic options are available to the people who live in the Burma, Laos, and Thailand. Without the access of viable economic options, people will be forced to engage themselves in illicit activities in order to survive. Access to a viable means of income, often depends on social status within a society. Ethnic minorities often find themselves without access to licit income sources. Poverty is the result of a lack of access to licit income sources. In the case of the Golden Triangle region, poverty and the lack of access to licit activities has led people to become involved in drug production and drug trafficking. According to the Socio-Economic theory, this problem can theoretically be solved, by producing alternative sources of income to groups that would otherwise be involved with drug production and drug trafficking.

### **1.5.3 Political Theory**

Using the Political Theory to analyze the conditions in the Golden Triangle is another useful analytical tool. According to the Political Theory, many problems such as poverty and drug trafficking are related to political factors that have created unstable conditions. The Political Theory is particularly useful to analyze the development of the drug trade in Burma and Laos. This theory can be used when looking at the internal politics of Burma and Laos. This theory can also be used to analyze the changing political policies of the United States and how the political

factors have affected the growth of the drug trade. As can be seen today, the United States has imposed political sanctions on Burma.

The political situation in Burma has led to a prolonged civil war. The ethnic minorities fighting against the central government have used the drug trade to finance their insurgencies. The political situation can also be seen in Laos, as the Hmong helped the United States fight the cold war, and used opium to finance their activities. The political situation with the United States during the Vietnam War allowed heroin production to increase and developed the threat of heroin to the United States. According to the Political Theory, the drug problem has been created due to political leaders and political policies. According to this theory, the problem should theoretically be able to be solved by solving the political problems. The political situation is still a major factor in Burma today. A military junta runs Burma and the United States continues to increase sanctions.



Figure 1.5.3. The Golden Triangle

#### 1.5.4. Clarification of Terms

##### 1.5.4.1. The Ideological Drug Traffickers

Drug trafficking in the Golden Triangle was originally developed to support



ethnic insurgencies. The Kuomintang Army, Karen, Kokang, Shan, Wa, and other various rebel groups inside Burma have used the production and sales of illicit drugs to buy food, weapons, and equipment to finance their ideological cause. The Hmong in Laos have similarly used opium to finance their cause.

Even the United States government played a role in supporting the opium trade to finance ethnic armies fighting in the cause of suppressing Communism. Most of the rebels with a cause soon evolved to be drug traffickers, and kept the concept of a cause to justify their drug trading activities. By the time ATS developed, most of the drug lords were simply business men with an Army to back them.

#### **1.5.4.2. The Drug Lords**

Drug lords mostly operate out of Burma. The drug lords lead large heavily armed armies and facilitate drug production, drug trafficking and other illicit activities. Many drug lords used to be freedom fighters with a cause. Most claim to be fighting for a cause; however the reality of the cause is mostly involved with the desire for a large cash flow. Most of the drug lords facilitate the movement of drugs from Burma to the Thai and Lao borders, where international syndicates facilitate international trafficking from major seaports to the United States and other international destinations.

#### **1.5.4.3. The International Syndicates**

International syndicates take responsibility for trafficking drugs to international markets. Various groups facilitate drug trafficking through the Golden Triangle to international markets. The international syndicates in Southeast Asia are mostly ethnic Chinese and West African criminal groups with global ties to facilitate drug trafficking and the spread of other transnational organized crime.

Chinese and West African traffickers have well established international trafficking operations smuggling illicit drugs and precursor chemicals cross borders. Most syndicates in the Golden Triangle operate out of Bangkok and deal with drug lords in Burma. Smaller groups of Burmese, Lao, Thai, and other nationalities facilitate trafficking to the United States by various means.

#### **1.5.4.4. International and Regional Agencies**

The United States, United Nations, and other bilateral and regional agencies are actively involved in the region. The Golden Triangle drug trade is a major threat to the United States, so the United States has been actively involved in the Golden Triangle for decades. The lead drug enforcement agency for the United States is the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

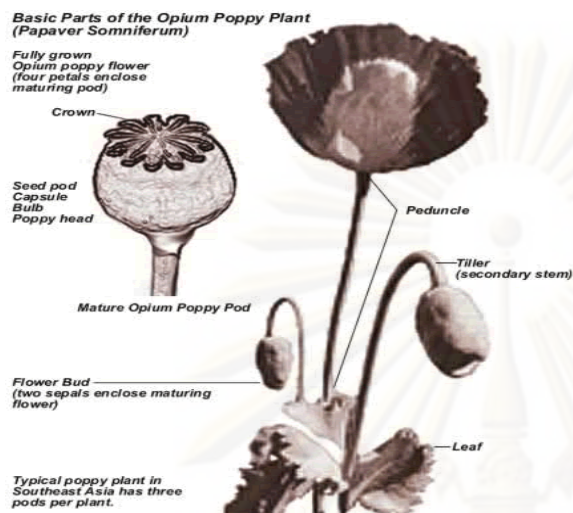
The DEA is actively involved in investigating international drug trafficking cases and training the local police and military in the Golden Triangle. The United States Department of State also has a Narcotics Affairs Section assigned to the United States Embassy in various countries throughout the region. The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is responsible for alternative development projects and other drug eradication projects in the Golden Triangle.

#### **1.5.4.5. Opium and Heroin**

Both opium and heroin come from the poppy plant. Opium is the pure plant form that is grown high in the mountains. Opium grows well at high altitudes where the Hill Tribe farmers live. Most Hill Tribe farmers grow opium to buy food or use as medicine. Opium can be smoked or eaten. Opium does not require any processing and is less dangerous than heroin or ATS. Opium used to be trafficked within the region; however, beginning in the late 1960's most opium was refined to heroin before being trafficked out of Burma, Laos, or Thailand.

Heroin is the much more dangerous and the chemically processed form of opium. The production of heroin requires a precursor chemical called acetic anhydride. Acetic anhydride is not available in Burma, so precursor chemicals need to be smuggled into Burma from China, India, and Thailand. The finished heroin product is then smuggled back out through the same routes. Heroin consists of two types. The two types of heroin are number 3 and number 4 heroin. Number 3 heroin is a very crude brown heroin and is mostly used by poor local addicts. Number 4 heroin is more difficult to produce and requires an expert chemist, who is usually provided by the Chinese criminal syndicates. Number 4 heroin is often referred to as its street name "China White". Number 4 heroin became popular during the Vietnam War and was used mostly by United States Soldiers in Vietnam and Thailand. After the

Vietnam War, Number 4 heroin began being trafficked to the United States. The Golden Triangle heroin originating in Burma is called Double UO Globe Heroin.



**Figure 1.5.4.5. Opium Plant**

#### **1.5.4.6. Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS)**

Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) are the most recent threat in the Golden Triangle. Opium and heroin have decreased and ATS has risen. Many traffickers prefer ATS because it is cheaper to produce, easier to produce, and hard to detect. ATS can be produced anywhere and does not depend on weather, a large labor force, and burdensome transportation.

ATS requires a precursor chemical called ephedrine or pseudo-ephedrine to produce. ATS consists of several types of synthetic drugs. Yaa- Baa and more recently Crystal Ice or Crystal Meth are the most popular types of ATS in Southeast Asia. Ecstasy has also recently become a threat in the region. ATS is affordable to farmers, truck drivers, and students, therefore it has surpassed heroin as a drug of choice. ATS is also quite popular in the United States.

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**Figure 1.5.4.6. UWSA ATS**

## **1.6. METHODOLOGY**

This research was qualitative research, which composed of documentary research, observation, and field work. The research composed of primary and secondary research. Field work consisted of observation at field sites and in depth interviews with subject matter experts.

### **1.6.1. Documentary Research**

This study began by an in-depth review of literature written by subject matter experts on the Golden Triangle Region and in Golden Triangle drug trafficking trends and threats. Primary documents consisted of studies conducted by experts and government reports. Secondary documents consisted of news and internet articles. An in depth evaluation of the history of drug production and trafficking in the region was analyzed during this research. Current trends were compared with past trends.

Information regarding the current threats of drugs and crime were collected from United States Drug Enforcement Website and the United States Department of State Website. The United States Department of State's annual Bureau of Narcotics and Crime Narcotics Reports were particularly useful. The United Nations office of Drugs and Crime website also provided invaluable information such as surveys and

reports. After reading literature, information was verified and compared by conducting interviews with subject matter experts in the region.

### **1.6.2. Field Research**

Interviews were conducted with various agencies and organizations in the Golden Triangle Region and the United States. Interviews were conducted in person, by telephone, and by email. Interviews were conducted to verify information that was found in literature and reports and to explore recent trends that were not covered in previous reports. Interviews were also helpful in attaining the viewpoint of subject matter experts involved in the daily duties of drug suppression work. The results of all interviews are published in Appendix A of this document.

Observation was conducted at various field sites. Much of the observation took place in remote areas such as border crossing on the Thai-Burma and Thai-Lao borders. During observation, current drug trafficking routes and border security problems were verified. Observation was also useful in Laos. In Laos, the presence of drug dealing and drug use is very obvious.

#### List of Field Sites Visited

1. Chiang Mai, Thailand
2. Chiang Kong District, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand
3. Mae Sai District, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand
4. Various areas of Chiang Rai Province, Thailand
5. Udon Thani, Thailand
6. Nong Khai, Thailand
7. Mae Sot District, Tak Province, Thailand
8. Vientiane, Laos

#### List of Interviews

- Interview 1 Office of Narcotics Control Board Chiang Mai
- Interview 2 Honolulu Police Department
- Interview 3 Office of Narcotics Control Board Bangkok
- Interview 4 San Jose Police Department

- Interview 5 Joint Interagency Task Force West
- Interview 6 California Department of Justice
- Interview 7 Royal Thai Immigration Mae Sai District
- Interview 8 Akha Foundation Chiang Rai
- Interview 9 Royal Thai Military Radio Station Unit 914
- Interview 10 Royal Thai Police Chiang Kong District
- Interview 11 Royal Thai Immigration Mae Sai Border Checkpoint
- Interview 12 Royal Thai Police Mae Sai Police Station
- Interview 13 U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Chiang Mai
- Interview 14 United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, Vientiane Laos
- Interview 15 U.S Department of State Narcotics Affairs Section, Vientiane

Laos

- Interview 16 Thai-Lao Border Checkpoint Nong Khai, Thailand
- Interview 17 Udon Thani Narcotics Suppression Center
- Interview 18 Royal Thai Customs Mae Sot District
- Interview 19 Royal Thai Police Mae Sot District
- Interview 20 Royal Thai Border Patrol Police Unit 346 Mae Sot District
- Interview 21 Royal Thai Border Patrol Police Unit 34 Tak Provincial Office

### **1.6.3. Literature Review**

**Chouvy, Pierre. & Meissonnier, Joel. (2004). Yaa Baa: Production, Traffic and Consumption of Methamphetamine in Mainland Southeast Asia. Singapore: Singapore University Press.**

This book discusses the production, use, and trafficking of Southeast Asia's most popular methamphetamine, ya-ba. The book discusses the emergence of ya-ba and the groups that prefer the use of ya-ba. The book also discusses the production methods and the trafficking routes. This book provides a great overview to the problem of ATS in the Golden Triangle region.

**International Narcotics Control Strategy Annual Reports 1996-2008. Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. U.S. Department of State.**

The Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs of the United States Department of State compiles a yearly international narcotics report. This report is called the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report. The report is released in March of every year. The reports examine in great detail the narcotics situation around the world. The Southeast Asia section is sub-divided by country. The report examines the yearly situation in the causes of drug trafficking and the amount of drug trafficking that has taken place in each country. The report analyzes trends and threats to the United States. The report also summarizes United States policy, programs, and foreign aid to each country. The website provides detailed yearly reports for Burma, Laos, and Thailand dating back to 1996.

**Lintner, Bertil. (1999). Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency Since 1948. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.**

This book gives an in-depth historical perspective of the opium problem in Burma. This book examines the early introduction of opium by the British colonization of Burma and the role that opium played during World War II. The book examines the civil war and development of insurgencies and the Communist Party of Burma. All of these events further developed the illegal drug trade in Burma and continue to affect the region and the world today. In this book, Bertil Lintner gives a complete overview of how the drug trade in Burma began and how it has developed over the years.

**Opium Cultivation in the Golden Triangle 2006: Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand. United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime.**

This report reviews the opium poppy situation in the Golden Triangle Region. The report reviews the opium conditions in Burma, Laos, and Thailand. The report reviews the changes that opium eradication has caused in the region and the challenges in the future. The report describes the socio-economic conditions that allow opium to be produced in the Golden Triangle region. The report gives estimated opium eradication figures.

**Pasuk Phongpaichit, Sungsidh Piriyarangsarn, & Nualoni Treerat. Guns Girls Gambling Ganja: Thailand's Illegal Economy and Public Policy.1998.**

This book reveals the inner workings of transnational organized crime in Thailand. The book focuses on drug trafficking and crimes that are related to drug trafficking. The book discusses the underground economy in Thailand and the crimes of money laundering, gambling, public corruption, human trafficking, weapons smuggling, and other crimes. Illegal drugs play a major role in the illegal economy in Thailand. The book discusses how the drugs and illegal migrants enter into Thailand and are then Cause crime in Thailand or trafficked to the United States and Europe. This book discusses the role that corrupt government officials play in the illicit economy of Thailand.

**Renard, Ronald. (1996). The Burmese Connection: Illegal Drugs and the Making of the Golden Triangle.**

This book provides a great understanding of the cause of the opium trade in Burma. The book discusses the historical reasons behind the opium trade and the political environment that allows opium to flourish. These factors have created what is known today as the Golden Triangle and link to various types of transnational crime. The book examines the different organizations responsible for the drug trade in Burma and the victims of the drug trade.

**Renard, Ronald. (2001). Opium Reduction in Thailand 1970-2000: A Thirty-Year Journey.**

This book discusses the thirty year period of opium eradication in Thailand. The book examines the Thai government's policy development that led to substantial opium reduction during a thirty year period. The book also examines several international programs that assisted Thailand in their opium eradication process.

**The National Programme Strategy for the Post Opium Scenario: "The Balanced Approach to Sustaining Opium Elimination in Lao PDR (2006-2009)". Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision& United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime.**



This document discusses Lao PDR's national strategy to sustain opium eradication efforts and to continue to eradicate opium and develop the poor. The issue of poverty and education is discussed. The problem of underdevelopment in Laos has to be addressed for the opium reduction plan to be successful.

**United Nations Survey Team. (1967). Report on the United Nations Survey Team on Economic and Social Needs of the Opium Producing Areas in Thailand. Bangkok.**

This document was a critical tool in developing an understanding of the needs of Hill Tribe people living within Thailand. This research was one of the earliest efforts to understand the reasons why Hill Tribe people grew opium and solutions to eradicate the opium growth and develop the Hill Tribes. The research was only the beginning, but provided a solid basis to solving the problem of opium in Northern Thailand.



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## **CHAPTER II**

### **DRUGS IN BURMA**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Burma is the most important country in Asia regarding drug trafficking. In order to understand the drug problem in the Golden Triangle, the situation that has occurred in Burma during the last sixty years must be understood. Without Burma, there would be no Golden Triangle. The roles of Laos and Thailand in the drug trade are relatively minor as compared to Burma. Burma was the number one opium producer in the world for decades. Only recently, has Burma dropped to the number two world producer of opium and heroin.

This drop in opium production is not necessarily good news, since the decline in opium has been compensated with an explosion of Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS). The new threat of ATS is even more dangerous and much more difficult to eradicate than opium or heroin. ATS is easier to produce, easier to smuggle, and harder to detect and suppress. The narcotics problem is caused by both political and socio-economic factors. Burma has not had peace since its independence from British colonization in 1948.

Since 1948, the country has suffered from continual ethnic insurgencies. These insurgents have used drug trafficking to finance their insurgencies. Most ethnic insurgent groups agreed to a ceasefire with the central government in 1989; however, two insurgent groups are still fighting today. The ceasefire agreements have not brought development and most former freedom fighters are now just plain old drug traffickers with armies to support them.

The situation has continued to worsen, as a corrupt military junta rules Burma and continues to suppress human rights and democracy. Since the most recent coup in 1988, the aggressive assaults by Burma's military against unarmed civilians, have only made matters worse. The United States and other nations have imposed sanctions, cutting off valuable drug eradication money and training for drug enforcement authorities. Since the 1988 coup and United States sanctions, the drug business has continued to grow along with poverty and under development. The

narcotics situation in Burma is complicated and cannot be solved without alternative solutions and international support for this international problem.



Figure 2.1. Map of Burma

## 2.2 The Creation of the Opium Problem in Burma

### 2.2.1 The Legacy of the British Empire

The problem of opium in Burma was not always a problem, at least not in the eyes of the British colonialists who had a monopoly on the opium trade. The British made a lot of money on opium during their centuries of colonization in Asia and India. The British fought two opium wars against China in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to force China to trade opium. As a result, opium cultivation grew in China and eventually spread into Burma. After the British colonized Burma, they initially encouraged opium use and used Hill Tribes to grow opium in the highlands of Burma.

Although the British eventually changed their policy of opium use, they never seriously implemented plans to fix the problem that they created. “The breakdown of social order, in which narcotics played a role during the British era, set the stage for dramatic upheavals in independent Burma.” (Renard, 1996:43). The British not only introduced and developed the opium trade in Burma, but the legacy of colonialism created an environment of increased disunity and distrust amongst the different ethnic groups in Burma.

Under British rule, many of the ethnic minorities had enjoyed political autonomy in their geographical areas. The Kachin, Karen, Chin, and Shan were all independent groups who did not want to be part of a unified Burma led by lowland ethnic Burmans. One man was able to gain the trust of these different groups. The new leader of Burma as an independent nation was popular among all ethnic groups; this man was Aung San. Aung San was a famous ex-military officer who was an experienced leader and proven in combat. Aung San was a critical figure in fighting for Burmese independence. Aung San was one of the few ethnic Burmans that was able to unite ethnic minorities from Shan, Kachin, and Chin States to join a unified Burma.

### **2.2.2. Independence and Civil War in Burma**

The leaders of the autonomous regions agreed to sign the Pangalong Agreement on February 12, 1947. Under this agreement, the ethnic minorities agreed to join the Union of Burma. One condition under the Pangalong Agreement allowed for any of these states to secede from the union after a period of ten years. The Karens refused to sign the agreement. Within only five months of the signing of the Panglong agreement, Aung San was assassinated along with his cabinet on July 19, 1947. Aung San’s political rival U Saw was convicted of plotting Aung San’s assassination.

Aung San was replaced by U Nu, a rather weak leader and soon the country began to break apart before the union of Burma was even formed. The various ethnic groups began to engage in armed combat against the central government and the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) became a formidable threat to the government as well. “The polarization of Burmese society appeared complete after barely a year of independence. In December 1948, U Nu issued a desperate appeal to the CPB to come

to the negotiating table.” (Lintner,1999:22). No negotiations were reached and civil war continued. The central Burmese government was fighting several different insurgent groups. The Communist Party eventually became the most powerful of all rebel groups, as they were able to go to China and gain Chinese support for their cause.

The CPB leaders temporarily fled to China, only to reemerge several years later with Chinese training, weapons, and financial backing. The ethnic minorities did not have the Chinese financial backing. The ethnic insurgent groups needed money to buy weapons and food to feed their armies. A large majority of these groups were located in the Shan and Kachin States. The Shan and Kachin States already had a natural resource that could be sold to finance their insurgency. This resource was opium and the world would pay a lot of money for opium. The insurgent groups forced the Hill Tribe farmers to grow opium, which the insurgent armies would sell to Thailand in exchange for weapons and ammunition. Opium was not yet illegal in Thailand and was needed for the Royal Thai Opium Monopoly. Even after Thailand made opium illegal, the trade continued to flow, as illicit opium was even more valuable.

### **2.2.3. China Falls to Communism and Opium Increases in Burma**

The real boom of opium development did not come from these insurgent groups, but they would eventually benefit from it. The major initial growth of the opium trade came due to the political situation in China after the Communist Party was victorious in 1949. After the Communist government took control in China, they outlawed opium and brutally suppressed it. As a result of the new Chinese government crackdown on opium, thousands of Chinese opium growers fled to Burma. As the opium growth was eradicated in China, it increased in Burma.

In addition to the new opium farmers, opium merchants also moved into Burma. The Panthay Muslim Chinese had been opium merchants for centuries and also faced oppression in Burma. Many of the Panthay had already migrated to the Shan State years earlier. The Panthays played a role in the developing opium trade; however, their role was minor compared to the role of armed migrants of the Chinese Nationalist Army. Remnants of the Kuomintang (KMT) Army fled into Burma.

The KMT were cut off from their leadership who had fled to Taiwan. The KMT had no income and were low on equipment. All they had were guns and military training. The KMT found opium to be the ideal solution to their financial problems. The KMT forced the local opium farmers to grow opium and the KMT would use the money from opium to buy weapons. "At Burma's independence in 1948, the country's opium production amounted to a mere thirty tons, or just enough to supply local addicts in the Shan states, where most poppies were grown. The KMT invasion changed that overnight." (Lintner, 1999:143). Before long, the KMT was able to make contact with their leadership in Taiwan. The KMT were instructed to prepare to reinvade China. Before long, Taiwan started shipping weapons into the new KMT bases and the KMT would ship opium out on the same aircraft. This contributed to the global opium trade in addition the opium continued to be smuggled by land into Thailand and the rest of Southeast Asia.

To make matters worse, the United States government supported the KMT. The United States government gave funding as well as condoned and even covertly assisted the opium trafficking activities of the KMT. The United States government supported the KMT in a secret war, with aims of winning the Cold War and stopping the spread of Communism at all costs. This policy along with the policy of other secret wars contributed to the expansion of illicit drugs in Southeast Asia.

Thailand being an ally of the United States, helped facilitate opium trafficking through Thailand and arms smuggling into Burma. With this relationship, the wealth of Thailand increased and KMT leadership developed close ties with high level Thai officials. Eventually KMT leaders sought refuge in Thailand and laundered their drug money into the Thai economy and transitioned to being major drug traffickers. As they retired from the ideological war against Communism, the KMT soon began to focus their energy on being drug lords under the cover of being legitimate businessmen. "The secret war in the Golden Triangle was also a failure. The Guomintang's forces and special agents could not ignite any rebellion in Yunnan and, frustrated, they increasingly turned their attention to the more lucrative opium trade." (Lintner, 2002:240). Finally under pressure from Burma's central government, Taiwan agreed to withdraw the KMT forces.

Even though many of the forces withdrew, many KMT troops secretly stayed

behind. Many KMT refused to leave, as they were now well established drug traffickers in Burma. At the same time, the Shan State requested to secede from the Union of Burma, as they were guaranteed the right to secede in 1957 under the Pangalong Agreement. The central Burmese government denied this right. This led to the emergence of new Shan armies and the increased drug production and trafficking to finance these insurgencies.

## **2.3 The Army Takes Control and Ethnic Insurgencies Increase**

### **2.3.1. The 1962 Coup**

As ethnic fighting ensued, the Burmese Army grew stronger and more experienced in battle. In the constant state of war, the Burmese Army became the most powerful institution in Burma. The military originally took power on a temporary status from 1958-1960. This power grab was called a trusteeship. Under this arrangement, the military power was only temporary and then restored to the civilian government. Power was temporarily returned to the weak civilian government, and then on March 1, 1962, the Burmese Army took full control of Burma. The military would not release power this time; instead they would continue to suppress democracy and human rights. Burma was now socialist, as the new military regime announced Burma's new policy of "The Burmese Way to Socialism".

Thousands of protestors gathered to protest the coup. The military responded, when they rolled in and suppressed the protests by killing innocent unarmed protestors. The new government takeover only made illicit drug matters worse. Thousands of people fled the country or joined resistance groups. Several students fled to the outlying areas to join the Shan resistance groups and the CPB.

The Burmese government ruined the economy by devaluing the currency. The new environment opened up the black market and illegal economy. Opium growth and trafficking flourished out of necessity, as the need to fight against the corrupt undemocratic government increased. "Consumer goods, textiles, machinery, spare parts for vehicles, and medicine went from Thailand to Burma, and teak, minerals, jade, precious stones and opium in the opposite direction."(Lintner,1999:223). During this stage of the opium development, the opium groups were not necessarily

criminals. They were just ordinary people struggling to survive.

Opium was used to gain basic necessities. Opium was means to buy food and for use as medicine for poor farmers. It was also used as means to finance a just cause against a corrupt government for ethnic freedom fighters. During the same period, the KMT was also selling opium to finance their just cause of freedom. Opium was quickly becoming the most viable way to make a living and probably did not seem very criminal at all to the local people just trying to survive. This was especially the case after the new military junta devalued the currency with the 1964 Socialist Economy Protection Law. After the enforcement of this law, most people did not have many options, but to turn to the black market. If the government suppressed the black market activity, matters would only get even worse.

### **2.3.2. The Shan Rebellion**

After the Shan were refused the right to secede from Burma, they decided to secede regardless of whether they were given permission. Several new Shan revolution armies were formed. All of these armies sold opium to Thailand to buy weapons. As the revolution increased, so did the opium. In addition to the Shan armies, several small independent armies were formed. Many of these new armies did not have a cause, other than making money by selling opium. The original Shan resistance force was formed in 1958 by Pu Ling Gung Na and Sao Noi. The revolutionary group was formed in the jungle with Sai Noi as the commander. The new organization was called Noom Suk Harn (Brave Young Warriors). Gung Na had connections with Royal Thai Police in Chiang Mai and was able to set up an opium trading deal to finance the new Army. The new Shan rebels allied with the KMT, who were now investing drug profits into legitimate businesses in Northern Thailand and continuing to facilitate opium trafficking into Thailand.

Many people joined with different agendas. Some wanted to be free, while some just wanted to be rich. "Some thought that an independent Shan country would be in a better position to do business with the outside world while others just wanted to take advantage of the booming opium trade along the border." (Lintner, 1999:188). Many of the idealist students who had fled to the jungle to join Noom Suk Harn became disillusioned. They soon felt that the Noom Suk Harn had become less



interested in being “brave young warriors” and more interested in being rich drug dealers. This group of idealistic young students broke away from Sao Noi to form the Shan State Independence Army (SSIA).

With the two different Shan groups, a Shan political group formed, in attempt to unite the two groups. The new political group was formed in 1962 and named the Shan National United Front (SNUF). The leader of this new group was Moh Heng. The Shan National Army (SNA) was formed when Sao Ngar Kham broke away from the SSIA and formed his own army. The SNA was based out of Northern Thailand, where several other groups were also basing their insurgencies. Sara Ba Thein took over the leadership of the SNA in 1964 after Sao Ngar Kham was assassinated. Most of the separate Shan Armies agreed to unite under the leadership of Yawnghe Mahadevi to form the Shan State Army (SSA) on March 25, 1964. The new SSA was formed by members from the Kokang Revolutionary Group led by a major opium warlord Yang Zhensheng (Jimmy Yang). Jimmy Yang’s sister Olive Yang was a major drug lord as well.

The SNA and part of the SSIA did not join and remained separate armies. Several Shan groups gained backing by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), in exchange for sending Shan troops to fight in the CIA’s new secret war against Communism in Laos. As these new groups emerged, resistance against the Burmese junta intensified and the opium trade boomed. The new demand for heroin from the United States military personnel stationed in Vietnam and Thailand was making the trade even more lucrative.

## **2.4 Emergence of Drug Trafficking Armies**

With the growing insurgency problem and the inability of the Burmese Army to suppress it, the Burmese Army decided to make a new counterinsurgency plan. The new plan would be to fight the insurgents without sacrificing the manpower of the Burmese Army. The plan was to form home guard units, called Ka Kwe Ye (KKY). With the emergence of private drug armies without a political cause, the Burmese Army thought that they would make a deal with them, converting them into KKY troops.

The result of this KKY policy would not solve the insurgency problem; the

policy would instead greatly increase the drug trade. By creating the KKY, the Burmese government condoned drug trafficking. The Burmese government was willing to win the counterinsurgency by all means, just like the United States was determined to win the Cold War, with disregard to drug trafficking. The Burmese Army made a deal with several local men, who had their own armies. The deal was that they would fight against the insurgent groups and in exchange they were free to use government roads to traffic their opium to the Thai border. Of course the drug armies accepted this deal.

With this new deal, the drug armies could gain a monopoly on the drug trafficking business. The KKY would be able to fight against the insurgents, who were their competition in the drug trafficking business, they would be able to freely traffic opium, and they would be backed by the Burmese Army. What a great deal for an emerging drug lord! During this process, the KKY were able to build up their arsenal of weapons.

Of course, the KKY spent less time fighting against insurgents and more time trafficking drugs. The KKY started running drug caravans to the Thai border and transporting drugs for mercenaries for a fee. The Panthay Chinese Muslim traders and other independent groups took advantage of these services. They would pay a percentage of the sale to the KKY, and the KKY would ensure an armed escort. Sometimes the Burmese Army themselves helped escort the opium convoys. "The KKY home guards were often hired by the merchants to convoy the drugs. Many KKY commanders were also merchants themselves. If Lo Hsing-han or Khun Sa, for instance, conducted a convoy down to the Thai border, they would be carrying their own opium as well as drugs belonging to the merchants, most of whom did not have private armies." (Lintner, 1995:24). The KKY fought occasional battles against the insurgent groups, but they were largely unsuccessful warriors.

Most of the battles were won by monopolizing the opium trade, which the insurgent groups had become dependent upon to finance their revolution. With the loss of opium revenues, many of the insurgent groups were beginning to get desperate for money. By the middle 1960's several different groups were involved in the drug trade. The groups involved in the drug trade were the insurgent groups, merchants, KKY troops, the Burmese Army, intelligence agencies, international crime

syndicates, couriers, farmers, and drug addicts.

## **2.5 The Military Junta's Drug Policy**

### **2.5.1. The Junta's Need for Legitimacy**

The Military government went through several changes in their drug policy. Typically the junta was much more concerned with consolidating its own power and focusing on security, as opposed to preventing drug trafficking. As seen with the creation of the KKY units, the junta encouraged and facilitated drug trafficking. "The cultivation of poppy was expanded in the early and mid-1960's after the Burmese military took over power in 1962 and proceeded, in the name of socialism, not only to nationalize private enterprise, large and small, but also outlawed all private economic activities." (Jelsma, Kramer, & Vervest, 2005:27). The junta not only encouraged drug trafficking with policies such as the creation of the KKY units, but their terrible mismanagement of the country forced people into professions such as drug trafficking and other black market underground activities. Despite the junta's promotion of the drug trade, like any political organization, they had to have an official policy against it.

After the 1962 coup, the junta needed to gain international support and funding for their new regime. The new regime announced that they were anti-drug and intended to suppress drugs; of course the talk was a lot more than the actions of the junta. U Nu signed the United Nations Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs in 1961.

### **2.5.2. Burma Develops Drug Policies**

Under the agreements of the 1961 convention, Burma agreed that drugs should only be legal for medical purposes and agreed to make drugs illegal within twenty years. Junta leader, General Ne Win asked the United Nations (UN) to approve the legalization of opium growth in the Shan States, the United Nations refused and the junta was quite angry. Despite their anger, the junta still initiated official drug prevention plans. The junta cooperated with the United Nations and allowed a team from the UN to study the opium cultivation in Burma.

Burma initiated a plan to study the addiction problem, crop substitution

methods, and revise drug laws. This was accomplished with the Opium Enquiry Committee of 1964. The junta also implemented a project to develop the Kokang region, which was the largest production area at the time. In October 1965, a new law was passed that made opium production and trafficking illegal in the Shan states. It is interesting that this law was passed during the peak period of the KKY plan, in which the government was using drug trafficking as a counter-insurgency strategy.

The international community became particularly alarmed when they discovered that opium was now being refined into heroin during the late 1960's. The heroin demand was rapidly increasing and heroin was easier to traffic than raw opium. Heroin was also more dangerous than opium. The majority of this heroin was supplying the large demand of United States military personnel that had flooded Southeast Asia, due to the Vietnam War. As they returned home, the heroin problem spread to the United States and Europe. Once the heroin problem had become global, the international community was eager to give drug aid to Burma.

In 1972, Burma refused to sign the Protocol Amending the UN Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs. This was quite likely because the junta was still upset from the UN's denial to legalize opium production in the Shan States. Of course, other than political reasons, the junta was not overly concerned about a law against opium production. In 1974, the junta passed the Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Law Act, further making drugs illegal and setting stiff penalties for drug production and trafficking. In 1983 and 1988, the law was amended, increasing penalties for drug use, production, and trafficking.

The 1975 Public Order Act was especially strong and mirrored the actions of the military junta government. The 1975 law denied drug traffickers trial and created heavy punishments for drug trafficking. The junta did not sign the 1976 United Nations Convention of Psychotropic Substances. The junta also developed 5 year plans for development in opium regions. The 5 year plans began in 1976 and continued until 1991. The United Nations donated 6.5 million U.S. dollars to a development program; the program was named the Burma Programme for Drug Abuse Control. The program lasted until 1991. Few positive results occurred from this program, as the opium production in the region continued to increase along with continued underdevelopment. Perhaps results would have been different if the junta

was actually committed to stopping drug production and trafficking instead of funding drug armies disguised as home guard units. Despite the reality of the situation, the junta gained international support by passing official legislation and gaining international funding and support.

## **2.6 The Return of the Communist Party of Burma and the Increase In Drugs**

### **2.6.1 The Return of the CPB**

By the middle of the 1960's, it had seemed like the junta's genius plan to sponsor the KKY drug trafficking home guard units was nearly successful. The KKY had managed to gain control of ninety percent of the opium in Burma and substantially reduced the income of the insurgent groups, who were dependent on opium for income to finance their insurgencies. The insurgency escalated for the junta, when the CPB suddenly returned from China, invading the Shan State in 1968.

The CPB had been underground for quite a while. The CPB return created a formidable challenge for the junta. The CPB had spent years of training in China. The CPB were now well trained militarily, well indoctrinated, and backed by China. The CPB was unlike the Shan insurgent groups. The CPB was not dependent upon the sale of opium to finance their revolution; they were heavily armed and financially backed by China. "During the period that followed the thrust into Mong Ko on New Years Day 1968, the CPB received massive Chinese support. Everything from anti-aircraft guns to sewing needles came across the bridge from Meng A to Pangshang in those days." (Lintner, 1990:259). The CPB was able to easily gain allies in the Shan State. Burma was already under the rule of the brutal socialist military junta, from this perspective the Communist Party of Burma almost seemed like a better alternative. Also, the CPB was willing to provide an unlimited supply of weapons to the Hill Tribe armies and the Shan insurgent armies. All CPB asked in return was for the groups to respect the CPB as a political entity.

### **2.6.2. CPB and Ethnic Minority Cooperation**

Most of the rebel groups allied with the CPB, while maintaining their

autonomy. Just as the United States and Taiwan had backed the KMT to invade China in their secret war, China had a similar objective of spreading Communism by backing the CPB. The CPB recruited the Akha and the Wa tribes to form the CPB Army. The Akha and the Wa hated Burmans, and were more than willing to fight for the CPB. The Wa tribe became the largest group of CPB fighters.

The CPB attack came at the same time that the United States was fighting the War in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam. The new Communist invasion deeply concerned the United States, as Communism was increasing in Southeast Asia along with and increasing production of opium and heroin. By the early 1970's with the new support of the CPB, insurgent armies, merchants, and the KKY were constantly improving the drug business. By the early 1970's, heroin refineries were booming along the Thai border.

The opium would be convoyed from the northern Shan State to the refineries along the Thai border. After the raw opium was processed to heroin, it would then be smuggled across the Thai border. The cross border trade was facilitated by the insurgent groups enjoying refuge on the Thai side of the border. Thailand tolerated the insurgent groups, as they created a buffer against the Communist threat on their border.

### **2.6.3. The Changing Role of the KMT**

In 1972, General Li Wenhuan of the KMT agreed to resign from the drug trade. He had already established himself in Thailand and laundered his drug money into the Thai economy. He agreed to resign from the drug trade in exchange for one million U.S. dollars. After receiving his money, he burned his opium and many of his men joined the Shan United Resistance Army. It is suspected that Gen Li still remained linked to the drug trade, but simply retired from being a military commander. Even though the KMT Army officially was disbanded, they still operated under the cover of the KKY and other groups.

The former KMT members became facilitators of international drug trafficking and played integral roles in founding the international ethnic Chinese drug syndicates that run the Southeast Asia drug trade today. General Li chose the perfect time to retire as a drug army commander, since the United States withdrew all support

from the KMT, after a policy change in 1973. In 1973, the United States formed the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and began a War on Drugs.

With the withdrawal of United States support, the KMT could no longer compete against the powerful drug armies in Burma. Most of the KMT fled into Thailand and supported the drug trade from Thailand. The United States now had to face the both the Drug War and the Cold War, which were often interrelated. Other than supporting the insurgent groups, the CPB was initially against opium. The CPB actually tried to initiate a crop substitution plan, but it failed miserably and opium production was resumed out of necessity. The CPB remained a political organization and limited their role in the opium trade, as long as they continued to be backed by China.

## **2.7 The Fall of the Ka Kwe Ye and the Rise of Drug Lords**

### **2.7.1. KKY Units Become Drug Armies**

During this period of KKY, Lo Hsing Han had become the most powerful KKY drug lord. Another powerful KKY leader was Zhang Qifu, better known as Khun Sa. Khun Sa was arrested in 1969 for drug trafficking; this allowed Lo Hsing Han to become the most powerful drug lord. Lo Hsing Han was a wanted man by the Burmese government. On January 4, 1973, the junta realized that the KKY was not solving the insurgency problem and ordered the KKY units to deactivate and turn in their weapons. Many of the units complied and became independent drug traffickers or opium farmers. Several groups refused to disarm and now had powerful, heavily armed armies to back them.

The two major drug armies were run by Lo Hsing Han and Khun Sa. These two became the most powerful drug lords in Burma. During this period, the Shan State Army was trying to gain political support for their cause. The SSA wanted out of the drug business, but needed a source of financial backing. The SSA proposed a plan to Lo Hsing Han. The plan was to propose that Lo Hsing Han and the SSA sell the majority of Burma's opium to the United States government, which the United States could then destroy. Lo Hsing Han agreed to go to Bangkok to propose the deal with the help of the Thais.

In 1973, Lo Hsing Han arrived in Thailand, but was never able to propose the

deal to the United States Embassy. The Thai authorities arrested him and turned him over to the Burmese government, before he could try to make a deal with the United States. The junta tried him for treason, not for drug trafficking. Khun Sa was released from prison during the same year that Lo Hsing Han was locked up. Khun Sa's army kidnapped a couple of Russian doctors working in the Shan State and agreed to release them in exchange for the release of Khun Sa. The junta released Kuhn Sa. With Lo Hsing Han behind bars, Khun Sa could get to work on becoming the next major opium king pin.

Most of Lo Hsing Han's men joined the Shan United Revolutionary Army and resumed drug trafficking. The dissolution of the KKY units created a new enemy for the junta within Burma. Many of the former KKY were now allied with the insurgent groups that they were supposed to be suppressing years earlier. In addition, most of these groups were allied with the CPB to some extent. The Lahu tribe was also formerly a KKY. The Lahu were another group that refused to give up and continued to attack the Burmese government troops and traffic drugs. Lahu had tribal relatives across the border in Thailand were major opium producers.

### **2.7.2. New Armies and New Alliances**

Kuhn Sa founded a new drug army in 1976. He named his new army the Shan United Army (SUA). Khun Sa and his army were ethnic Chinese and not Shan. Kuhn Sa's real name was Zhang Qifu. He adopted the Shan name of Khun Sa and the army name of Shan United Army to gain Thai support. The Shan are originally from the same ethnic group as the Thai. The Thai, Lao, and the Shan in Burma all share common linguistic ties. All of these groups form the Tai language group and are ethnically Tai. The Shan are more ethnically and culturally similar to Thai than Burmese.

The SUA and Khun Sa were unlike the SSA who had a political cause. The only cause that Khun Sa believed in was drug trafficking. Khun Sa was allowed to set up his base of operations for his SUA on the Thai side of the border in northern Chiang Rai province. The SUA, under Kuhn Sa's leadership soon became the most powerful drug trafficking organization in the region.

The SSA needed a new ally, and many turned to the CPB for help. The CPB



agreed to help and continued to arm the resistance groups. The CPB, however, was beginning to face problems of their own. After the death of Mao Zedong in 1978, a new regime gained power in China. With the new regime under Deng Xiaopong, policy changes decreased the lack of support for the CPB. The new Chinese government decided to normalize relations with the Burmese government.

As the CPB began to lose funding from China, they were forced to become involved in the drug trade themselves. “Drug revenues became particularly useful after China under the leadership of Deng Xiaopong, reduced at least temporarily, its military and financial support.”(Boucaud, A. & Boucaud, L.,2000:38). By the middle of the 1980’s, the CPB had control over 80 percent of the opium producing land. This provided a tax base for the CPB and allowed the CPB to maintain its ideological struggle for the time being.

## **2.8 Drug Lords Gain More Power**

### **2.8.1. The Development of Khun Sa’s Shan United Army**

During the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, many of the drug lords were operating out of Northern Thailand. It was hard to distinguish which groups had legitimate political concerns and which groups were just drug lords. Many of the Hill Tribes fled to Thailand during the fighting and joined their relatives in growing opium in the Thai highlands. In 1976, members from ten ethnic minority groups united together for a common political cause to form the National Democratic Front (NDF). The CPB also joined this organization. It is ironic that an organization fighting for democracy would be backed by the Communist Party of Burma.

While ethnic minorities were concerned with politics, Khun Sa continued to build up his SUA from his headquarters at Ban Hin Taek in Thailand. The SUA was composed of ex KKY, drug merchants, and former KMT troops. Almost all of the members were ethnic Chinese, with the Shan name to cover for their primary motive of drug trafficking. Khun Sa and General Li Wenhuan had followed similar patterns of setting up in Thailand and both contributed heavily to the making of the Golden Triangle. Khun Sa was well liked. He had good connections with the Burmese and Thai authorities. He was also generous, as he invested drug money back into the economy and into the pockets of corrupt officials. With these methods, Khun Sa

gained loyalty and support from various social classes. Khun Sa's role was to smuggle his opium and heroin into Thailand.

The role of trafficking to the international community from Bangkok was the responsibility of the ethnic Chinese criminal organizations that had global networks. The Thai Chinese in Bangkok referred to as "Chiu Chao" had connections with the global syndicates and would smuggle the opium to the United States and the rest of the world. The Hill Tribes would grow the opium, the insurgents and drug lords would tax it and transport it to the border, and it would be refined to heroin and then turned over to the Chinese gangs to be smuggled to the United States.

### **2.8.2. Khun Sa Kicked Out of Thailand**

After United States put pressure on Thailand to take care of the Khun Sa problem, he was forced back into the Burmese side of the border and continued to develop his drug business. Khun Sa was able to eliminate much of his SSA competition in 1983. In 1984, Khun Sa made another deal with the corrupt junta, once again agreeing to attack the insurgent groups in the Shan State in exchange for government support of his drug business. "But Khun Sa also needed a firmer deal with the Burmese authorities. On 7 March 1984, SUA representatives reportedly met the eastern commander of Burma Army, Brig-Gen. Aye San, at the garrison town of Mong Ton to finalise the details of a joint cooperation agreement." (Lintner, 1999:325). This was a revival of the KKY in a sense. Khun Sa was able to eliminate his competition and gain the backing of the junta as well. This obviously led Khun Sa becoming an even more powerful drug lord and his army and wealth continued to grow. Of course the junta publicly denied that they made such a deal with Khun Sa.

By 1985, Khun Sa was able to push out the remaining KMT elements remaining in Burma. Khun Sa gained even more power in 1985, when he combined forces with various Shan armies to form the Mong Tai Army. The Mong Tai Army was the new army to back up Khun Sa's new organization, the Thailand Revolutionary Council. The Shan United Revolutionary Army, elements from the Shan State Army, and other smaller Shan insurgent groups all joined together to form the new Mong Tai Army under the leadership of Khun Sa and his Thailand Revolutionary Council. Khun Sa now commanded a heavily armed and well trained drug army consisting of 20,000

men.

### **2.8.3. The SLORC and the Continued Decline of the Burmese State**

While Khun Sa was becoming more powerful everyday, the Burmese government was preparing to make matters even worse for the Burmese people and increase business for Kuhn Sa. The State Law and Restoration Council (SLORC) replaced the ruling junta in 1988. The new junta only made matters worse, despite their new name. In 1987, the Burmese government decided to devalue the national currency. The already impoverished Burmese population suffered even more. Thousands of people lost their life savings. Once again groups of lowland Burmese were increasingly forced into the illicit underground economy.

In 1987, Burma applied for the least developed nation status with the United Nations. The actions of the incompetent junta continued to support the drug trade, both directly and indirectly. The Burmese citizens had enough of the corrupt military government and massive democracy demonstrations ensued. Aun Sang Suu Kyi (the daughter of Aun Sang) emerged as a democratic leader and inspired pro democracy demonstrations throughout the country.

A democratic political party named the National League for Democracy (NLD) was formed. The Burmese desire for democracy was increasing. As the demonstrations grew, General Saw Maung, the leader of the SLORC moved in to seize power in Burma. The SLORC claimed to seize power in order to save the country and commenced to brutally suppress the demonstrators. SLORC troops mowed down unarmed civilians with machine guns. This action by the SLORC made the economic situation, the insurgency, and the drug problem in Burma even worse.

After the human rights violations committed by the SLORC, Burma lost the much needed support of the international community. "Foreign aid to Burma was cut off by the U.S., Australia, Britain, Germany and Japan. The aid from the U.S. had consisted mostly of anti-narcotics assistance amounting to US \$12.3 million per year. By terminating its support, Washington obviously wanted to make a point." (Lintner, 1999:353). The human rights situation in Burma was terrible and a blow to democracy. With the loss of foreign aid, the situation in Burma would only get worse. Since a large amount of the aid from the United States consisted of 12.3 million U.S.

dollars in annual anti-drug funds, Burma was now short on 12.3 million dollars per year to combat drug trafficking and obviously did not have the funds to spend their own money on an anti-drug trafficking campaign.

In addition to the lack of drug enforcement from both the Burmese authorities and the international withdrawal, thousands of people were now unemployed and the underground economy was one of the few viable options for many. With the rise of the SLORC and the loss of international support, refugees fled into Thailand and other countries. These new refugees and illegal migrants found work in illegal industries and many directly or indirectly became involved in the booming drug trade.

The SLORC needed international recognition. The SLORC claimed that they would hold elections and claimed that they were committed to fighting the illegal drug trade. The role of the DEA was now limited to joint investigations and sharing drug intelligence. The DEA could not provide training or help develop programs to suppress illicit drug production and trafficking. The SLORC honored their commitment and held elections on May 27, 1990. The SLORC underestimated Aun Sang Suu Kyi. Aun Sang Suu Kyi won the election, with the SLORC only receiving a very small amount of votes. The SLORC refused to accept the results of the elections, and kept Aun San Suu Kyi imprisoned. Aun Sang Suu Kyi was arrested before the elections in May 1990. The SLORC had only made matters worse for Burma and international sanctions would only increase problems in Burma and allow the drug business to flourish. Aun Sang Suu Kyi and other political prisoners remain imprisoned today.

## **2.9 The Fall of the CPB and the Continued Rise of the Drug Trade**

### **2.9.1. The Fall of the CPB**

After the CPB lost financial support from China, the CPB began to lose power. The CPB was able to get by on the drug trade, but loss of China's backing was an ideological matter as well. As the CPB became heavily involved in the drug trade in the 1980's, many began to lose focus on the CPB ideology and became more interested in being wealthy from the drug trade. The CPB began cooperating with Khun Sa and his powerful Mong Tai Army.

With the cooperation of Khun Sa and the CPB, and with United States funding

out of the picture thanks to the corrupt human rights abusing SLORC, the drug business was good in the Shan State. In addition to the skyrocketing production of opium and heroin, Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) were also beginning to be a popular drug by the end of the 1980's. In March 1989, Pheng Jia Xin, a Wa Army commander in Kokang, initiated a coup against the CPB. Two other commanders followed the lead of Pheng Jia Xin, and by April 1989, the CPB was overthrown. The remaining CPB leaders fled to China, but this time they would not return. The CPB had collapsed rather suddenly. This was good news for the Cold War advocates, but bad news for the drug war.

### **2.9.2. CPB Military Forces Divide into Independent Drug Armies**

The CPB's huge ethnic army could now focus entirely on drug trafficking, without having to deal with the politics and ideology of the CPB. During the same period, the SLORC started another home guard unit to attack insurgents. The new unit was called the Pyi Thu Sit (People's Militia). The rules were the same as they were for the KKY. The Pyi Thu Sit, would agree to attack ethnic insurgents and in return they would be free to traffic drugs with the approval of the SLORC. Plenty of well trained soldiers were now free to join the new home guard drug army.

The rest of the former CPB Army split off into various factions. The New Democratic Army (NDA) formed in the northern part of the Shan State. The Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA) formed in the Kokang area. The National Democratic Alliance Military and Local Administration Committee took control north of Kungtung in the eastern Shan State. The United Wa State Army (UWSA) set up along the Thai border. All of these new armies became heavily involved in the drug trade; however, the UWSA proved to be the most powerful group and would soon surpass the level of drug trafficking that occurred under Khun Sa. International support and funding was now gone and poverty and corruption had increased in Burma. By the end of the 1980's, these factors were a dream come true for drug lords.

### **2.9.3. Ceasefire Agreements**

Shortly after the collapse of the CPB, the SLORC decided that the best policy was to negotiate ceasefire agreements with the ethnic armies. The ceasefire would

guarantee autonomy and would allow the ethnic insurgents and the drug armies to maintain their armies and continue drug trafficking. The agreements varied according to each area. The UWSA was the strongest group, so they were able to gain the most autonomy and were able to traffic illicit drugs with virtually no interference from the Burmese authorities.

By the end of 1989, most of the groups had agreed to ceasefire agreements. “The actions of the Burmese Army, which indicate a belief that narcotics problems are less serious than ethnic rebellion, have shown signs of playing off the drug dealers while trying to put the Karens and other such rebels out of commission. This policy has given rise to fears that the SLORC is actually abetting the drug traffic.”(Renard, 1996:72). The government brought back the ex-drug lord Lo Hsing Han to help negotiate the ceasefire agreements. In exchange for Lo Hsing Han’s work, he was also allowed to get back into the drug trafficking business with the SLORC’s approval. These groups were now able to traffic drugs, without having to fund an insurgency.

After the ceasefire agreements, drug production continued to increase. Burma became the number one producer of opium in the world and the major producer of ATS in Asia. Heroin refineries increased and ATS was produced in the same refineries. Chinese drug gangs moved in the Shan State and facilitated the increased international drug smuggling. With the help of the Chinese, new drug routes opened in China. As the new drug routes opened in China, the profit of Khun Sa decreased. Khun Sa’s army also was involved in battles with the UWSA for control of drug profits. Khun Sa was now wanted by the United States, as an indictment for his arrest was issued in 1990.

#### **2.9.4. UWSA Rise in Power and Khun Sa’s Decline**

The UWSA battles against Khun Sa were initiated with the backing of the SLORC. Under international pressure, the SLORC agreed to suppress the activities of Khun Sa. The SLORC made a deal with the UWSA. The UWSA would be allowed to traffic drugs, if they attacked Khun Sa. Once again, the Burmese military junta principle of playing one side against the other in exchange for drug trafficking rights was used. Of course the UWSA agreed, since they could gain power in the drug trade and have the official backing of the SLORC.

With the massive increase of drug production in the 1990's, new smuggling routes were needed. Thailand still remained a primary important route, but drug trafficking through Thailand's northern border was becoming more difficult as the Thai security measures increased. Another primary route opened up through China. This was easy, since the new drug armies and other ex-CPB members had connections with the border authorities in China. Secondary routes opened up through Laos, India, and Bangladesh. Also, some new routes were trafficked from the sea ports and by air from Burma.

The China land smuggling route became quite popular and was only the first step to the sea smuggling route to the United States. Smuggling narcotics to the United States among containerized cargo became a very popular method of trafficking drugs from Southeast Asia to the United States. "One of the many ways SEA heroin traffickers smuggle bulk quantities of SEA heroin to international markets is by use of commercial containerized cargo. Heroin processed in the Golden Triangle (Burma, Laos, and Thailand) is smuggled overland to seaports in Burma, China, Thailand, Malaysia, and Vietnam for transshipment within containerized cargo through Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, and Korea. From these transit countries in Southeast Asia, the heroin laden containers are shipped to consumer markets in Europe, Australia, Canada, and the United States." (United States Drug Enforcement Administration, 2001). Drugs also began being shipped by boat along the Mekong River. These Mekong drug routes could then be smuggled internationally through Cambodia and Vietnam or re-smuggled through Thailand's northeastern border. All of these drug routes were also later used as human trafficking routes, as the economic situation in Burma drove Burmese citizens out of the country looking for a better life.

Burma made a few more international political moves to suppress drug trafficking in the 1990's. In 1991 Burma deposited to the instrument of accession with the UN Convention on Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. Burma agreed to the agreement, but with conditions of its own. The conditions were that Burma would not submit to the World Court and that Burmese citizens could not be extradited. In 1991, the UN donated money for a border development on the China and Thailand borders. In 1992, Burma starting working with China and Thailand to develop joint drug suppression strategies. Domestic drug use began to increase in

Burma and HIV AIDS began to become a serious problem among intravenous drug users. The Burmese government did not have an effective drug treatment program, so the problem continued to increase as both drug addiction and HIV continued to increase.

#### **2.9.5. Khun Sa Surrenders**

In 1996, Khun Sa along with his Mong Tai Army surrendered to the SLORC authorities. The United States requested that Khun Sa be extradited for trial in the United States. Of course, this request was denied. Since Khun Sa was not extradited, the United States wanted him punished for his crimes. The Burmese government did not punish Khun Sa at all. The Burmese government made a deal with Khun Sa. In exchange for leaving the drug trade, Khun Sa would be allowed to launder his drug money into the legitimate Burmese economy. Khun Sa became one of the richest businessmen in Burma and built roads and infrastructure, which were suspected of facilitating the drug trade.

The United States claimed that Burma violated the 1988 UN Convention, which the Burmese government signed. Under this convention, the Burmese government is obligated to prosecute drug traffickers. Khun Sa was never prosecuted and treated with respect. While one may think that the surrender of Khun Sa may have put a dent in the drug trade, the opposite was true. The drug trade increased even more with Khun Sa out of the picture. "Following the surrender of Khun Sa, the Kokang, Wa, and ESSA areas in particular became drug trafficking havens where opium was produced and refined with relative impunity." (United States Department of State, 1997). Remnants of Khun Sa's Mong Tai Army became independent ATS smugglers. Others joined Colonel Yawd Serk's new Shan State Army South (SSA-S). Yawd Serk was formally with SURA. The SSA-S and the Karen are the only two groups that continue to agree to ceasefire agreements with the central government. After the surrender of Khun Sa, the UWSA moved in to control the drug trade in Burma.

#### **2.9.6. UWSA Gains Control of the Drug Trade**

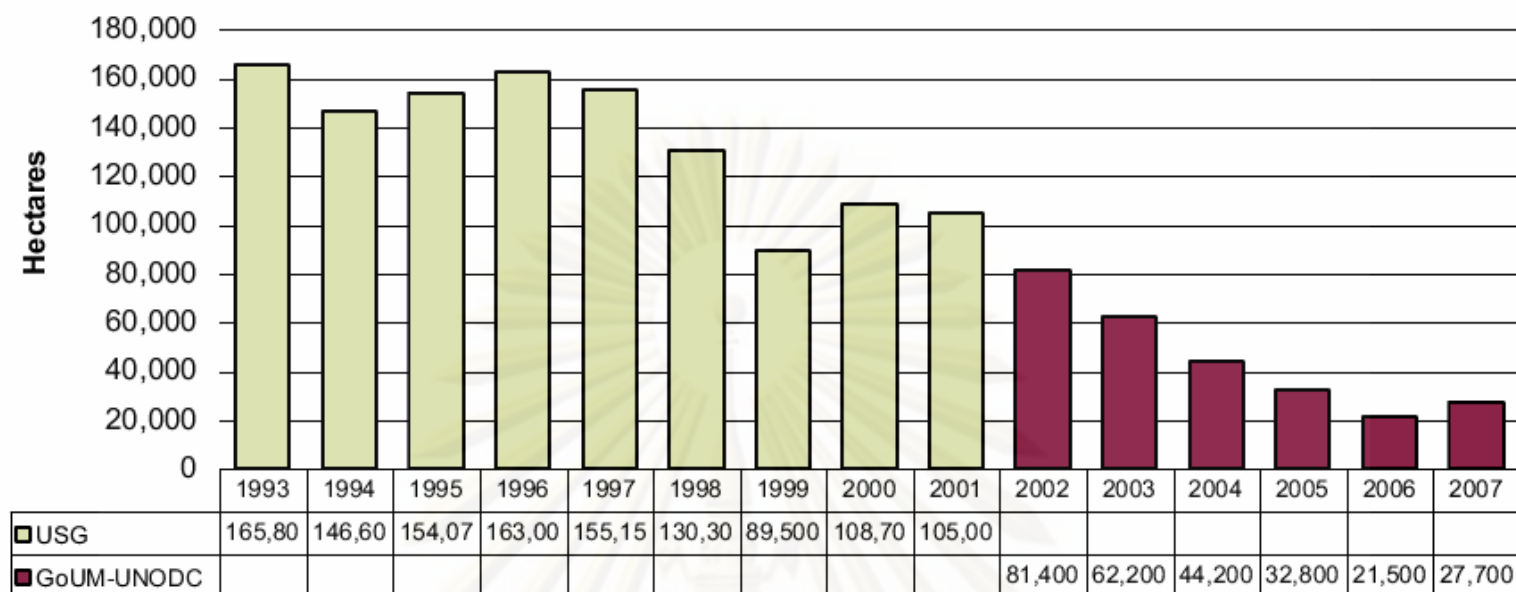
The UWSA became and remains the most powerful drug army in Burma. The other major groups that gained power were the MNDAA in Kokang, the Eastern Shan



State Army (ESSA), the SSA-S or SURA, Monko Defense Army, and the Kachin Defense Army. In 1997, the SLORC changed its name to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Despite the name change, the regime remained under the rule of the same corrupt junta that had run the country since 1962.

The ethnic armies made plans to be opium free, in accordance with the ceasefire agreements. Although these groups declared to be drug free, the deadlines were reached slowly and most groups declared to be opium free and then continued to produce and traffic opium and heroin. “While several areas are reportedly opium-free, these same ethnic groups continue to traffic in heroin and methamphetamine.” (United States Drug Enforcement Administration, 2002). By 1999, the ESSA area and the Kachin area declared to be opium free. These regions were never really major opium producing areas. Despite being opium free, the leaders of these armies were suspected to remain involved at some level with drug trafficking.

The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime began the Wa development project (WADP) in the Wa region in 1998. The United States funded the project for several years, until the UWSA made death threats on DEA Agent’s lives. The UWSA proclaimed an opium ban to be effective in 2005. The UWSA, relocated Hill Tribes to low land areas to give the farmers an opportunity to farm better land. The motives of the UWSA for this movement are under suspicion. Many feel that the UWSA had ulterior motives for relocating the opium farmers. Many feel that the UWSA was attempting to control certain areas to increase their control of the drug trade. Several of these relocated farmers likely ended up working in heroin and ATS refineries, which are usually located together. Many feel that the UWSA is eager to give up opium production, since ATS production is more profitable and easier to produce and transport. After 1996, opium production began to decline and ATS continued to increase. This new ATS threat was flooding into Thailand and becoming a serious concern for Thai government, as well as the international community.



**Figure 2.9. Estimated Opium Production in Burma 1993-2007**

## 2.10 Amphetamine Type Stimulants

### 2.10.1. The Rise of ATS in Burma

Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) became the new major drug threat in the Golden Triangle by the middle 1990's. "The "Golden Triangle" in mainland Southeast Asia is one of the two main areas of illicit opiate production in the world. In addition, it is also from there that hundreds of millions of methamphetamine pills are sourced."(Chouvy & Meissonnier, 2004:12). The drug began being produced in the 1980's and reached its peak popularity in less than a decade. ATS is a broad classification for various types of methamphetamines.

The most common Southeast Asian pill is ya-ba, which is the Thai word meaning "crazy drug". Ice or crystal methamphetamine originated in China, but with the new cooperation with Chinese syndicates, all types of ATS are now being produced and trafficked from Burma. ATS has many advantages compared to opium. ATS is cheaper to produce, very little labor is involved, it has no distinctive smell, transportation is more convenient, the market is larger, it is harder to detect and interdict, and it is not dependent on the environment.

### **2.10.2. The Greater Threat of ATS**

ATS is a much different drug than opium for many reasons. For one, the drug is based on pure greed as opposed to opium. The growth of opium involves many levels. At the lowest level of opium production, poor farmers are just trying to make a living to buy food. ATS usually involves powerful drug gangs and wealthy businessmen. While opium has to be grown high in the mountains and be transported to the market, ATS can be processed anywhere. ATS is made in small mobile labs close to areas in which it is marketed. ATS can be made inside a vehicle. This mobility makes it hard for officials to detect. ATS pills are light and compact, therefore they are easy to smuggle and traffic. While opium can be affected by a drought and has a growing season, the ATS season is year round and not dependent upon weather.

ATS users are a different group than heroin users. Heroin is usually used by a middle class group and is viewed as a dangerous drug. ATS, specifically ya-ba is used by all classes of people. ATS is relatively affordable, therefore popular. When ya-ba first became popular in Southeast Asia, it was not even seen as a drug. Ya-ba was first used as an energy pill by students, truck drivers, taxi drivers, farmers, partying youth, and other groups. Ya-ba reached all groups, because it was cheap to sell and cheap to produce. While ATS initially was a drug used in Asia, it was not long before it became popular globally.

United States authorities began finding ATS from Southeast Asia in the United States within several years of its initial popularity in Asia. "There have also been shipments of methamphetamine tablets to ethnic Hmong and Yao individuals in the Sacramento, California area. However, the amount of Burma-produced tablets being shipped to the United States is currently unknown."(United States Drug Enforcement Administration, 2003). ATS is a new threat to the United States, but the threat is so new that authorities still do not know exactly how big of a threat it is. Certain ethnic Hmong and Yao in California are known to be involved in drug gangs. ATS can be sold for a greater profit in the United States and fuel criminal activity. Since the shipments are harder to detect, the amount of ATS in the United States may be greater than currently estimated.

### **2.10.3. ATS Production and Trafficking**

In order to produce heroin and ATS, chemicals are needed to make the product. The chemicals are easy to come by and are smuggled mainly from China and India. Most recently, smaller amounts from Thailand have been smuggled into Burma. “Acetic anhydride, an essential chemical in the production of heroin, and ephedrine, the principal chemical ingredient of methamphetamine, are trafficked from China, India, and Thailand.”(United States Department of State, 2002). The chemical necessary for heroin production is acetic anhydride. Ephedrine and pseudoephedrine are needed to produce ATS. These chemicals are not produced in Burma, so in order for the drug gangs to produce ATS, they depend on the smuggling of chemicals.

So far, ATS producers in Burma, have not had any problems with getting these chemicals. Authorities are aware that these chemicals must be controlled. Chemical diversion laws have been passed that control these chemicals. Chemical diversion has also employed other ethnic groups. Ethnic Chin groups are largely responsible for trafficking precursor chemicals from the Indian border for sale to the UWSA.

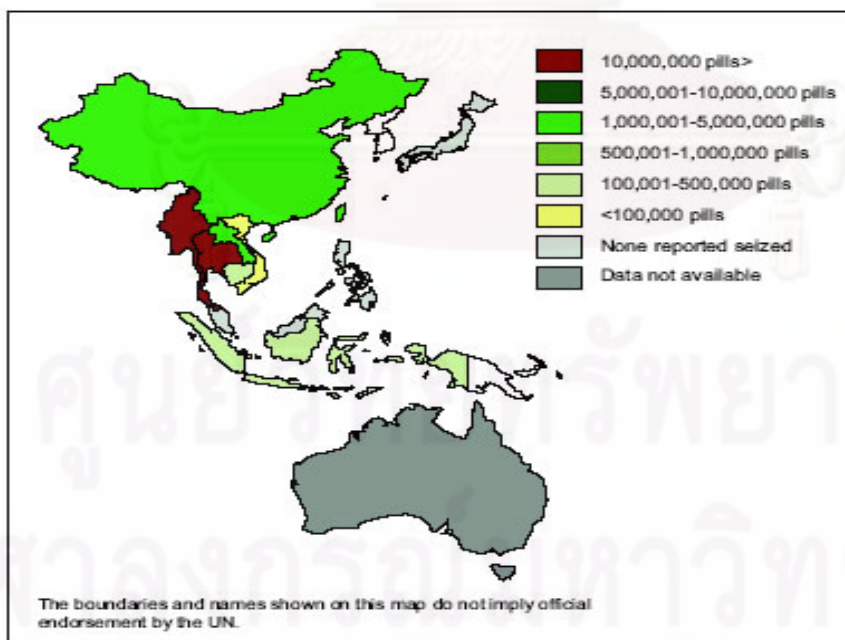
The drug gangs responsible for ATS production and trafficking are numerous. Most of them are linked to ethnic Chinese drug syndicates. Within Burma, the UWSA is the major ATS producer. Wei Xue Gang, one of the UWSA’s top commanders is a well known drug trafficker in both heroin and now ATS. Wei and his brother are largely responsible for the ATS boom. “Several of the ethnic trafficking armies, especially the Wa, also control amphetamine production labs and extensive trafficking operations, raising questions whether the gradual departure from opium cultivation is not just a business decision to concentrate on ATS. These ATS operations remain largely intact and are a major factor in amphetamine trafficking in Southeast Asia and beyond.” (United States Department of State, 2004). Today, an estimated eighty percent of ATS production in Burma is controlled by the UWSA.

### **2.10.4. Decreased Interest in Heroin and Increased Interest in ATS**

The UWSA declared opium illegal in 2005, and opium did decrease. Since the decrease of opium production, ATS continues to increase. The UWSA and other

traffickers have only increased their profits. UWSA seems to be willing to give up or decrease opium trafficking, since ATS is easier to produce and much more profitable. The United States government has issued an indictment for Wei Xue Gang and issued drug trafficking indictments for seven other UWSA leaders in 2005. Farmers, who are now under employed in the opium business, are also now involved in some extent with the ATS business. Farmers are often given money to store ATS on their land and some become ATS smugglers.

ATS is a new challenge to authorities, because little is known about the ATS business. ATS is a new type of drug and does not follow the same rules and patterns as opium and heroin. It is difficult for developed nations to stop the ATS trade, but is even more difficult for Burma, especially without international assistance and funding. In 2005, ice or crystal methamphetamine, began being produced and trafficked from Burma. This suggests increased Chinese cooperation with ethnic Chinese gangs. A United States Department of State International Narcotics Report suggested that the Golden Triangle will soon be referred to as the “Ice Triangle”. ATS is making more money for traffickers than they could ever have dreamed of with opium and heroin.



**Figure 2.10. Methamphetamine pill seizures in Golden Triangle 2006**

## **2.11 Burma's Post-Ceasefire Drug Suppression Efforts**

### **2.11.1. Burma's Post-Ceasefire Actions to Combat Drugs**

Since the ceasefire, Burmese authorities have made minimal drug enforcement efforts. Part of the problem is funding, corruption, and the dependence of the Burmese economy on illicit drugs. Also, the heavily armed drug armies are a challenge. Despite these challenges, Burma has at least officially made some progress in drug suppression efforts. The Central Committee for Drug Abuse Control (CCDAC) is the primary drug enforcement agency for the Burmese government. The CCDAC falls under the command of the Directorate of Defense Services Intelligence (DDSI). The CCDAC is a combined force of police and military personnel. The CCDAC has 27 drug enforcement task forces throughout Burma. The CCDAC is continually challenged by under funding, just like most government and private agencies in Burma. The CCDAC is challenged with combating the well funded drug armies. The CCDAC has conducted various seizures of drugs, but the quantity of seizures is very small compared to the production and trafficking levels. The seizures hardly make a dent in the drug trade.

The government of Burma has initiated development projects, but the projects are not well funded, therefore ineffective. The central government expects the ethnic minorities to fund their own projects; of course they do not want to fund a project that will decrease their drug profits. The ongoing development efforts fall under the 1990 Master Plan for Development of Border Areas and National Races. This plan is ongoing and the lack of development is also ongoing. The United Nations has funded the UNDCP Wa development project since the 1990's and has built roads and schools. The work of the Wa project has not shown any noticeable results.

### **2.11.2. Post-Ceasefire Cooperation with the International Community**

Since 2003, the United States has directly funded a small development project in the northeastern Shan State called "Project Old Soldier". Even though this project is funded by the United States, the money or benefits of the project do not pass directly through the Burmese government. Burma's official policy is to have a drug free Burma by the year 2014. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) policy is to have a drug free Southeast Asia by 2015. Burma is obviously the main

obstacle to a drug free Southeast Asia, and the drug free timelines while quite wonderful in theory, are most likely not realistic at all.

The Burmese government cooperated with the United States in conducting joint opium surveys from 1993 until 2004. Since 2005, the Burmese government has refused to cooperate in joint opium surveys. The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has conducted opium surveys in Burma since 2005. The United States has funded and relied on the UNODC surveys as well as satellite imagery. Opium production in Burma has declined substantially since 1996. Part of this has been due to drought. This is not great news, considering that the opium decline has been replaced with the more dangerous ATS. Also, even though opium has declined, Burma is still a major opium producer and still the number two producer in the world. Burma has made some progress diplomatically.

Burma has signed agreements with ASEAN, the UNODC, Cambodia, China, India, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam to cooperate in bilateral and regional drug suppression efforts. Burma signed a Counter Drug Memorandum of Understanding with China and Thailand in 2001. In 2002, Burma made some progress on money laundering, as they passed a new money laundering law and made a few drug related seizures. Burma continued to develop money laundering laws in 2003 and 2004. Burma also launched a new poppy eradication plan called "New Destiny" in 2002. The Kokang region originally declared that they would be poppy free in 2000; the law went into effect in 2003. UWSA also followed through with making opium illegal in 2005.

All of the ethnic areas are now so called "opium free", but the opium problem still exists. 2005 was a big year for Burmese drug enforcement efforts. With the help of the DEA, the CCDAC made several big seizures in 2005. 2005 also marked an increased trend of international drug trafficking by air and sea routes. In 2007, Laos and India became major trafficking routes in addition to China and Thailand. Previously Laos and India were secondary routes. Despite the increased efforts, drugs production and trafficking only continue to rise in 2008.

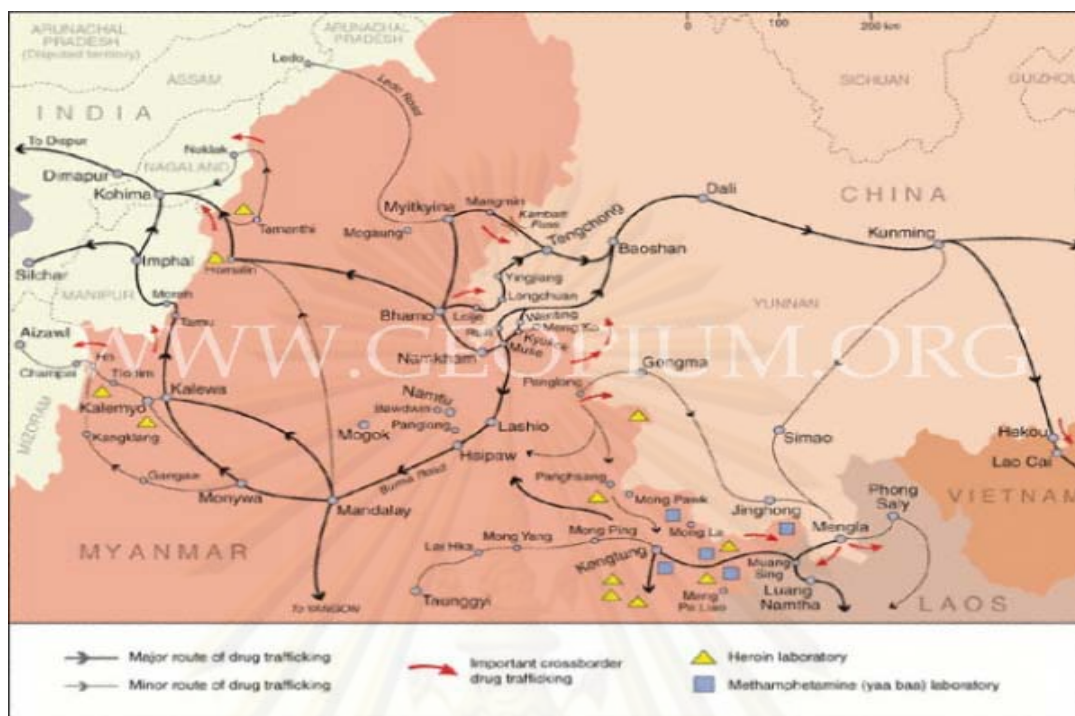


Figure 2.11. Drug Trafficking Routes Originating in Burma

## 2.12 Burma's Post-Ceasefire Challenges

### 2.12.1. The Drug Problem Continues to Increase

Since the ceasefire agreement, illicit drug production has only gotten worse. With the new agreements, the Burmese government has little control of the ethnic areas and the ethnic areas continue to be backed by large and well trained armies. Other problems with enforcement are due to the money laundering problems and public corruption. The Burmese government is often accused of not really wanting to suppress drugs, because drug money funds the Burmese economy. "There is reason to believe that money laundering in Burma and the return of narcotics profits laundered elsewhere is a significant factor in the overall Burmese economy, through the extent is impossible to measure accurately. Political and economic constraints on legal capital inflows magnify the importance of narcotics derived fund in the economy." (United States Department of State, 1998). This can be seen with the reinvestment of drug money into legitimate businesses in Burma.

Burma is also facing a domestic drug addiction problem, which has spread HIV AIDS throughout the country. Burma faces budget problems that prevent them



from fully developing drug suppression programs and treatment programs for drug addicts. The remote areas where drug armies operate are also challenging when suppressing drug trafficking in Burma.

### **2.12.2. Corruption**

Official corruption is a major issue in Burma. Burma has failed to prosecute high level corruption. The Burmese Army is notorious for being corrupt. “Burma does not have a legislature or effective constitution; and has no laws on record specifically related to corruption. While there is little evidence that senior officials in the Burmese Government are involved in the drug trade, there are credible indications that mid- and-lower level military leaders and government officials, particularly those posted in border and drug producing areas, are closely involved in facilitating the drug trade.”(United States Department of State, 2008). The Burmese government has failed to solve the public corruption issue. Part of this problem is due to the level of poverty and the low pay of the military and police. The Burmese government has not done much to increase the well being of its citizens, therefore, these citizens including government officials will continue to be tempted to become involved in the drug trade and other public corrupt activities.

### **2.12.3. Lack of Alternative Options for Farmers**

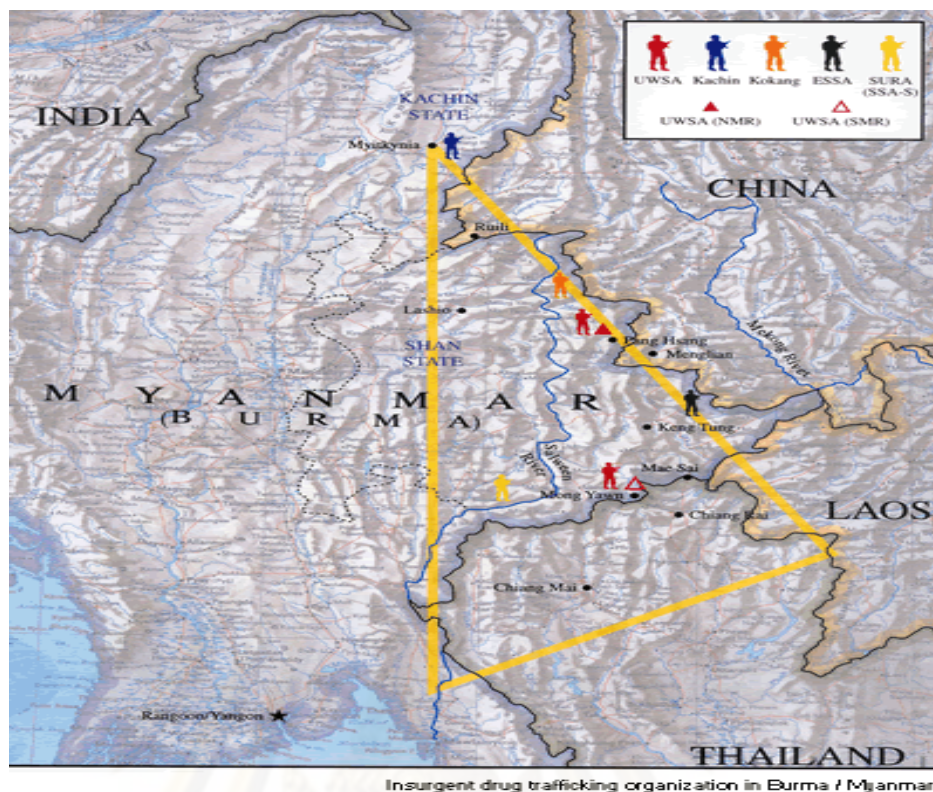
One of the issues with stopping opium growth is the agricultural sector. The farmers, who grow opium, most often do so out of necessity. If the government of Burma wants to stop opium growing, they need to provide a suitable alternative for the farmers to make income and feed their families. So far, the Burmese government has not provided a suitable alternative to these farmers. “Burma has not provided most opium farmers with access to alternative development opportunities.”(United States Department of State, 2008). These farmers need to grow opium to buy rice and a lack of a suitable health care system leads to opium use as a traditional medicine. With the lack of alternative development opportunities and the increased demand for opium and heroin, these farmers will continue to grow opium out of necessity.

Farmers who have stopped growing opium are at risk for returning to opium farming as they find that no alternative options for survival are available. Also, as

opium supply continues to decline and the demand remains, the price of opium continues to rise. With the increased price of opium, some find opium growing even more attractive. The results of the 2002 Kokang opium ban were catastrophic. After a 2002 opium ban in Kokang, a severe food shortage spread and an 80 percent school attendance drop out rate occurred. Massive groups simply migrated to the Wa region, where opium growing was still legal. This example and others, stress the importance of providing suitable alternatives for opium growers.

#### **2.12.4. Continued Insurgency Financed by Drugs**

Another challenge in drug enforcement efforts is that Burma is still not at peace. Most groups have simply agreed to a ceasefire, this is not to be confused with a peace agreement. Burmese authorities still have limited control, if any over major drug producing areas. Burmese policy is more concerned with national security than drug trafficking. An over aggressive stance on drug enforcement could trigger renewed conflict. Also, two rebel army groups are still fighting with the central Burmese government. These two groups are the Shan State Army-South or SURA and the Christian Karen group with their Karen National Union (KNU) Army. The KNU have never been heavily involved in the drug trade. For most of the Christian Karens, it is against their religion to traffic drugs. The Buddhist Karen group and their Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) are known to be involved with running drug trafficking operations in their territory. The DKBA are primarily responsible for the ATS smuggled into Western Thailand in Tak Province, which then goes to Bangkok and onto international markets. The DKBA has now reached a ceasefire agreement with the central government. The deal with the DKBA seems to be along the typical patterns of Burmese deal making. It seems that the Burmese government allows the DKBA to traffic drugs in exchange for attacking KNU forces. The Shan State Army-South is still using drug trafficking to finance their insurgency. Burma needs to unite the country under peaceful conditions, before the drug war can end. Poverty must be reduced, corruption eliminated, and human rights respected. The corrupt military junta is a major issue. The lack of international assistance only makes the problem worse.



**Figure 2.12. Drug Armies in Burma**

### 2.13 Conclusion

The drug problem in Burma is a serious issue that not only affects Burma, but it affects most of the world. The drug problem in Burma leads to security concerns for Southeast Asian nations, the United States, and several countries around the world. Opium has been reduced in Burma, only to be replaced with the even more marketable and more dangerous ATS. The drug problem in Burma is very complicated and is related to political and socio-economic problems.

Burma needs international assistance and foreign aid to solve the root causes that lead to drug trafficking. Burma is one of the least developed nations in the world and the poverty and lack of legitimate opportunities only lead to increased drug trafficking. The actions of the Burmese military junta have continued to cut off international support for Burma. Burma needs international support. Without international support and programs that will provide alternative income sources for an impoverished nation, narcotics and crime will continue to flood the streets of the United States and other communities around the globe.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **DRUGS IN LAOS**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The illicit drug problem in Laos is due to a combination of colonial policies under the French, United States involvement in the region during the Cold War, as well as the political and socio-economic problems that followed. Laos has traditionally been both a major producer of illicit drugs as well as a major transit state for international drug trafficking. The drug production and trafficking trends in Laos have changed considerably during the past 60 years. The opium and heroin threat grew during the Cold War and became an international threat particularly to the United States towards the end of the Vietnam War. During the late 1950's the drug threat from Burma was already affecting Laos. As Thailand increased anti-drug initiatives, Laos became even more desirable as a major transit route. Laos serves as a drug transit route to several countries on its border. Burma, Cambodia, China, Thailand, and Vietnam are all major routes for international drug trafficking. Laos is in the middle of this international trade and located right next to Burma, Asia's largest drug producer.

Since the normalization of relations with the United States in 1992, the United States has been actively involved with providing bilateral foreign drug aid and professional training. The United States has a particular interest in Laos. Laos is the best place for the United States to counter the Burmese drug threat. Due to current United States foreign policy, very little anti-drug work can be done in Burma. This allows the problem to continue to grow and threaten Laos. The United States is interested in containing the drug threat, before it reaches the streets of Bangkok and ultimately the United States. The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has been actively involved in alternative development projects conducted jointly with the Lao government. By 2006, most of the opium production in Laos had been eliminated. The remaining opium production is mostly for domestic consumption and no longer a major threat to the international community.

The threat of former opium growers returning to opium growing is an immense concern, as the previously poor farmers have now reached even a lower level of poverty. Food shortages have occurred in these areas and a lack of alternative development and the rising prices paid for opium threaten the sustainability of these accomplishments. In addition to this threat, Burma is still a major producer of opium and many of the United Wa State Army (UWSA) heroin and Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) refineries are operating in remote Northwestern Laos, where it is difficult for Lao law enforcement officials to effectively patrol.

The major drug threat in the Golden Triangle as well as Laos is now ATS. ATS has become a major domestic problem in Laos as well as the major drug trafficked through Laos to international markets. Many former opium and heroin traffickers have now switched to ATS. Little is known about ATS at the moment, as it is a fairly new threat. ATS is a challenge for developed countries to interdict; however, it is nearly impossible for Laos to effectively deal with this new threat. In addition to the ATS threat, human trafficking is a rising threat in Laos as well as rising crime. Drug trafficking and human trafficking are often run by the same syndicates that run their product through Laos and then internationally. As Laos struggles to pull itself out of poverty, it has a constant threat of illegal narcotics working against development efforts.



**Figure 3.1. Map of Laos**

## **3.2 Laos under French Rule**

### **3.2.1 Early French Involvement in Laos**

The French colonized Laos in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The French had also colonized Cambodia and Vietnam to form French Indo China. In order to finance their colony, the French ran an opium monopoly and sold the product to the local residents. Like the British in Burma, the French managed to leave a legacy in Laos that would lead to a drug problem, poverty, and civil war. “The Southeast Asian opium trade was the creation of European colonialism” (McCoy, 2003:89). The Hmong and other Hill Tribes had migrated to the mountains of Laos during the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to escape political oppression in Southern China. The Hmong have used opium for centuries, as it was encouraged by the British with their Opium Wars. Opium became part of traditional life for the Hmong. Opium for the Hmong was used as medicine and has always been a crop that grew well at high altitudes in the mountains.

The French had originally imported opium into Laos from Turkey and Iran.

Due to changes in policies of these governments and the events of World War II, these supplies became temporarily unavailable in Southeast Asia. The French decided to solve this catastrophic problem by having the Hmong grow opium in large quantities to supply the demand in Vietnam. The French taxed the Hmong very heavily and allowed them to pay in opium. This strategy encouraged the Hmong and other tribes to produce more opium to meet the demands of the French. The French also did very little to develop Laos, which would lead to future poverty, ethnic division, and ultimately an environment conducive to drug production and trafficking. During the time of the French, Hmong groups had split over opium. Certain Hmong groups sided with the French, while others sided with the Communist insurgents of the Viet Minh and the Pathet Lao.

### **3.2.2 The Post-World War II Return of the French and French Defeat**

The Japanese invasion temporarily disrupted French power in the opium trade; however, the French quickly returned to cause more problems in Southeast Asia after the Japanese had surrendered. Things had changed while the French had been gone. Chinese traffickers and other ethnic groups had moved into the area to participate in the opium trade. The United States did not agree with the French return to Southeast Asia; however, due to the new Cold War policy, the containment of Communism had to be contained at all costs. After China fell to Communism in 1949, the United States began providing support to the Nationalist Chinese Kuomintang (KMT) Army that had fled into Burma. As the United States became involved in this Secret War in Burma, this Secret War along with KMT forces and opium eventually began to expand to Laos.

In 1950, the United States began sending war equipment to Vietnam to aid the French. This was largely due to the Communist developments in 1950. In January 1950, Ho Chi Minh set up a new Communist government in North Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh established the People's Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which was then backed by China and Russia. In addition to this new threat, war had broken out between United States backed South Korea and North Korea. The threat of the whole world falling to Communism had to be dealt with and Southeast Asia was a vulnerable spot.

In addition to the Vietnamese threat, Laos broke into a civil war after World War II. Laos became split by three political factions. The factions that evolved were a Communist faction, an Anti-Communist faction, and a Neutralist faction. The Communist faction began when Prince Souphanouvong started the Pathet Lao resistance and gained the support of the Viet Minh. To make matters worse, the French took advantage of the situation and increased opium trafficking.

The French increased Hmong taxes after the war and encouraged more opium production to fight against the new Communist insurgency in the region. "The French told the Hmong that since they had spent considerable money on the construction of roads, airfields, and market places, they would have to tax them to pay back these monies." (Hamilton-Merrit, 1993:45). Most of the opium was grown in Northeastern Laos. The remote region required aircraft to pick up the product.

The French military began flying the opium out of the mountains and into Saigon. The South Vietnamese military also became involved and would also fly into Laos to pick up the opium. In addition, other groups such as Corsican traffickers operating private airlines also became involved in this traffic. Once in Saigon, the opium was usually sold to ethnic Chinese traffickers who would process the opium to heroin in Saigon and then traffic it to international markets. During this period, the United States gradually became more involved in Vietnam and in Laos.

During the 1950's the United States started an aircraft service called Civil Air Transport (CAT) to help fly supplies for the French. CAT eventually became Air America, which was the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) personal airline that would eventually also help fly opium out of the mountains in return for the Hmong fighting the war for the CIA. The French soon realized that if they wanted the Hmong to fight for them, they had to purchase Hmong opium at a fair price. What had been a French tax base now had become the standard source of income for the Hmong.

After the French suffered the defeat of the North Vietnamese in 1954, the war for the French was pretty much over. The Geneva Peace Accords were signed in 1954. The Accords required that foreign troops leave Laos, as it was now Neutral. The North Vietnamese ignored these Accords and continued to work with the Pathet Lao in building up Communist forces in Laos.

The new independent government of Laos signed defense and economic



agreements with the United States. Under the accords, no military bases or foreign troops were allowed in Laos. The International Control Commission (ICC) was established in Laos to monitor violations of the Accords. The ICC proved to be ineffective, due to their unfamiliarity with the area as well as the remote areas that the Communist troops operated.

### **3.3 The Cold War and Increased U.S. Involvement in Southeast Asia**

#### **3.3.1. The Cold War and the beginning of U.S. Involvement in Laos**

Some French advisors stayed in Laos and Vietnam, but most of the former French positions were taken over by the United States. United States military personnel began building up forces in South Vietnam and the United States began dropping weapons and ammunition into Laos. "As the U.S. moved to further prop up the Lao domino, it mobilized men, money, and machines to meet the challenge." (McCoy, 2003:74). The war that the United States would fight in Vietnam would be directly related to Laos. The difference was that United States troops were not allowed in Laos.

In 1954, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was founded. This organization was the idea of the United States and Thailand. It was funded by the United States. The objective of SEATO was to keep Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam from falling to Communism. The United States developed aid programs in Laos with the help of Thailand. Since military personnel were not allowed in Laos, many military personnel who were temporarily converted to civilian status were used. Many of these personnel worked out of the United States Embassy in Laos.

In 1957, the King of Laos negotiated with the Pathet Lao and they were granted a few seats in Lao parliament. In 1958, the Pathet Lao won the majority vote in an election. In 1959, tensions escalated in Laos as a three way civil war was fought between the Communist, Anti-Communist, and the Neutralist factions. To make matters worse, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) invaded Laos to support the Pathet Lao.

The war in Laos, which was ultimately against the North Vietnamese, would involve only a handful of CIA advisors and would be fought by indigenous Hill Tribes. The Hmong formed the majority of these forces and were allowed and often

assisted in trafficking their opium in return for fighting the war for the United States. By the early 1960's, the United States was already involved in a new Secret War in Laos to fight the spread of Communism.

### **3.3.2. The rise of the Pathet Lao and the Beginning of the CIA and Hmong Secret War**

In 1960, a pro- American and anti-Communist government was elected; however, within several months Captain Kong Le seized power and announced that Laos was now Neutralist. He reinstated Prince Souvanna Phouma and the Pathet Lao announced support for the coups detat. At the same time an anti-Communist force was set up by General Phoumi Nosavan in the Savannaket. The United States recognized the new government. Within a few months Prince Souvanna Phouma turned his power over to Kong Le and went into exile. The NVA and Pathet Lao continued to gain more territory and the country fell into chaos.

At the end of 1960, the CIA became involved in Laos, when they contacted a Hmong who was an officer in the Lao Army. Vang Pao, who would later become General Vang Pao, would lead the CIA's new Hmong Army and fight against the communist for the next 15 years in support of the CIA's Secret War in Laos. In return the CIA would provide food, weapons, supplies, salaries, and facilitate or tolerate the opium trafficking and heroin refining that took place under Vang Pao. As conflict increased, many of the Hmong began working refining heroin. Vang Pao had set up a heroin refinery in Northeastern Laos. With the help of the excellent work of Chinese chemists provided by international drug syndicates, Laos was producing number 4 heroin by the late 1960's.

The effects of this secret war would lead to the increased production and trafficking of opium and heroin. The ironic part of the scenario was that the opium trafficked as a result of the Secret Wars in Burma and Laos was being supplied to United States troops in Vietnam and Thailand. All of this involvement in Southeast Asia would soon lead to a rising drug problem that the United States had never experienced before.

In 1962, another Geneva Accords Agreement was signed and the United States was forced to further decrease military support to Laos. North Vietnam continued to

deny any involvement, even though they continued to build up troops and seize territory in Northeastern Laos. Souvanna Phoumi returned to become Prime Minister once again in 1962. Phoumi gave up his power and merged with the Neutralist government. Phoumi then focused mostly on increasing the drug trade. Before long, Phoumi was running the central drug trade, Ouane was running Burmese drug imports from the Northwest and Vang Pao was fighting communists for the CIA and selling opium and heroin to make ends meet for the Hmong people in the Northeast.

Phoumi continued to destroy the government, as he was appointed as the Finance Minister. During this period, the CIA continued to build up the Hmong Army, which would soon reach 30,000 troops. Transporting opium out of the mountains was necessary in order to get Hmong fighters to continue to volunteer to fight the bloody war. This was especially the case, as Hmong fighters died rapidly in guerilla warfare against the NVA and Pathet Lao.

After awhile, Hmong stopped producing rice, as it was provided by the United States government. Opium became the primary cash crop for the Hmong. The United States troop buildup continued to increase in Vietnam and so did the demand for heroin. The NVA began using the Ho Chi Minh trail as a re-supply route running through Laos to re-supply troops fighting in the south. Opium and heroin was also shipped into South Vietnam using the same supply routes.

### **3.3.3. Civil War and the Rise of Opium and Heroin**

During this chaos, the country was already becoming a prime area for drug trafficking. Besides the lack of law enforcement, Lao government officials were the main culprits in the drug trade at the highest level. Lao Generals took control of the trade. The Hmong never became rich in their role; they were just trying to survive. The civil war was an excellent financial opportunity for politicians and high ranking military officers to engage in illicit activities.

General Phoumi Nosavan seized power at the end of 1960 and personally became involved in the drug trade. The United States did not support Phoumi's new government. Phoumi used the drug trade to finance his new government. "Desperate for funds but determined not to resign, Phoumi turned to the opium traffic as an alternative source of income for his army and government."(McCoy, 2003:300).

Phoumi Nosavan gained control of the drug trade with the help of General Ouane Rattikone, who was the military commander in Northwestern Laos.

Before the involvement of Ouane and Phoumi, the majority of opium in Laos was grown in Northeastern Laos. With the increased warfare and bombing, much of the opium production moved to the Northwest. Laos also began to process heroin within their borders for export to United States troops in Vietnam. Ouane conducted agreements with the KMT as well as with Khun Sa to increase the import of Burmese opium into Laos. This led to the increase of opium in Burma, Laos, and the Golden Triangle as a whole. All of this was due to the conflict in Vietnam and the huge demand for heroin from American troops in the region.

In 1964, another coup was staged in Laos. Phoumi Nosavan fled to Thailand in 1965 and General Ouane and General Kouprasith took over the drug trade in Laos. The United States Department of Defense wanted to run the war in Laos; however, the CIA maintained control of Laos. Even high level government officials knew that the incompetent leadership of the United States military would be catastrophic for the sensitive situation in Laos. This Secret War was unknown to the American public and was at true counter insurgency, as the CIA used indigenous troops to fight their own war.

This sort of unconventional warfare justified the spread of opium as long as Communism was contained. With half of the war financed by opium, the Hmong would fight for low salaries and the cost analysis looked good in Washington. The United States also fully funded the Royal Lao Army, which was supplementing its own income with the involvement in the drug trade at the highest level of leadership. At the time, few people ever thought that opium and heroin would be a problem that would reach the United States.

In 1967, a large opium battle between Khun Sa and the KMT took place during a delivery of opium by Khun Sa to General Ouane in Northwestern Laos. The battle crossed into Lao territory and General Ouane bombed both sides and took all of the opium. General Ouane also held several KMT troops until negotiations were complete. "After the battle General Ouane emerged as one of the most important heroin manufactures in the Golden Triangle, since his share of the Burmese opium trade increased considerably."(McCoy, 2003:334). After negotiations, General Ouane

gained an advantage as export taxes were dropped and traffickers in Burma had to pay an import tax to General Ouane.

After this victory, heroin refineries increased in Northwestern Laos. The Northwest also provided opium to be flown to Vang Pao's refineries as the opium growing declined temporarily in the Northeast due to heavy fighting and bombing. The Secret War in Laos led to the emergence of the Northwestern Laos as a major drug producing, refining, and trafficking area. Thanks to these developments, Laos was quickly becoming one of the most important heroin producers in the Golden Triangle. The processed heroin could then be trafficked to Saigon and Bangkok, and within several years the United States and the rest of the world.

As the war continued in Laos, the American public gradually became aware to some extent what was happening in Laos, but very little was still known. As Hmong fighters continued to die in the war, Hmong widows were increasing and needed to find a way to make a living. This likely led to an increase in opium and heroin workers in Laos. When Cambodia opened up to international trade in 1970, it became a new trafficking route for Golden Triangle opium. Golden Triangle opium could now be trafficked through Laos and then into Cambodia and then into Saigon by land.

Saigon grew as the major international port and was the major port for heroin being shipped to the United States. The Chinese Chiu Chao syndicate was heavily involved in providing chemists to refine opium to number 4 heroin and to traffic the product internationally. In January 1973, the United States and Vietnam reached a ceasefire agreement and United States started withdrawing its troops. This meant that the United States would withdraw from the region, including Laos.

#### **3.3.4. U.S. Troop Withdrawal and the Increase of Heroin Trafficking to the United States**

During the early 1970's, the United States began to reduce troops in Vietnam. As the troop reduction took place, the drug syndicates were losing profit. The syndicates would soon need to start trafficking to the United States. "By 1972, Southeast Asia's Chiu Chao syndicates were, in fact, trying to capture the U.S. market-then the only significant drug consumer among affluent nations. Looking back, DEA analysts came to feel that the GI heroin epidemic in Vietnam may have

served as a “consumer test” for the Chinese syndicates and encouraged their later effort to export to the United States.”(McCoy, 2003:395). Many United States service members returned to the United States as drug addicts.

The drug addiction problem that was formerly only a lower class problem in the United States, had now spread to the middle class and the upper class. Many of the returning service members became involved in trafficking heroin to the United States. Many would still have friends in Vietnam and could request that they would send the heroin through the U.S. military postal system. Several former military members based themselves in Bangkok and began trafficking heroin to the United States. These small groups were minor traffickers compared to the Chinese syndicates that would soon provide the supply for the demand.

The push for the change of drug trafficking patterns from Southeast Asia coincided with the beginning of withdrawal of United States troops from Vietnam. 1972 was an election year in the United States, so President Nixon pressed for ceasefire agreements with Vietnam before the November elections. The Pathet Lao and the Royal Lao Government also began negotiations for a peace agreement in October 1972. The United States and Vietnam signed the ceasefire agreement in January 1973. After the ceasefire, United States troops began an evacuation from Vietnam and Southeast Asia, which would be complete by 1975.

The drug trafficking gangs also developed plans to increase the traffic of illicit drugs to the United States. The Royal Lao Government and the Pathet Lao signed a ceasefire agreement in February 1973. The Restoration of Peace and Reconciliation Agreement allowed for the Pathet Lao to maintain power in their region, neutralized Vientiane, and stipulated that all foreign troops withdraw within sixty days after the establishment of a provisional government. This led to the United States withdrawal. The Vietnamese were supposed to withdraw, but only increased troops in Laos. Part of the agreement ordered the Hmong Army under Vang Pao to disassemble. All of this instability further contributed to increased drug trafficking. Vang Pao and the Hmong were in danger of Pathet Lao and Vietnamese reprisal. The United States was leaving and would no longer fund, arm, or feed the Hmong. This created a refugee situation, which only increased as the United States left and the Pathet Lao and the Vietnamese took over the country.

The Pathet Lao began seizing as much land as possible, the Hmong were demobilizing, and the Pathet Lao and Royal Lao Government troops were jointly patrolling Vientiane. Demobilized Hmong troops could now focus on growing opium and refining heroin. The Hmong could obviously not depend on a stable Lao government and were no longer receiving income from the CIA. An increase in opium and heroin production seemed like the most logical choice as few legitimate options were available.

In April 1974, a new provisional government was established in Laos. On June 3, 1974, the last American military members left Laos. Laos broke into chaos. Public employees began to go on strike, the Pathet Lao incited anti-American propaganda, and the central government lost control of the country. With all of these events, the authorities were in no position to suppress drug trafficking. Laos continued to develop as a prime choice for drug production and trafficking. The last of American troops left Vietnam in 1975 and the Communist North Vietnamese brutally reunited the country.

The fall of Vietnam temporarily stopped the majority of heroin from entering Vietnam. "Crude opium still crossed the border from Laos to service the city's declining addict population, but syndicates that had once moved high-grade heroin onward to markets in Europe or America had fled Vietnam with the fall of Saigon." (McCoy, 2003:261). This reunification temporarily closed Saigon as an international drug trafficking port. The fall of Vietnam, now caused even more drugs to be pushed into Bangkok. After 1975, Bangkok became the major drug trafficking port in Southeast Asia. Laos became a major producer and could easily smuggle the product into Thailand and then onto international markets.

### **3.4 Communism, Insurgency, and Opium in Laos**

#### **3.4.1. The Pathet Lao Seize Power and Implement Brutal Reforms**

By 1975, the Pathet Lao had gained control of Laos. Laos was now a Communist country. The Thai-Lao border was closed in August 1975. Laos was renamed the Lao People's Democratic Republic in December, 1975. The real power behind Prince Souphavanavong was revealed, as Kaysone Phoumvihane who took control over the country and began to implement reforms. The Pathet Lao went to

work on cleaning up the country. The Hmong, who had helped the Americans, were a high priority for reeducation and reprisal. The Hmong realized this and a mass Hmong refugee movement began. Thousands of Hmongs fled to Thailand.

The CIA evacuated Vang Pao and high ranking Hmong officers and their families to Thailand. From Thailand, many were relocated around the world. Vang Pao was eventually relocated to the United States. The thousands of Hmong who were not fortunate enough to be evacuated or who did not flee were rounded up and raped, tortured, and killed or sent to prison camps to be reeducated. This increased the refugee problem to Thailand. Many Hmong relocated to join relatives in Northern Thailand and increased opium growing in the Northern Thai Mountains.

In 1976, the Pathet Lao and the Vietnamese started using chemical weapons on the Hmong resistance. Some of the Hmong, who remained in Laos, continued to fight against the Pathet Lao, just as they had for the previous 15 years. These freedom fighters no longer had the support of the United States. This made the opium and heroin business particularly attractive.

Opium and heroin were necessary to buy food and weapons to continue the resistance movement in Laos. Opium also was valuable as a medicine to help cure the effects of the poisonous gas that was dropped by the Pathet Lao and the Vietnamese. "Sometimes it would take 10 to 15 days to die. If we were lucky to have opium, maybe we could survive. For those who had red diarrhea they would die if they didn't get some opium." (Hamilton-Merritt, 1993:398). So, opium growing and heroin refining became even more important to the Hmong after the Pathet Lao seized power. Opium was a way to live independent from the low land Lao and served not only as a cash crop, but medicine as well. Opium was one of the few crops that would grow well in the high mountains where the Hmong lived to avoid Pathet Lao and Vietnamese detection.

The situation only worsened in Laos, as Kaysone sent the Lao Royal Family to a concentration camp in November 1976. The King and Queen of Laos died in the concentration camp. No one was exempt from the new regime. The torture and cruelty only increased the will of Hmong fighters and increased the necessity of the drug trade. This was quite similar to the insurgent situation in Burma. The Soviet Union and Vietnam increased support for the new Communist government of Laos. In July



1977, Laos and Vietnam signed the “25 Year Treaty of Friendship between Lao PDR and Vietnam” this treaty reinforced each other’s commitment to the Socialism and allowed Vietnam further influence Laos. Vietnam troops increased in Laos and helped hunt down the Hmong.

### **3.4.2. Hmong Freedom Fighters, Refugees, and Drug Crime in the United States**

The Hmong resistance became even more important as thousands of people were reeducated, tortured, and murdered. The economy of Laos continued to worsen, as the new government was focused on internal problems and cutting ties with the world in the name of the Communist ideology that would destroy the economy and encourage illicit activity. Life would never be the same for the Hmong that had become refugees in Thailand. Many of these refugees would be relocated to different countries. Many of the Hmong ended up in the United States.

The Hmong in the United States struggled to adapt. Many ended up on welfare and were often relocated to the inner city where violent gangs would harass them. The refugee problem would contribute even more to the drug trade. Many of the new refugees that would be resettled in the United States would become contacts for international drug trafficking and form ethnic gangs related to drug crime and rising crime in the United States. These factors increased the drug problem in the United States.

Many of the young Hmong in the United States began to form groups to band together to protect themselves against bullies in the slums. Before long, these groups emerged into street gangs. The Lao Crips operating primarily out of California are primarily ethnic Hmong and are known for using narcotics to finance their operations. “Laotian gangs are involved in transporting opium to San Francisco, and to other Laotian communities located in Minnesota and Wisconsin.”(National Drug Intelligence Center, 2001). It was likely hard for many Hmong to adapt to the structured lifestyle in the United States after fighting opium financed guerrilla warfare for the CIA for 15 years.

Many Hmong likely saw nothing morally wrong with forming a gang to protect their family members and selling opium to improve their lifestyle. This may

have been especially true, seeing that the mighty CIA tolerated the Hmong opium trade for years. As Hmong relocated to the United States, Lao opium sent by mail from relatives in Laos began to increase in addition to large scale organized drug trafficking.

### **3.4.3. Vang Pao Relocates to California and Continues to Fight**

General Vang Pao eventually settled in California. Vang Pao remained an influential leader in the United States Hmong community and continued to fight the war against the Pathet Lao by trying to gather political support for the Hmong. Vang Pao was influential in coordinating for many more Hmong refugees to come to the United States. Vang Pao met with a Lao prince named Sisoukl na Champasak in California and formed the United Lao National Liberation Front (ULNLF) or the Neo Hom in California. Neo Hom was setup as a covert resistance movement with the primary objective of overthrowing the Communist government in Laos. Neo Hom was based in the United States, but would send money and equipment to the resistance members fighting in Laos.

Vang Pao continued to collect donations and raise money for the resistance in Laos. Vang Pao was likely involved with illegal activities. In 1989 Neo Hom fighters in Laos revolted against the government by announcing independence in their region and setup an interim government. The Lao government with assistance of Vietnam increased attacks to suppress the insurgents. Neo Hom continued to implement plans to overthrow the Lao government. Members in Laos depended on donations from the California headquarters, as well as the drug trade in Laos, in which the destination of the product was the United States.

As time passed, United States policy continued to change. As relations were normalized between the United States and Laos, Vang Pao's cause was no longer a concern for the United States government. With the new War on Terror after 2001, Vang Pao's actions would now classify him as a terrorist, not a freedom fighter. Ironically, Vang Pao was arrested by United States Federal Authorities in 2007 in California. Vang Pao was arrested after being linked with a plan to buy weapons from an undercover Federal Agent and smuggle the weapons into Laos to Neo Hom members. The plan was to overthrow the Lao government. Vang Pao was now

classified as a terrorist and as of 2008 awaiting trial. If convicted, he will face life imprisonment in the United States.

#### **3.4.4. Khun Sa Expands Refineries into Northwestern Laos**

During the late 1980's, the increasing threat of drugs from Burma crept across the border into Laos. The new trend followed the same pattern as a decade earlier under General Ouane's command. In the 1970's, Khun Sa was still rising in the drug trade, but by the late 1980's Kuhn Sa was a major drug lord and in position to do business with Laos. "This pressure may have led Khun Sa to disperse his vulnerable laboratories by moving some into nearby Laos, forging a working alliance with the country's Communist leaders. Six months after the attacks, Thai intelligence sources reported that there were now seventeen heroin refineries in Northwestern Laos, most of them under Khun Sa's control."(McCoy, 2003:431). Khun Sa had traditionally operated refineries inside Burma as well as across the border in Thailand. The Burmese factories were vulnerable during times of increased suppression from the Burmese government.

With the increased enforcement by the Thai government, Kuhn Sa was forced to relocate heroin refineries that were previously operated in Thailand into Laos. Laos also increased as a trafficking route in the late 1980's. The Communist government in Laos tolerated drug trafficking and cooperated with Kuhn Sa, allowing him to set up heroin refineries inside Laos. This served two objectives for the Lao government. First, the heroin trade increased revenue for the government and second, it reduced the opium and heroin income that the Hmong would need to finance their insurgency against the Lao government.

Before long, Khun Sa would begin producing ATS in Burma which was produced in the same refineries as heroin. Burmese produced ATS would soon move into Laos during the 1990's as a production point and a plague to new Lao addicts. As domestic addiction of opium, heroin, and then ATS began to become a serious problem in Laos, the post 1975 Lao government passed their first drug law since in 1989. This law was implemented in 1990. The law made heroin production and drug trafficking illegal, but did not outlaw opium growing.

### **3.4.5. The Lao Government Recognizes the Drug Problem**

During the 1990's, Laos began working toward solving their increasing drug problem by opening up to the world and accepting foreign aid. In March 1990, the United States began funding development projects in Laos to aid in drug suppression efforts. In April 1990, the International Fund for Agricultural Development gave the government of Laos 5.5 million U.S. dollars. The United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse also donated 2.6 million U.S. dollars during the same month. Laos published a draft constitution in 1990. In June 1990, Laos and Thailand began talks to discuss anti- drug trafficking cooperation.

In August 1991, the Lao government finally issued a Lao Constitution. The document was still lacking the characteristics of democracy. The Constitution did not provide for freedom of speech, civil rights, multiple political parties, and other rights that the west would normally approve of. The Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision (LCDC) was established to serve as the main drug control agency and began to work closely with the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Laos was now entering a new phase in history that would open the country to development and international support. The many years of war had come to an end, with only small resistance groups still operating. Poverty produced from years of national disunity and underdevelopment were problems that allowed drug trafficking to run the country that was now the world's number three producer of opium and becoming a major drug transit country. Solving these issues would require funding and international support.

## **3.5 International Support for Opium and Heroin Reduction in Laos**

### **3.5.1. The Normalization of U.S. and Lao Relations**

In the early 1990's, the United States government began to improve international relations with Laos and Vietnam. The concern of Laos as a major drug threat the United States was a major factor. Since the United States had cut off diplomatic ties with Burma, the importance of having a strong anti-drug program in Laos was even more important. The United States needed to help Laos develop

infrastructure and law enforcement capabilities to combat the drug threat coming from Burma.

As the United States normalized relations with China and Vietnam, trade routes re-opened. This meant that drug trafficking routes reopened as well and Laos would serve as a transit route for Burmese drugs going to the United States via China, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand. By the early 1990's reports of Lao government officials being involved with drug trafficked had increased the concern for the United States government. The alternative development programs in Laos would be focused on convincing highland ethnic minorities to stop growing opium. The United States was now involved in cleaning up a mess made during the Vietnam War.

The UNODC and Lao government began conducting joint opium surveys in 1992. In 1992, the Lao government established a United States funded and trained Anti-Smuggling Unit as part of Lao Customs drug trafficking interdiction efforts. In 1993, the Lao government developed their first Counter Narcotics Master Plan. "The Government of Laos (GOL) Counternarcotics Master Plan was developed with UNDCP assistance in 1993 and is directed at addressing all aspects of the drug problem in Laos. The Plan is ambitious; full and effective implementation will require foreign donor funding."(United States Department of State, 1998). The Lao government showed a desire to solve the drug problem, however, Laos was poor and international funding was a prerequisite from the early stages of drug suppression efforts in Laos. Laos dependence on international aid and reluctance to use their own funding has continued to be a problem.

Laos continued to develop anti-drug trafficking measures, as they signed the 1993 Memorandum of Understanding Agreement (MOU) with Burma, Cambodia, China, and Vietnam. The MOU would serve as an agreement for governments to prevent cross border smuggling. The United States recognized the efforts of Laos to prevent drug production and trafficking. In 1993, the United States Department of State certified Laos in their annual narcotics certification process. In 1994, the first Lao Counter Narcotics Unit was established in Vientiane. The Counter Narcotics Units would be a specialized national drug police force. Funding and training for these units was provided by the United States government.

### **3.5.2. The Development of Lao Drug Legislature and Increased International Drug Eradication Cooperation**

With the increased support from the United States and the UNODC, Laos continued to take measures to improve anti-narcotics efforts in the mid 1990's. In 1996 Laos passed a new drug law to amend the 1990 law under Article 135. The new law outlawed opium growing. The amendment to Article 135 also increased the penalty for drug trafficking to a penalty of 8 years imprisonment. Two additional Counter Narcotics Units were established in Bokeo and Savannakhet, making a total of three Counter Narcotics Units. The government of Laos and the United States also signed an agreement to assign a permanent United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Agent to the United States Embassy beginning in 1998. This was the first time a DEA Agent was stationed in Laos since 1975 and represented the Lao government's commitment to solving the increasing drug problem.

Laos also made great progress with increasing regional cooperation in 1996. Laos signed a Bilateral Agreement with Russia to cooperate in anti-narcotics efforts. Laos participated in several regional law enforcement efforts during 1996. Laos also hosted a conference to discuss the trafficking of precursor chemicals by West African criminal organizations operating in the region. Heroin was already a major problem and ATS was rapidly increasing as a major drug produced and trafficked through Laos. Precursor chemicals are necessary to produce ATS. The Bilateral United States funded crop substitution project in Houphan Province proved to be successful as well.

Laos continued to show a commitment to combating drug trafficking in 1997, as they ratified the United Nations Convention of Psychotropic Substances. This was critical, as ATS was becoming the new drug of choice in Laos and the region as opium continued to decline. Laos also signed bilateral anti-narcotics agreements with Burma and the Philippines in 1997. The crop control agreements with the United States began to expand. A new crop control project began in Oudomxai province in 1998 with the support of UNODC funding. Laos also hosted two more Precursor Chemical Conferences in 1998.

1999 was a major year for Lao government drug enforcement efforts. In 1999, the Lao government and the UNODC announced the "Balanced Approach to Opium Elimination in Lao PDR". This plan set a goal of Lao being opium free by 2006. "In

1999, the GOL agreed to a new goal of eliminating opium cultivation in Laos by 2006. The GOL will fund 25 percent of the U.S. \$80 million estimated cost of the six-year plan now being developed with UNDCP assistance.”(United States Department of State, 2000). The plan would focus on eradicating opium by combining alternative development, community based drug demand reduction, civil awareness, and law enforcement programs to create a balanced approach to the problem. Seventy five percent of the plan was funded by international support. In 1999, the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Counter Narcotics Units were opened in Luang Prabang and Phong Sali. Thai and Vietnamese officials complained of increasing drug trafficking coming from Laos during 1999. Ecstasy was found for the first time in Laos during 1999, showing not only a rise in ATS threat but a more diversified threat than merely ya-baa.

In 2000, Laos hosted the 1<sup>st</sup> National Conference on Drug Control to discuss drug enforcement issues. The government of Laos also continued to improve drug laws. In 2000, the government of Laos issued Prime Minister Order 14. Order 14 enacted measures to support the new Balanced Approach and aimed at reached the goal of opium eradication by 2006. The National Assembly amended Article 135 once again in 2000. The changes to Article 135 further increased the penalties drug trafficking. “In accordance with a prime ministerial order issued in late 2000, it outlined tough new measures for eliminating opium production, imposed the death penalty for certain drug related crimes, and organized a national campaign to address the growing problem of methamphetamine abuse among teenagers. On the other hand, practical Lao efforts at law enforcement still fall well short of these ambitious policy goals.”(United States Department of State, 2003). While the plan showed great motivation on behalf of the Lao government, the reality of Lao law enforcement being able to enforce the policy was a different story. The inadequate ability and under funding of Lao law enforcement continues to be a challenge in Laos. Two more Counter Narcotics Units were established in Champasak and Houpanh provinces in 2000. 2000 also marked a sharp increase in heroin and ATS seizures in Laos. As infrastructure was improving in Laos, so was the threat of drug trafficking through Laos.

In 2001, the 7<sup>th</sup> National Congress of Laos made drug suppression a national priority and began a national anti-drug trafficking campaign. This was intended to

reduce demand reduction as part of the Balanced Approach Plan. 2001 also marked an increased threat from the United Wa State Army (UWSA) in Burma. The UWSA had begun establishing ATS refineries in Northwestern Laos. Other ATS refineries were operated by Burmese and Thai groups. Hmong rebel groups also operate ATS refineries, now using ATS to finance their insurgency. Vang Pao began to encourage peaceful negotiations between these groups and the Lao government in 2001. The Lao government also declared Neo Hom as an “International Terrorist Organization” in 2001. The Neo Hom was still a threat to the peace and stability of the Lao government and continued to be a drug trafficking threat as well as a threat to national security.

In 2003, the Lao government allocated \$200,000 dollars of their own funding to combat drug eradication and trafficking. Even though this amount was small, it symbolized the Lao government’s continued commitment to combating illicit drugs. During this same period, the Mekong River increased as a major drug trafficking route. Lao and Thai joint patrols increased on the river border between the two countries. Unfortunately the Mekong River will continue to be a major smuggling route. The size of the river makes it impossible to detect and interdict all smuggling activities. In 2004, Laos finally became a party to the 1988 United Nations Drug Convention. Many communities in Laos declared themselves opium free in 2004 and 2005, which was ahead of the 2006 deadline set by the government.

2005 already marked a transition from opium as an international problem, to that of a domestic problem. According to the 2005 opium survey, Laos only produced an estimated 1,800 hectares in 2005. This was a great improvement compared to the 6,600 hectares in 2004 and 26,800 hectares in 1998. “For the first time in many years, we can safely assume that Laos is no longer a supplier of illegal opiates to the world market.” (Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision, 2005). In February 2006, Laos announce that it had reached its goal of eliminating opium production as an international threat. While Laos still produced opium, the substantial reduction of opium was encouraging, although new problems continued to threaten the stability of Laos.

### **3.5.3. The Decrease of Opium and the Challenges of Sustainment**

Despite these efforts, opium production within Laos remained high. To solve



this problem, development efforts needed to be focused on the major producers of opium. Opium in Laos was a major problem in the ten northernmost provinces of Laos. By 2006, only 6 Provinces were major opium producers. The major concern for opium production is in Phongsaly Province and Oudomxay Province. The secondary concerns are in Luang Prabang, Luang Namtha, Huaphanh, and Xieng Khouang Provinces. The producers are ethnic minorities living high in the mountains in very remote areas. Opium was a way of life for the various ethnic minorities. The groups are diverse and include Hmong, Yao, Akha, Lahu, Phunoi, Tai, and various other ethnic minorities. These tribes produced opium for personal consumption as well as for sale to the international trafficking organizations.

Some of the Hmong were operating heroin refineries to finance their resistance against the central government. Most of these tribes were poor and grew opium just to survive. Opium was grown to buy food and cure illness. The tribes used slash burn farming methods and opium was the best crop that would grow high in the mountains and with primitive farming techniques.

Infrastructure was also a factor, as roads linking to the lowland markets were non-existent in most areas. Opium was much lighter to carry as opposed to rice and would provide a better profit. Of course drug traffickers would often facilitate a pickup of the opium. No one was going to climb a mountain to pick up rice. The lack of suitable healthcare facilities and lack of modern education also led to increased opium growth and opium abuse.

The remote mountainous area and lack of law enforcement personnel continue to be a challenge for Lao law enforcement personnel. Opium has generally declined since 1989, with fluctuation of opium during certain years. One major challenge to stopping opium growth is the fact that opium is grown to secure food for most of these tribes. Many tribes had lost the art of rice growing during the 1970's, when the CIA began providing rice to the Hmong.

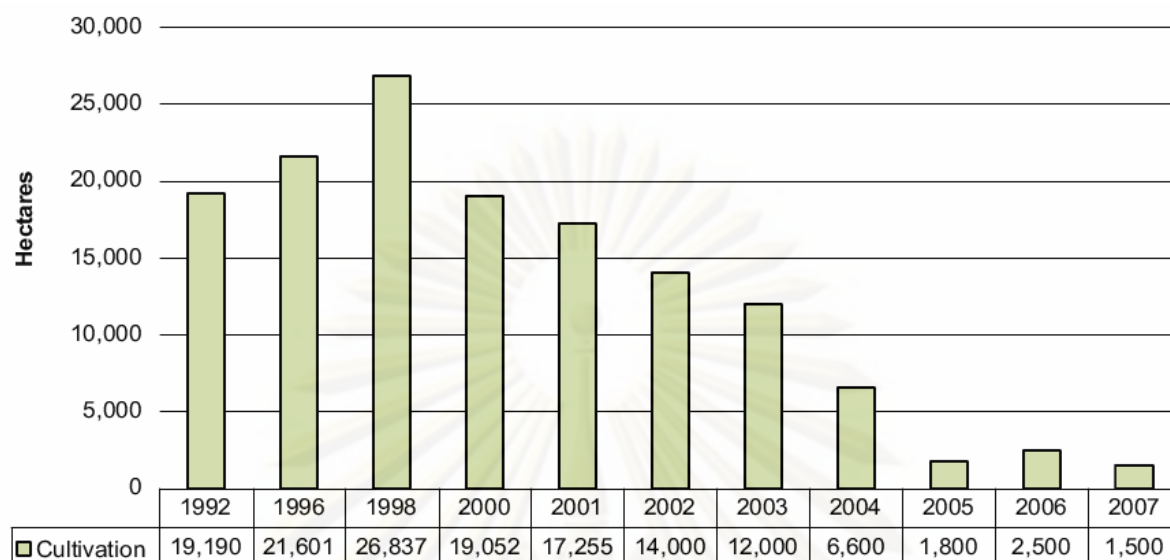
Alternative development must be secure before opium growth can be fully eliminated. Even though most opium in Laos was eliminated for international export by 2006, the threat of tribes returning to growing opium due to a lack of alternative income is a constant concern. Many of these tribes return to growing opium to survive and to buy food. Half of the tribes in Laos still suffer from food shortages. "There is

an imminent danger that without timely effort on the part of governments, donors, and aid agencies, the gains achieved over the last decade in terms of poverty alleviation and opium poppy reduction will be lost.” (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2006:33). The lack of trust between the Hill Tribes and low land Lao also is a major challenge to anti-drug efforts in Laos. Laos was recognized as one of the poorest countries in the world, when they gained “Least Developed Country (LDC)” status by the United Nations.

As Laos decreased opium production, the import of opium from Burma has increased. Laos transitioned to a role as a major transit country for drug trafficking. The increase of opium prices reflects the lack of opium. The price of opium increased by 240 percent between 2002 and 2006. This price increase may encourage many farmers to return to opium growing as a lack of alternative options may not be available.

The eradication of opium has made former opium growers vulnerable due to a lack of medicine and lack of nutritious food, leading to health problems. Education has gotten worse as many students drop out of school to work. Some former growers have taken work in producing or trafficking, the much more dangerous and threatening ATS. Some former opium producers or their families migrate to find work. This migration is often illegal and often involves a broker. The lack of opium growth and alternative development has contributed to the rise to human trafficking victims who often become trafficked by the same criminal organizations that used to pick up their opium and have now diversified to trafficking humans in addition to narcotics.

In 2007 only an estimated 1,500 hectares of opium was produced in Laos. Laos is no longer a world opium producer. Laos has made remarkable progress in changing the opium producing trend. While the threat of farmers returning to opium production remains, it is a relatively minor concern when compared to the new threat of ATS that presents a much greater threat than opium or heroin ever presented. The continuing threat of ATS trafficking from neighboring countries only compounds the production within Laos.



**Figure 3.5. Estimated area under opium poppy cultivation in Laos 1992-2007**

### **3.6 The Post-Opium Era and Amphetamine Type Stimulants in Laos**

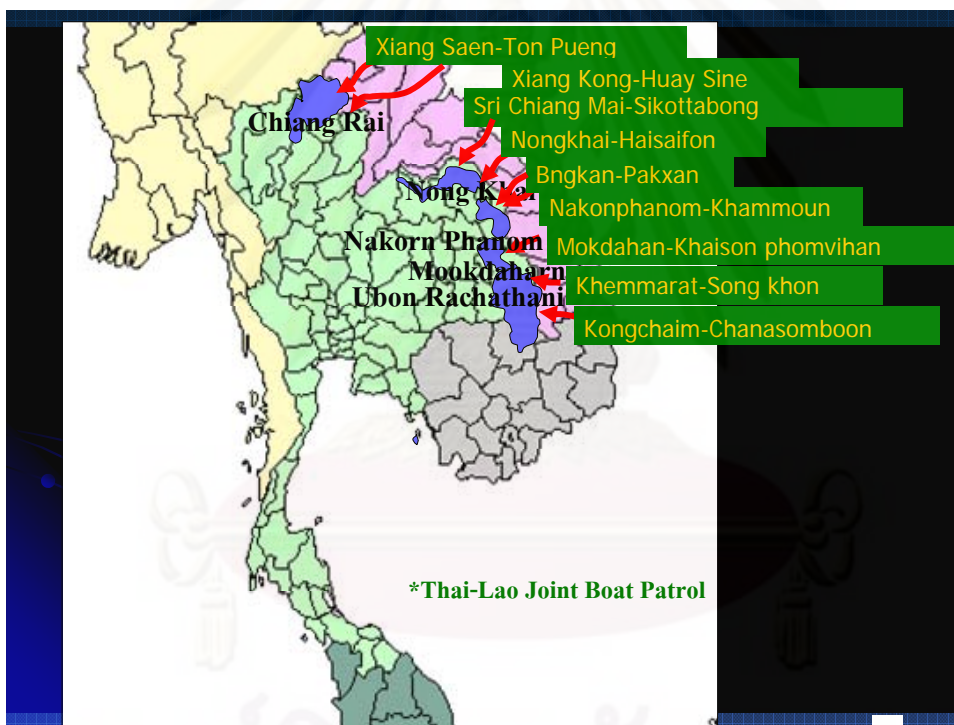
#### **3.6.1. The Transition from Heroin to ATS**

The threat of ATS in Laos became a major problem during the mid 1990's. The threat of ATS in Laos coincided with the peak of the ATS threat in Thailand. ATS in the region originates in Burma and has only increased. The majority of ATS going to Laos or transiting through Laos to international markets is controlled by drug lords in Burma and ethnic Chinese international drug trafficking organizations. Just as Burmese drug lords shifted production of heroin to the remote areas of Laos, the same trend followed for the production of ATS in Lao territory. Khun Sa began the trend and now the UWSA runs numerous ATS refineries out of Northwestern Laos.

In 2001 Thai police confirmed that such a shift of "UWSA laboratories" to Laos had taken place, and reported that many methamphetamine production centers had been set up east of the Mekong River not far from the Burmese frontier. The Laotian province of Bokeo is also important in the manufacture of yaa baa. Official Thai sources attribute this to the involvement of two groups: Thai and Burmese natives on the one hand, and Hmong Laotians affiliated with

anti-Vientiane movements who are also associated with national traffickers on the other. (Chouvy & Meissonnier, 2004:34).

This pattern of ATS production and trafficking is particularly threatening. On the one hand Burmese and Thai traffickers are operating criminal enterprises in sovereign Lao territory and on the other Hmong rebel groups are financing an insurgency which is financed by trafficking drugs to the United States to be sold by Lao and other Asian street gangs in the United States. This is not only a threat to Lao national security, but a threat to the United States as well. Since ATS is much easier to produce and harder to detect, it can be produced and trafficked very easily. The Lao law enforcement authorities are not equipped to deal with the growing ATS problem.



**Figure 3.6.1. Joint Thai and Lao Mekong River Patrol Stations**

### 3.6.2. The Increased Threat that ATS Poses

The Lao government must focus on domestic demand reduction to control the ATS trade. This is a particularly threatening problem, since a very large percentage of Lao youth are addicted to ATS. ATS trafficked through Laos can be trafficked to the United States through China, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam. ATS is easily smuggled from Burma and then re-smuggled through Laos to neighboring countries,

before reaching international markets.

Laos also serves as a transit point for smuggling precursor chemicals into Burma. “Smuggling tableted methamphetamine into China and Vietnam through Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Cambodia remains a problem.” (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2008). The increase of the threat of ATS trafficking through Laos only increases as the infrastructure improves. The opening of the transnational highway linking Bangkok with China will only increase the threat of ATS trafficking through Laos. This new highway can easily send ATS to international trafficking ports in China and Thailand, with Laos serving as a pickup and drop off point for Burma.

Laos realized its new problem with ATS and began to take action in 2002. In 2002 the Prime Minister of Laos launched a new initiative to focus on combating ATS. In 2002, opium and heroin seizures decreased, while ATS seizures continued to increase. In 2003 reports indicated that traffickers now preferred to traffic ATS due to the cheaper operating costs and the higher profits that ATS provided. ATS became a widely available drug and much more affordable than opium or heroin, this was especially true with the rising costs of heroin due to the shortage. Many drug addicts switched to ATS, due to the cheap cost.

Unfortunately, just as Laos appears to be on the verge of a major triumph against opium, a new threat has appeared in the form of amphetamine type stimulants (ATS). The scourge of methamphetamine, locally known as “ya ba” (crazy medicine), is exploding among the nation’s youth, truck drivers, and commercial sex workers. A paucity of law enforcement resources, vulnerability to corruption, and the difficulty of controlling the nation’s long and remote borders will make it difficult for Laos to easily overcome this challenge. Focused demand reduction programs, more robust law enforcement, and better international cooperation will be necessary if Laos is not to become a major ATS consumer and transit country. (United States Department of State, 2006).

According to a United States Department of State report, ATS seems to be the new major challenge in drug trafficking trends for Laos. The Lao plan to focus on demand

reduction to combat ATS trafficking will be a difficult task. The addict population does not appear to be decreasing.

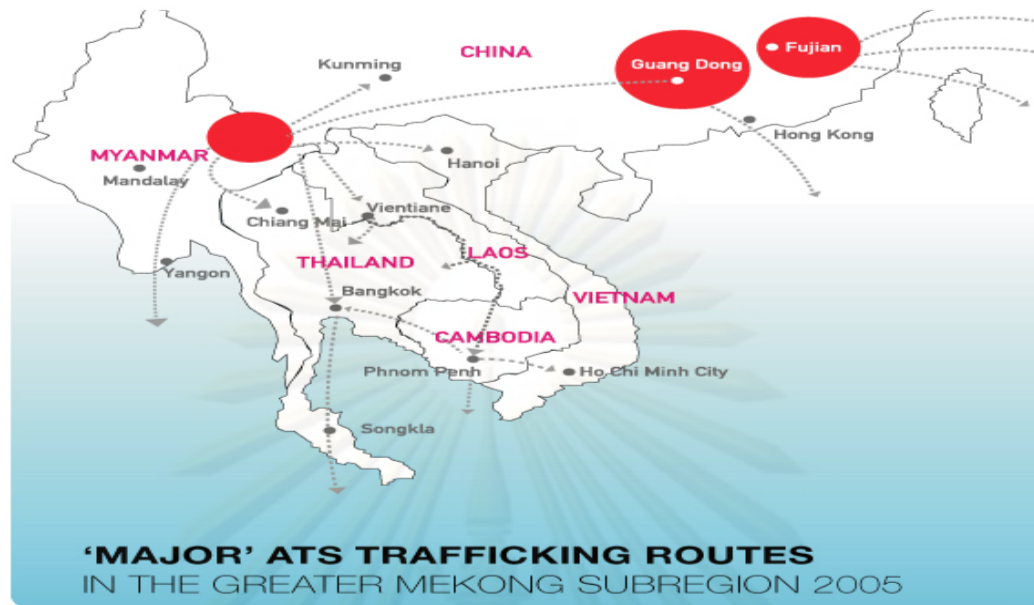
### **3.6.3. The Lao Government's Actions to Counter the ATS Threat**

The Lao government has considered revising penal codes once again to reflect the new threat of ATS. The Lao government has increased cooperation with Thailand. Lao and Thai officials have cooperated in joint investigations and increased joint Mekong River patrols. In 2006, the Lao government with the help of the UNODC formulated "The National Programme Strategy for Post Opium Scenario: The Balanced Approach to Sustaining Opium Elimination in Lao PDR (2006-2009)." The new strategy focuses on dual challenges of sustaining opium reduction while also trying to control the rapid increase of ATS.

The plan focuses on four basic areas. The plan focuses on alternative livelihood development, demand reduction, law enforcement, and civic awareness. The budget for this new plan is \$8, 300, 000 U.S. dollars and is funded internationally. This new plan will be integrated with previous plans. The rising problem of corruption is also a concern with controlling the ATS threat. Government officials in Laos are underpaid and easily bribed due to poverty.

A new threat of new inject able ATS was discovered in Laos in 2007. Little is known about the relatively new threat of ATS. The fact that is known for sure is that ATS is a much larger threat than opium and that Laos is ill equipped to deal with the ATS threat. "Increasing cross-border transit trafficking of ATS, heroin, chemical precursors combined with the increasing problems of crime, corruption, money laundering and human trafficking- if allowed to escalate unchecked- could affect the stability and security of trade, economy and development of the country and region."(Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision and United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, 2006). It is critical that Laos is able to control the ATS threat.

If Laos does not control the problem with ATS, it will become uncontrollable and a larger threat to Southeast Asia and the United States. The ATS threat not only threatens an increased drug problem, but it is linked to other issues such as arms trafficking, human trafficking, terrorism, and other types of transnational crime.



**Figure 3.6. 2. ATS Trafficking Routes 2005**

### 3.7 Conclusion

Laos is a critical country in eradicating drug production and trafficking in the Golden Triangle region. Laos suffers from an unfortunate history that has led to the rise of drug trafficking due to both political and socio economic reasons. Laos is one of the poorest countries in the world and has long uncontrollable and remote borders that are very difficult to control. Laos shares a remote border with Burma, one of the world's major drug producers. The threat from Burma is hard to control. The unstable government, poverty, and powerful drug gangs running operations which are virtually unchecked in Burma and inside Laos creates a major challenge. As Thailand has implemented strict drug enforcement measures, Laos become even more attractive for the drug business. Laos has eradicated its international supply of opium and heroin, but is now a major international transit route for heroin and ATS. Laos will remain in this vulnerable position as long as problems in Burma continue. Development in Laos and continued United States assistance is a vital short term measure; however, the problem is Burma needs to be solved before a long term solution in Laos can be reached.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **DRUGS IN THAILAND**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

##### **4.1.1. Introduction to Thailand as an International Drug Hub**

The production and trafficking of illegal narcotics in the Golden Triangle countries of Burma, Laos, and Thailand have been serious national and international problems. While Burma and Laos have been major producers in the region, Thailand has never been a major producer, compared to its neighbors. The little opium that Thailand did produce has been virtually eliminated within Thailand's borders for nearly a decade. Laos seems to be following the example of Thailand, by eradicating most major opium produced within their borders by 2006.

Laos is still a trafficking threat for Burmese heroin and Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) being smuggled into Thailand. Trafficking of illicit drugs entering Thailand from its borders is the number one drug threat in Thailand today. Thailand is a major drug trafficking transit country for international destinations and also has a major drug using population, creating demand. International traffickers operating in Southeast Asia operate out of Bangkok. The major international traffickers in the region tend to be ethnic Chinese criminal syndicates and West African gangs.

The producers of the opium in all three countries tend to be ethnic minorities living high in the mountains. These people are known as the Hill Tribes. Hill Tribe people in Thailand are often connected to members of the same tribes in Burma, Laos, and Southern China. These tribes had been producing opium for centuries. Opium production was their way of life. Hill Tribes produced opium for many reasons.

##### **4.1.2. Introduction to Thailand's Journey of Opium Eradication**

Hill Tribes used opium as medicine, since they lacked modern medicine. Opium was also sold to buy rice, since the Hill Tribe people could not grow enough rice to feed themselves. Opium has declined in Burma, Laos, and Thailand. Despite the decline, Burma is still the world's number two producer of opium and is still refining heroin for international production that is trafficked along with ATS in



Thailand.

The Thai government has set an example for the region with their successful eradication of opium over a 30 year period. The Thai government eradicated opium by adopting a policy of rural development. The Thai government eradicated opium production within Thailand, implementing a productive policy of alternative development and assimilation for the Hill Tribes. Of course the Thai model of assimilation is unique to Thailand. Thailand has not suffered from the problems of colonialization, decades of civil war, and bad relations with the United States that Burma and Laos have faced. Unfortunately, opium was quickly replaced with ATS. Although heroin is still a problem, ATS is now the major trafficking threat to Thailand and internationally today. Thailand continues to play a major role in anti-narcotics efforts in the region.

Growing opium has been a trade passed on to Hill Tribe people for centuries. After centuries of the opium trade being passed on from generation to generation, the Hill Tribe growers became quite good at their job and became very knowledgeable in their trade. Most of the Hill Tribes in Thailand originated in Southern China. Most of the opium producing Hill Tribes migrated to Thailand during the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century due to oppression in China and continued to migrate after China fell to Communism in 1949.

During the early migration period, many Hill Tribes actually came to Thailand to grow opium. The Thai government controlled a Royal opium monopoly. Due to a shortage in opium in Turkey and Iran, the Royal Thai government wanted to increase growth within Thailand. This initiative to recruit opium growers began in 1947 and increased after China outlawed opium. After China fell to Communism, the new Communist government outlawed opium and aggressively enforced the new law. The Hill Tribe people being opium producers and ethnic minorities that were discriminated against, moved south to Burma, Laos, and eventually to Thailand.

Most of the Hill Tribes migrated to Burma or Laos first and then eventually moved into Thailand. Tribes in Thailand maintained their ethnic and cultural ties with tribes in Burma, China, and Laos. "If you add to the physical realities of this terrain a number of traditionally nomadic peoples, whose own sense of identity is not defined by borders, but by links of kinship, language and tradition with people who live at

similar heights above sea level across four or five countries, you have an explanation for the existence of the extraordinary racial and cultural cocktail that Northern Thailand offers.” (Perve, 2006:4). Once the Hill Tribes relocated to Thailand and other areas, they resumed their occupations of growing opium in Thailand and the surrounding regions. These Hill Tribe people were not citizens of Thailand. The allegiance of the tribes was to their tribe living in the region, not to Thailand. The Hill Tribes identified more to other tribes who were also opium producers in Laos and Burma than they did with the lowland Thais.

Most of the opium producing tribes lived at high altitudes above 3,000 feet. Opium only grows well at these altitudes, so there was a tendency for the lower elevation Hill Tribes to assimilate to Thai society faster and grow very little opium. Opium growing was not always a problem in Thailand or the region. The British had actively encouraged opium growth for centuries and had fought two wars against China to force them to grow and trade opium.

Opium was not a problem in Thailand until the 1960's. Opium in Thailand was made illegal in 1955 and then began to be enforced in 1959. “The Hmong are criticized for being illegal producers of opium. Over the past decade and a half they have borne the grunt of government programs receiving international assistance aimed at eradicating poppy cultivation. Yet originally it was pressure from these same government agencies which encouraged the Hmong to concentrate on the growth of this crop.” (Tapp, 1986:19). Before opium was made illegal, it was legal and a registered monopoly of the Thai government. The opium was heavily taxed and an excellent source of revenue for the Thai government. During this period, the Hill Tribes were essentially working for the Royal Thai government. The Thai government encouraged the Hill Tribes to produce opium and would buy it from the Hill Tribes and sell it in registered and heavily taxed opium dens in Bangkok.

With international pressure, the Thai government changed their policy and made opium illegal with severe penalties. Once this change occurred, the Thai government with the assistance and funding of the United Nations, the United States, and other international communities began to work toward suppressing the opium trade in Thailand. The targets of the eradication efforts were the major producers of opium, which were the Hill Tribe people living high on the remote mountains of

Northern Thailand. The Thai government, who had formerly encouraged opium production, was now faced with the dilemma of eradicating the opium production and finding an alternative way for the Hill Tribes to make a living.

Once the Thai government was faced with the extremely challenging task of eradicating opium in Northern Thailand, the first step was to figure out how to approach this serious problem. A major challenge was that the Hill Tribe people were not Thai citizens and were not culturally similar to the Thai. The Hill Tribe people were hard to reach, living high in the mountains often inaccessible by road. Eradication of opium would be a very difficult task that needed to be approached carefully. Very little was known about the opium growing tribes living in the Thai mountains. Most Hill Tribe people could not speak Thai and most Thais could not speak Hill Tribe languages. There was not just one Hill Tribe, or just one Hill Tribe language. There were various different groups with various different languages and traditions. The first phase of opium eradication had to be a learning phase. Many questions needed to be answered before opium could begin to be eradicated.



**Figure 4.1. Map of Northern Thailand and Golden Triangle**

## **4.2. Hill Tribes in Thailand**

### **4.2.1. Opium Producing Hill Tribes**

Today approximately 1 million Hill Tribe people live in the mountains of

Northern Thailand. Hill Tribes in Thailand consist of six major tribes. The major tribes are the Hmong or Mao, Yao, Lisu, Lahu, Akha, and Karen. Of these six tribes certain characteristics are held in common, however many differences exist. The major opium producers have traditionally been the Hmong, Yao, Lisu, and Lahu. These tribes live at very high altitudes, where opium grows very well. The Hmong and the Yao have been the major producers, with the Hmong being the number one producer in Thailand.

These tribes have also been major opium producers in Burma and Laos and sometimes migrate across borders, where opium growing is accepted. The Akha have traditionally been minor producers in Thailand, but have never been able to grow large amounts of opium, due to the low elevation that they live at. The Akha and Karen have assimilated easier, due to their lowland dwellings with easy access and interaction with the Thai populace.

The Karen are the most assimilated, since they have been in Thailand longer than the other tribes. Karen have never been a major opium tribe, mostly due to their Christian religious beliefs. The Karen and Akha also tend to live in fixed locations, whereas the highland opium producing tribes tended to migrate after the land was no longer usable. "They then move, often great distances, to settle in new areas. Poppy cultivation encourages a migratory pattern of living. Because Miao depend upon opium production they do not grow enough other crops."(United Nations Survey Team, 1967:39). These highland tribes have traditionally practiced swidden agriculture. They would use a piece of land for about 10 years and then move on to a new area, after the land was no longer useable.

#### **4.2.2. Reasons for Opium Production**

Swidden agriculture was destroying the environment as well as an inefficient way of farming. This made the Hill Tribes traditional lifestyle, not only a threat as an opium producer, but a threat to the environment. Because of the altitude that the opium producing tribes live at, opium is the most logical crop to grow and it sells for the highest price to the lowland traffickers.

In addition to the price that the Hill Tribes can sell opium as compared to other crops, the fact that good land for growing alternative crops is generally not

available to these Hill Tribe groups. Since the opium producing tribes live at very high elevations, the land is not suitable for producing regular crops. This is especially so, without the knowledge of proper farming techniques to replace their traditional swidden agriculture. The highland tribes, therefore, would need to grow opium to buy rice.

The highest amount of opium production in Thailand generally took place in the northern provinces, such as Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Tak, and Nan. These were very remote areas with the highest mountains. Since the Hill Tribes were not Thai citizens, they could not own land legally and they could not make a living any other way than growing opium. During the opium producing days, the Hill Tribes were only trying to survive. Hill Tribes that still produce opium in the Golden Triangle today are still poor farmers living in poverty. The Hill Tribes have never substantially benefited from drug trafficking. "The Halpern Report of 1972 calculated that \$120 worth of opium purchased from the farmers brought in returns of \$430,000 when it was sold as heroin on the New York streets." (Tapp, 1986:27). The traffickers became rich, while the Hill Tribes just grew opium to feed their families. The wealthier tribes were the groups that produced the largest amount of opium. Even though the lowland tribes did not produce large amounts of opium, they were often victims or participants in the process. Hmong would often hire Karen or other tribes to work in the opium fields. Many of these other tribe members were drug addicts and would work in exchange for opium.

Due to the extreme isolation of the Hill Tribes from Thai society, they needed to be self sufficient. Opium was medicine and traffickers would pick up the opium and transport it into the towns. Most of the Hill Tribes had very little formal education and very little knowledge of the world outside their realm in the mountains. The Hill Tribes did not have schools, modern health care, and knowledge of modern agricultural technology and techniques. After opium became illegal, most of the Hill Tribes seemed to understand it was illegal, but they had little other alternative other than growing opium.

Opium was not only a cash crop, it was also medicine. "Opium is known to the villagers to be effective in many illnesses such as pain, diarrhea and cough. Abdominal pain, headache and backache are among the common reasons given for

opium smoking.” (Charas, Vichai, Prida, & Ayut,1977:4). The Hill Tribes did not have any other medicine or modern doctors. The Hill Tribes would have a shaman or a witch doctor, who would prescribe opium. Most of the opium producing tribes were not initially drug addicts in the same sense of a western addict. Many elderly tribe members became addicted after prolonged periods of illness. Opium use was also used for other various reasons. Opium was used among Hill Tribes for health reasons, depression, economic factors, behavioral problems, and for recreation.

The Vietnam War added to the problem of demand for opium, which was refined to heroin before sending to U.S. troops. Thailand became a major rest and relaxation destination for United States soldiers fighting in Vietnam. In addition to Thailand being a rest and relaxation destination, a large number of United States soldiers were stationed in Thailand during this period. A large amount of soldiers during this period were heroin addicts, creating a great demand within Thailand and spreading the addiction and demand to the United States after they returned from the war.

#### **4.2.3. Hill Tribe Development Policies Begin**

The efforts of making these people allegiant to Thailand and developing them led to Thailand’s development of a policy of Rural Development. The policy of Rural Development evolved over the years. Developing the Hill Tribes was a priority since the First National Economic and Social Development Plan in 1961. The initial policy of developing the Hill Tribes had to come from the highest leadership in the Thai government. His Majesty King Bhumibol Aduladej himself set the example by taking a personal interest in developing the Hill Tribe people and making them Thai.

In addition to the threats of opium trafficking and destroying the environment, the Hill Tribes were viewed as a security threat to the Thai government. Most of the opium production in Thailand occurred during the cold war. During this period, the Thai government was weary of the communist threat.

Some of the hilltribes people have been persuaded to join insurgents groups in undermining the country. The hilltribesmen know the area well and are physically strong and hard to defeat. They are well connected to their kinsmen in the neighboring socialist countries who

further influence them ideologically. Furthermore, the converted minority groups along the Western border have been persuaded to cooperate with the Communist Part of Thailand in their insurgent activities in the North. If the situation is not improved, the national security will be seriously threatened. (National Economic and Social Development Board, 1982:316).

This threat was from the Thai Communist Party living in the mountains and from the neighboring countries around Thailand. The threat was also strong as the Pathet Lao communist group was fighting for power in Laos. The threat became even stronger after the Pathet Lao was victorious in Laos and Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam all fell to Communism in 1975. The Hill Tribes were often suspected of being sympathetic to communist forces in the mountains. Also, the production of illegal narcotics has been used to finance insurgents groups for a long time.

The Hill Tribes were essentially illegal migrants in Thai territory and were not under the control of the Thai government. Since this group was totally different than the Thai, the Thai government was unsure of who the Hill Tribes were allegiant to. If these Hill Tribes were allegiant to the Communist forces, this could be a major security threat to Thailand. So, in the early years, the Hill Tribes were seen as a burden and were a problem for the Border Police to deal with. In the early years, the tribes were distrustful of Thai authorities, seeing them as oppressors and often as enemies.

The Thai government realized from very early on in their efforts to suppress opium, that the Hill Tribes must be developed and become part of Thailand. The threat of Communism led to increased drug trafficking, as Burmese and Chinese anti Communist rebel groups and drug traffickers were allowed to take refuge in Northern Thailand as an unofficial security force. These drug traffickers encouraged Hill Tribes to grow opium, which they would pick up and then traffic to Bangkok and beyond.

### **4.3. The Evolution of Opium Eradication Policies**

#### **4.3.1. Thai Military and Police Involvement in Opium and the Cold War**

The Thai government legally banned the production and use of all opiates in 1955. This policy change was largely due to international pressure and was a financial

burden to the Thai government, which had become dependent upon the tax revenue from opium. After the law was enacted, it was not enforced until several years later. “It is clear that the opium ban did not reflect the real needs of the Thai government as it is widely known that military leaders and other local officials continued to be involved in opium trading until 1984-1985, when opium cultivation was basically stopped.” (Kwanchewan, 2005:3). Since the government was so dependent on the trade, several corrupt officials continued to be involved with the opium trade for many years. Even after opium was eliminated within Thailand, corrupt officials were found to be involved with the trafficking and smuggling of illegal narcotics. The Royal Thai Army and Royal Thai Police were active in escorting opium and then heroin from the Burmese border to Bangkok throughout the 1970’s and into the 1990’s.

The military controlled government of Thailand allowed the Army and Police to have an excess of power. This abuse of official power and corruption remains a problem in Thailand today. The Royal Thai Border Patrol Police were also established in 1955 and were the first Thai government officials to work with the Hill Tribe people. The Border Patrol Police began development projects such as establishing schools shortly after they were established. The Border Patrol Police also occasionally gave medical supplies or agricultural supplies to the Hill Tribes. In this phase, the Thai government gave welfare to the tribes, but did very little to develop them and really solve the problem. This was because the problem was not yet well known.

In 1957 Sarit Thanarat seized power when he staged a coup and eliminated the civilian government. The United States government was not overly concerned about this un-democratic method at the time. The main concern of the United States government and the United Nations was the fact that the Thai government was dedicated to fighting Communism. Sarit Thanarat realized this and gained funding from the United States, United Nations, and other western countries by implementing policies to aggressively attack Communism.

The opium policy was much slower to be implemented, as opium financed insurgency was tolerated to fight against Communism. During the 1950’s the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), was supporting the Chinese Nationalist Kuomintang Army (KMT) in Burma. The KMT was already well established in the



opium trade by the 1950's. Opium was used to buy weapons. These weapons were traded with Thailand in exchange for opium. The Royal Thai Police and Royal Thai Army were responsible for the illicit trade. Additionally, the Thai Army had already developed ties with many KMT, during their occupation of the Shan State during World War II. In 1958 the illegality of opium began to be enforced and the Thai government made a public display as they seized opium pipes and opium and burned it publicly.

#### **4.3.2. Opium Becomes Illegal**

In 1959 the Harmful Habit-Forming Drugs Act took full effect. As the opium laws were enforced a certain amount of the production of opium would merely shift to Burma and Laos and then be smuggled back into Thailand. "Some cultivators have crossed into Myanmar where surveillance is less prevalent. Myanmar remains the biggest producer in the region at about 1,500 tons followed by Laos, at about 126 tons." (Renard, 2001:39). Opium became hard to come by in Bangkok, but it would still remain plentiful in Northern Thailand for decades.

Bangkok was within control of the central government, and could therefore control opium much more effectively than the isolated areas in the north. The scarcity of opium in Bangkok led to the rise of heroin addiction which was smuggled from Burma and Laos. Heroin was easier to smuggle than opium, but much more dangerous.

In 1959, the Department of Public Welfare was established and given the primary responsibility of working with the Hill Tribes. No single agency had sole responsibility of working with the Hill Tribes. Since the problems of the Hill Tribes were so diverse, several different agencies were involved with Hill Tribe development work. The Department of Public Welfare, the Border Patrol Police, the Forestry Department, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Public Health, and several international, bilateral, and non-governmental organizations were involved in Hill Tribe Development work.

Although work began to eradicate opium within Thailand, the military government was using the drug business to secure cash and gain power. The military and police leaders were likely not interested in banning the opium trade. In the early

stages, the opium ban was to gain international support and different government forces were working in opposite directions.

#### **4.4. Surveys and Findings for Further Policy Development**

##### **4.4.1. The Thai Government Begins to Explore the Causes of the Opium Problem**

The development work of the Hill Tribes evolved in phases. The three main phases of Hill Tribe development and opium production were divided into an initial research and learning phase in the 1960's, followed by the Crop Substitution Initiative in the 1970's, which was also a learning phase. The Thai government adopted a Rural Integrated Development Policy in the 1980's and finally evolved to the final phase of Participatory Alternative Development in the 1990's. Before any of these phases could be initiated, the Thai government needed to find out the extent of the problem they were facing.

The Thai government began conducting several surveys to estimate their workload for the future. In addition to the surveys conducted by Thai authorities, the Thai government asked for international help in assessing and combating the problem. The Royal Forestry Department conducted an aerial survey in 1956-1957 and discovered that more than fifty percent of the Thai forests in Northern Thailand had been seriously damaged.

##### **4.4.2. The 1961 Young Report**

In 1961 an early survey was conducted by Gordon Young, which produced the Young Report. Young's report attempted to measure the extent of opium production by the Hill Tribes in Northern Thailand. The report served as a valuable asset; however, it still left many questions unanswered. The Young Report failed to give an accurate estimate of how much opium was being produced.

Young's report estimated opium production to be at least thirty tons per year. This information was hard to find in the 1960's as many of the tribes were inaccessible, as the infrastructure to reach the most remote and high opium producing tribes was not yet available. Young's report was able to distinguish which tribes were responsible for highest production of opium. Young concluded that the tribes in the

most remote.

#### **4.4.3. The 1962 Department of Public Welfare Socio Economic Survey**

In 1962, the Department of Public Welfare conducted a Socio Economic Survey. This survey was funded by the Asia foundation and the United Nations. The survey targeted eighteen tribes in the northern provinces of Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Tak. The survey focused on the tribes suspected to be the major opium producers. These tribes were Akha, Hmong, Lisu, Lahu, and Yao.

This study estimated the population of the tribes in the area, their family size, their opium production, their methods of income, and their income level. The figure differed from the Young survey. The estimation of opium growth was later found to be underestimated in the 1962 survey.

Part of the problem with the underestimation was due to the sampling of Akha. Akha live at low altitudes and were later found to be relatively small producers of opium. "Tribesmen are fairly consistent in the altitudes they prefer; in the types of crops they grow and in the modes of working." (United Nations Survey Team, 1967:53). The survey ignored several of the highest villages in the sample area and failed to measure the opium production in highland villages in other provinces, such as rural Nan province.

The survey contributed to a great increase of knowledge about Hill Tribes. The survey was conducted by observers who collected information in the villages of long periods of time. Much was still unknown, but much was learned and gave the Thai government a solid foundation for future strategies and research. The previous surveys were conducted during the non-opium growing season and the actual amounts of opium produced were still unknown. Also, little was known about Hill Tribe population size, culture, activities, needs, and other factors.

#### **4.4.4. The 1965-66 Socio Economic Survey of the Hill Tribes in Thailand**

As a result of a lack of information, the Thai government launched another survey in 1965. This new survey was called the Socio Economic Survey of the Hill Tribes in Thailand, and was conducted from 1965-1966. The survey was conducted during the actual opium production season. Several diverse departments of the Thai

government were involved in this survey.

The survey was rather accurate in the sense that it determined the demographic data, such as population size and village size and location. One of the flaws was that one method of determining the opium production was in the form of questionnaire. “Even upon the basis of the answers given the sampling error was calculated to be approximately 28.9% and there are strong indications that many persons must have been less than honest in their answers.” (United Nations Survey Team, 1967:57). It is likely that the Hill Tribes underestimated their actual opium production for their own personal safety and the distrust of the government officials.

Many of the findings in the survey were contradictory to the known facts in the area. Another issue with the survey was that it was conducted during the production season. The facts about sales and production of opium were all related to the previous season, which was a possible factor in inaccuracy. These ground surveys were combined with aerial surveys.

#### **4.4.5. The 1967 United Nations Survey**

In 1967, the Thai government learned even more about the opium production and the Hill Tribes. In 1967, the United Nations sent experts to conduct a survey, in which the findings were presented in the Report of the United Nations Survey Team on the Economic and Social Development Needs of the Opium Producing Areas in Thailand. This survey was extremely important and helped the Thai government further develop their policy of Rural Development and Highland Development policies. This survey examined the conditions of the Hill Tribe people and focused on their problems of underdevelopment.

The survey not only focused on how much opium was produced, but focused on why the opium was produced. The Thai government had already initiated programs to develop the Hill Tribes in the early 1960's, but the United Nations Survey would further increase the knowledge that would help the Thai government refine their plan of action. The findings of the survey recommended a gradual reduction of the opium and realized that the eradication of opium must be gradual.

The Hill Tribes needed to be developed and given an alternative means to make a living, before the opium was destroyed. Of course, this was already the policy

of the Thai government had stated from the beginning. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej had already ordered that the Hill Tribes must be developed before the opium is eradicated.

The 1967 United Nations Survey began by studying the difference between the different tribes. It found that the largest opium producing tribes were not generally poor, but were also not rich. The survey found that the tribes with the highest poverty rate, were the ones that did not produce opium, or produced very little opium. “The fact that opium is a much more basic feature of the economies and cultures of some of the largest tribes than has been previously recognized indicates the magnitude of the problem faced by the Government. It is a feature that cannot be eliminated easily.”(United Nations Survey Team, 1967:11). The findings in this report found that the tribes were dependent upon opium and it was widely spread throughout Northern Thailand.

The Thai government previously had no idea that the problem was this big. The United Nations report confirmed the estimate of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, when he said that the problem would take about 30 years to solve. To solve the problem, the Hill Tribes would need to be developed and assimilated to Thailand. Assimilation would take several years.

The Hill Tribes had been growing opium for centuries, and did not know any other way to make a living. For the major opium producing tribes, opium was an integral part of their culture. The 1967 United Nations Survey also examined the shifting cultivation of the opium producing tribes and the effects on the environment. The importance of opium as a cash crop was examined. The growth of opium was used to buy rice, supplies, jewelry, and to pay the bride price. The elimination of the opium would change the social lifestyle of the Hill Tribes and increase their poverty. The survey also examined relationship between the traders and the Hill Tribes. The survey estimated annual opium production in Thailand at an astounding 145 tons.

## **4.5. Early Development Projects**

### **4.5.1. The Nikhom Projects**

The new information available from the surveys would help the Thai government begin to understand the problem of the Hill Tribes and adjust their policies accordingly. This information would have been useful nearly a decade earlier when the Thai government simply tried to resettle the Hill Tribes without sufficient knowledge of the real problem. A resettlement project beginning in 1960 called the Hill Tribe Self- Help Welfare “Nikhom” (Land Settlement) Program, proved to be unsuccessful. The goal of Nikhom was to gather several groups of Hill Tribes and move them into Nikhom villages. The goal of this project was to prevent opium production and conserve the environment.

In 1964, the Nikhom was replaced by another program called The Hill Tribe Development and Welfare Program. This program was under the Nikhom budget, but soon failed. “In December 1968, the combined Hill Tribe Nikhom/Hill Tribe Development & Welfare Center in Petchaboon was abandoned, under fire, by the Welfare Division staff as government troops clashed with hill tribe insurgent forces. The multi-million baht hill complex was never re-occupied.” (Hearn,1974:6). A large amount of money was invested in this project, but it failed. Resettlement projects would later be attempted in the future. The issue with the resettlement projects was that the Hill Tribes were independent people, and did not want to live in a camp under the authority of Thai government officials.

### **4.5.2. The Leadership of the King of Thailand**

As mentioned, the earliest opium reduction activities and Hill Tribe work development was initiated by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej. The King of Thailand realized the security dilemma and he took a personal interest in investigating the problems and needs of the Hill Tribes and helping develop them. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej even donated personal funds to development projects. During this early period relations between the Hill Tribes and the government were not very good.

The Thai military and Border Police were often involved in armed conflict

with these tribes. This tense relationship could be seen as the Nikhom resettlement project ended in disaster. His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej first went to Chiang Mai in 1958 and had begun to learn about the cultures of the Hill Tribes.

In the 1960's the Thai government had already developed a policy to develop other rural areas within Thailand. The Royal family of Thailand conducted much of this work. The Royal Assistance Unit was founded in 1966. The Royal Assistance Unit was formed to develop rural areas in need. In 1969, the Royal Assistance Unit began working in the north of Thailand with the Hill Tribes. The king of Thailand focused on developing agricultural knowledge and crop substitution.

The Royal Project was initiated in 1969. The Royal Project focused on teaching Hill Tribes alternative development techniques and marketing techniques to help them sell their goods to the lowlands. As mentioned, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej ordered that the opium crops not be destroyed until a suitable replacement could be found. "The king realized that the radical removal of the hill people's source of income would imperil them." (Renard, 2001:76). The Thai government officials had a great deal of work ahead of them. The eradication process did not actually begin to take place until almost a decade later.

#### **4.5.3. The Hill Tribe Welfare Division and Mobile Development Teams**

The Hill Tribe Welfare Division subordinate to the Department of Public Welfare developed several programs designed to help study and develop Hill Tribe people as well as improve their lives. One of these projects was the development of 3-man teams called Hill Tribe Mobile Development Teams. The members of each team were composed of an agricultural expert, a health care official, and a social welfare official. The teams were first used in Tak Province and then expanded to Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Nan Provinces in 1966. By 1974, there were 160 of these teams operating in nine Northern provinces.

The mission of these teams was to conserve the environment, reduce opium production, develop relationships with the Hill Tribes, and to promote Thai nationalism. The teams would spend the majority of their time in the mountains amongst the Hill Tribes. Between 1964 and 1974, 83,981,400 Baht was spent on these Mobile Development Teams. These teams were a great asset because they would

deploy Thai culture to the Hill Tribes and began to develop an important relationship which led to trust and assimilation. The information learned from these teams proved to be an invaluable asset and led to increased development of policies and programs to develop Hill Tribes and eliminate opium production.

#### **4.5.4. The Hill Tribe Research Center**

One of the recommendations found during the 1962 Report on the Socio-Economic Survey of the Hill Tribes in Northern Thailand identified a need for in depth study and research on the Hill Tribes. The solution resulted in the foundation of the Tribal Research Centre in 1965. “Mandorff believed that the implementation of these recommendations would be successful only if the last recommendation was adopted- to establish a Tribal Research Center in Northern Thailand.” (Kwanchewan, 2005:4). This program also fell under the Hill Tribe Welfare Division subordinate to the Department of Public Welfare.

Although the Tribal Research Centre was officially under the government, it was located on the campus of Chiang Mai University and was mostly an academic organization. The main objective was to collect, research, and analyze socio-economic data of the Hill Tribes. The center was staffed by both Thai and International staff. The center relied on funds from the United States, United Nations, and several other western countries. Experts focused on a specific tribe and became proficient in the languages, and knowledgeable in the cultures, customs, and history of the tribes.

In 1984 the Tribal Research Center was promoted to a higher level of importance when it became the Tribal Research Institute. The Tribal Research Institute was abolished in 2002 at the same time as the abolition of the Department of Public Welfare. The reason for this was that the government felt that the Hill Tribes had sufficiently assimilated to Thai society. Also, as the opium was eradicated, the international funding stopped and the Thai government did not see the need to continue to fund the organization.

The data collected from the Mobile Development Teams, The Border Patrol Police, The Ministry of Education, The Ministry of Public Health, and the research work produced by the Tribal Research Center all contributed to the development of



improved Thai government policy regarding the Hill Tribes. The Thai government had taken a position of development and assimilation to eradicate the opium from the beginning. The constant evaluation of new data led to the development of new policies which led to continued improvement of Hill Tribe development work and the eradication of opium.

#### **4.5.5. National Development Plans**

Most of the Hill Tribe Development Policies were derived from the five-year National Economic and Social Development Plans. The first plan was published in 1961 and mentioned a policy of Rural Development and addressed the problems of the Hill Tribes. Since most of the 1970's were spent as a learning phase, the development of policies to develop Hill Tribes and eradicate opium peaked in the 1980's. The Fifth National and Economic Development Plan 1982-1987, focused on developing the rural areas and eliminating poverty. The Rural Development Plan was a large priority in the fifth plan and was even further developed in the Sixth National Economic and Social Development Plan 1986-1991. The sixth plan focused on the involvement of the community and localization of programs. These national plans led to the further development of specific Highland Development Plans.

The National Economic and Social Development Board developed the Master Plan for the Development of the Opium Poppy Cultivation Regions in Thailand in 1983. This master plan focused on rural development projects to develop Hill Tribe communities. A second Master Plan for Highland Development and Drug Abuse Control was completed in 1988 and focused more on the addiction aspect of the Hill Tribes. The Seventh National Economic and Social Development Plan 1992-1996 led to the development of another Highland Master Plan. This plan was called the Master Plan for the Development of Highland Population, Environment and Control of Narcotic Crops. This plan focused on the participation of the Hill Tribes and the continued improvement of agricultural production and economic development.

All of these plans supported common goals that would enable the Thai government to develop the Hill Tribes and eradicate opium production. The overall goal was of course to eradicate opium. Other goals focused on establishing permanent settlements. The constantly moving Hill Tribes posed a security threat and also could

not assimilate and make a suitable living if they were constantly moving. The permanent settlements would aim at developing the tribes and provide alternative means to production that did not involve opium production.

#### **4.5.6. Hill Tribe Development and Relationship Building**

Another aim was to conserve the environment that was being destroyed by the primitive swidden agriculture methods. In order for these goals to be accomplished, it was necessary to develop infrastructure. This included building quality roads that could link the Hill Tribes with the towns. The roads would lead to the increase of schools to teach Hill Tribe children the Thai language and Thai culture. The roads were also necessary to establish health care services in the mountains. Also plans to legalize Hill Tribe villages and legalize Hill Tribes would be initiated. All of this work required the cooperation and coordination of several different Thai government agencies as well as cooperation with international and bilateral efforts.

As mentioned, Hill Tribe development and opium reduction would be accomplished in three distinct phases. The first phase during the 1970's was the period of the Crop Replacement Initiative. "Highland development work in Thailand during the 1970's aimed at replacing opium with other cash crops." (Renard, 2001:73). During this phase the Thai government focused on replacing opium with other cash crops. Very little was known about agricultural development and the Hill Tribes during this phase. Because of this, no opium was actually destroyed during this phase. In fact in the early period of crop replacement, the prospect of opium eradication was not even directly mentioned to the Hill Tribes.

The possibility of changing to other crops was mentioned and abandonment of opium was only indirectly and discretely mentioned. If the full objective of opium eradication was revealed too early, the relationship of trust would likely have not developed. The main objective during this phase was to focus on building relationships, improving infrastructure, improving living conditions for the Hill Tribes, and gaining the allegiance of the Hill Tribes.

Building a relationship of trust with the Hill Tribes was a slow process for many reasons. One of the obstacles was that the culture and language barrier slowed progress. Also, the Hill Tribes had formerly only known the Thais only in the form of

police or soldiers, as opposed to teachers and doctors. One problem during this phase was that it was authoritarian as opposed to participative. The help came in the form of directives and was managed from Bangkok.

The centralized authoritarian approach with policies to improve the Hill Tribes formulated by an ethnocentric Thai middle to upper class was too far removed from the reality of the situation on the ground. Other problems arose as various agencies were responsible for the development of the Hill Tribes; coordination was difficult since each agency had their own set of priorities. Of course the police would see the problem as more of focus on law enforcement problems. The health care workers would focus on health problems. The education workers would focus on education development. The Department of Forestry would focus on environmental aspects. These were all important problems, but they needed to be integrated to solve the whole problem of underdevelopment.

The largely unsuccessful resettlement programs occurred during the first phase and extended into the second and third phases. "A prima facie case can be made out, if only on the basis of fragmented evidence, to establish that a coordinated operation has commenced with the help of the Army to move as many highlanders out of the mountains as possible." (McKinnon, 1987:6). The resettlement programs were part of the government's goal of establishing permanent settlements. This was carried out due to environmental concerns and security concerns. The Forestry Department and the Army coordinated efforts in these resettlements.

During this learning phase, the Army and Police continued to build a relationship with KMT drug traffickers in Burma, who had given up their ideological Cold War fight and now focused mostly on trafficking heroin into Thailand. This was especially profitable as the United States soldiers during the Vietnam War created a demand for heroin.

Many of the KMT were now operating within Thailand now and heroin was being refined within the borders of Northern, Thailand. New Burmese traffickers such as Kuhn Sa were also gaining sympathy of the Thai government and operating out of the Thai side of the border to escape the interception of the Burmese government. The Office of Narcotics Control Board was created as the central drug Thai drug enforcement agency in November, 1976.

## **4.6. Crop Replacement Initiative**

### **4.6.1. Overview of the Crop Replacement Initiative**

The first phase of opium eradication which focused mostly on crop substitution was not successful in solving the complex problems that led to the underdevelopment of Hill Tribes and the production of opium. “In order for the development programmes to encompass indigenous institutions, the forms taken by these institutions and the social and ecological determinants of these forms must be clearly understood.” (Cooper,1980:27). During the 1980’s, the Thai government had finally begun to understand the Hill Tribes culture and their problems.

After a decade of relationship building, the Thai government could begin eradication efforts. With the combined efforts of several different agencies, the Thai government had learned that while crop substitution was an important goal, it could not be successful without focusing on several aspects of Hill tribe development. During the second phase, the Thai government adopted a policy of Rural Integrated Development.

The Vietnam War ended in 1975, causing great tension among security and Communist insurgents on the borders of Thailand. This led to a great deal of mistrust between Thai officials and Hill Tribes who were constantly suspected of insurgent activity and their loyalty to Thailand was uncertain. In order to develop the Hill Tribes and assimilate them into Thai society, a level of trust had to be established. This relationship of trust was developed during the second phase. Opium began to be eradicated during this phase. Infrastructure had become quite developed by the second phase and therefore Hill Tribes began to have greater interaction with the Thai public and occasionally foreign tourists.

Hill Tribe villages were legalized and large numbers of Hill Tribes were provided Thai citizenship or at least permanent residency status. The issue of citizenship was sensitive issue. Initially the Thai government was liberal with providing Hill Tribes citizenship, however, issues arose. One of the major issues of providing Hill Tribes citizenship was related to the political and social problems in Burma and Laos, which created a refugee problem in Thailand. These refugees were mostly Hill Tribes formerly living in Burma and Laos and were often encouraged to

illegally migrate to Thailand and claim citizenship. This was obviously a difficult situation for Thai government officials, as it was difficult to distinguish whether the Hill Tribe member was born in Thailand or simply the Burmese or Lao cousin of the Thai Hill Tribe member. Because of this issue the government of Thailand required that Hill Tribes provide proof that they were born in Thailand and have a line of lineage linking them to Thailand. This proof was often impossible for the Hill Tribes to attain, and has resulted in over fifty percent of Hill Tribes in Thailand without Thai citizenship today.

#### **4.6.2. Challenges to Eradication and the Increase of Narcotics**

Most of Thailand's early drug enforcement programs were focused on the eradication of the source of opium within Thailand. These programs did not effectively focus on who was actually trafficking the illegal drugs. Although a large amount of opium was grown in Northern Thailand, it was relatively small compared to the amount of opium grown in Burma. During the initial phases of Hill Tribe development, smuggling from Burma began to increase and began to be smuggled in the form of heroin. The increase smuggling was for many reasons.

The United States had changed their policy of support for the KMT soldiers, who had become drug traffickers. The KMT were now losing control in Burma and were seeking refuge in Thailand. This was not a problem, since they had developed a good relationship with the Thai Police and Army Commanders, who had been their smuggling connection inside Thailand for decades. Once the KMT were granted refugee status and many became Thai citizens, they set up business in Thailand. The businesses had a front as a normal business, but the KMT became the major traffickers within Thailand. The drug traffickers in Burma would traffic the narcotics to the border and then the KMT would take over from there. Once in Thailand, the KMT would ensure that the drugs reached their destination within Thailand and to the United States and beyond.

During the early phase, the KMT focused on the huge demand for heroin that United States soldiers in the region required. After the end of the Vietnam War, the KMT focused on smuggling narcotics to the United States. Another challenge contributing to the drug problem in Thailand was that several drug lords and

insurgents from Burma were operating within Thailand's northern border under the protection of the Royal Thai Government. Khun Sa, himself had his headquarters on the Thai side of the Burma-Thailand border, until Thailand under international pressure forced Kuhn Sa out of Thailand, where he simply moved across the border and easily re-smuggled his heroin back into Thailand. The problems of corrupt officials in Thailand would take years to fix and still exist today.

In addition to the Chinese KMT transitioning to being international traffickers, many other traffickers had already made Bangkok their base of operations. The Chinese Chiu Chao syndicate had relocated to Bangkok from Hong Kong due increased enforcement. Bangkok had become an easy place to operate out of due to the high level officials involved in drug trafficking and high level of corruption.

Just as Thailand was beginning to eradicate opium in Thailand, it was already becoming a major international drug transit route for international drug traffic from Burma and Laos. With the withdrawal of the United States from the region and the fall of Vietnam and Laos to Communism, Bangkok became even more important as an international drug trafficking hub.

The new destination for Golden Triangle heroin was no longer Vietnam, but was now the United States. Also, Saigon, which was formally a popular international drug trafficking port, was now closed. All illegal heroin being trafficked through Saigon was now diverted to Bangkok, further increasing the importance of Bangkok as the center for Golden Triangle drugs to be trafficked internationally. Of course, this made Bangkok the ideal place for international syndicates to place their headquarters. While the Thai government was working on eliminating Hill Tribe opium, the major problem of Thailand becoming an international drug transit route was just beginning.

## **4.7 Rural Integrated Development**

### **4.7.1. Citizen Involvement in Development**

The second phase encouraged participation of the Hill Tribes in developing their communities. The Fifth National Economic and Social Development Plan discussed the importance of Hill Tribe involvement in development: "Accelerate development efforts in various fields, encouraging the participation of hilltribe people. Closer contact and better understanding will be established in hilltribe villages which

have not yet been reached by government agencies.” (National Economic and Social Development Board,1982:66). This phase helped the Hill Tribes realize that the problem of opium was a problem that affected their own community. It was not simply a problem of the Thai government, but a problem of Hill Tribes that was preventing them from a better way of life.

The Sixth National Economic and Social Development Plan focused on further developing the goals outlined in of the Fifth Plan. “The role of people’s organizations and general public in deciding how to solve their own problems and those of their communities will be encouraged, thus increasing self-reliance.”(National Economic and Social Development Board,1987:345). These goals focused on the participation of the private sector in contributing to solving community problems.

The idea was that the citizen would be empowered to make a difference in their own community for a better future. This community involvement aspect has proven to be successful in many countries in solving community problems. Many American law enforcement agencies have adopted this concept in the form of “Community Policing”.

#### **4.7.2. Government Decentralization**

Another important factor during phase two was the decentralization of authority in Hill Tribe development. “The majority of government development projects are experimental projects in selected areas. Their pattern and form have been designed solely by the central administration which lack insights into the real causes of their problems.” (National Economic and Social Development Board,1982:278). The goal of decentralization allowed for officials in Northern Thailand to have more decision making ability. These officials were the subject matter experts and could provide expert knowledge that the centrally located Bangkok officials could not provide.

This new policy was also aimed at involving the Hill Tribes in the decision making process. During this phase, local village leaders were given responsibility that was formerly held by Thai officials. Several Hill Tribe people migrated to the lowlands and attended low land education facilities. Many of the Hill Tribe people began to receive a university level education in the lowlands and would return to the

hills to help develop the Hill Tribes. On the other hand, some Hill Tribes completely assimilated into Thai society and rose to important positions in the civilian and government sectors.

#### 4.7.3. Social Development Issues

Family planning was another focus to relieve poverty and develop the Hill Tribes during phase two. While some Hill Tribes proved to be very successful in education most of them remained uneducated. “The result shows that out of a population aged 5 and over 80.5 percent had no education.” (National Statistical Office, 1986:20). As recorded in a survey in Chiang Rai province in 1986, 80.5 percent of Hill Tribes did not have any education. This number was substantial and a cause for concern.

In order for the Thai government to reach its goal under the Rural Development Plan, education had to be improved. One issue was that the quality of schools in the mountains was rather poor. Also, even though the education was free, many Hill Tribe parents did not understand the importance of education as it was not relevant to their primary mission of agriculture.

As the eradication of opium proved to be successful, new problems developed. One of these problems was the rise of heroin smuggling from Burma and Laos and some production within Thailand. As was the case of opium eradication in Bangkok several decades earlier, heroin which was easily smuggled, quickly replaced opium. The new addiction of heroin by the Hill Tribes was a much more dangerous problem than opium. One weakness during the second phase was the lack of rehabilitation programs.



Figure 4.7. The Thai Government Message to Drug Traffickers



## **4.8. Participatory Alternative Development**

### **4.8.1. Hill Tribes Assimilate and Development Peaks**

The third and the final phase of the opium eradication and Hill Tribe Development Program took place during the 1990's and continues to be the policy of the Thai government today. The third phase further developed and integrated plans for community participation initiated during the second phase. During this phase the approach was mostly participative as opposed to directive. People took an even more active role in developing their communities. Education continued to be developed and Hill Tribes became even more assimilated into Thai society.

Further decentralization of central control was initiated during this phase. "Rural development will be promoted with emphasis on the decentralization of development administration to regional and local areas, by allocating budget to support provincial development aimed at raising income and improving living conditions of the rural poor." (National Economic and Social Development Board, 1992:104). This further decentralization was necessary to fully implement the Participatory Alternative Development Plan.

The decentralization led to a large budget at the local level to further develop Hill Tribe development programs. The hard work of rural development reached its peak during the 1990's. "Hill people entered the government service, earned college degrees, and many became teachers in the hills. By the 1990's only a small amount of opium cultivation persisted, encouraged by the high price of it commanded because of scarcity." (Renard, 2001:117). By this period, the infrastructure was outstanding. The Hill Tribes were now linked to the cities and towns and had more contact and further assimilation. The good quality of roads allowed the villagers to easily move into the lowlands to sell alternative crops and handicrafts. Tourism was also increasing in the north and the Hill Tribes could supplement their income by selling crafts to tourists. Large numbers of Hill Tribes continued to become Thai citizens.

### **4.8.2. Rehabilitation Programs**

Opium production in Thailand was nearly eliminated by the mid 1990's. During the third phase, a combination of several factors led to a balanced approach to

the eradication of opium and development of Hill Tribes. The balanced approach combined the efforts of alternative development with emphasis on community self development and participation, the reduction of the demand for opium and other illegal drugs, the role of law enforcement, long term investment projects, and assimilation through the development of Thai nationalism.

As opium disappeared and heroin was increasingly smuggled, more attention was devoted to the development of rehabilitation problems. The heroin problem was much older in Bangkok; therefore, Bangkok had already developed rehabilitation facilities. The heroin problem among Hill Tribes became apparent in the mid 1980's. "These figures clearly illustrate that opium abuse is dominant in the north of the country, but heroin addiction is said to be increasing and can now also be found among the hill tribe population." (International Labor Organization, 1986:9). The rehabilitation facilities were lacking for Hill Tribe people.

The concept of drug rehabilitation in Thailand is relatively new. Initial provisions for drug rehabilitation were initially developed as part of the 1979 Narcotics Act. The Narcotics Act requires that drug addicts be admitted to a treatment program. While the law was passed in 1979, treatment programs were quite slow in reaching Northern Thailand.

The oldest treatment facility in Thailand was opened in 1957 in Bangkok. This facility is the Thanyarak Hospital. In 1984 a Drug-Dependence Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre was opened in Chiang Mai to serve the addicted population in the north to include the Hill Tribes. One of the challenges faced with this facility was that it was often situated too far away from Hill Tribe villages, therefore, being inaccessible to many Hill Tribe people. To solve this problem, mobile treatment units were established to take the treatment to the Hill Tribe people. The Hill Tribe heroin addiction continued to rise throughout the 1990's and soon transitioned to ATS addiction as heroin decreased.

#### **4.8.3. New Challenges for Hill Tribes**

As opium was eradicated and Hill Tribes were developed, the Hill Tribe population faced new challenges. The development of infrastructure and assimilation connected the Hill Tribe to the lowlands. While many Hill Tribe people successfully

assimilated, a much larger number went to the cities to fill less attractive positions. Many Hill Tribe women went to Chiang Mai or Bangkok to work in brothels as prostitutes. “The lack of agricultural land, capital, education, and employment opportunities have forced these girls to work as waitresses, maids, factory workers, and prostitutes.”(Chayan, Prasit, & Chanya, 1993:19). The migration of the Hill Tribe women has led to the spread of HIV to the Hill Tribe communities. Men who go to work in the cities often visit prostitutes and return to spread HIV to their village.

The heroin problem has also led to the spread of HIV, as the use of infected needles became a problem that was not faced with opium. Hill Tribes continued to migrate to lower class professions in the cities after opium production was no longer available for income. The majority of Hill Tribes were in a lower socioeconomic status as opposed to when they were producing opium. The need for a sustained development was realized and focused on continued community involvement and drug awareness programs.

Another issue that was faced was the vulnerability of Hill Tribe women to human trafficking. “They are considered exotic and often times easy to control because they speak little Thai and in some cases they have no identification card. Most of the young hilltribe women who become prostitutes are sold to middlemen who have misled the parents into thinking the girls will work as maids, waitresses, etc.” (Chayan, Prasit, & Chanya, 1993:19). As income became scarce after the eradication of opium, Hill Tribe parents would often sell their daughters to traffickers. The situation may not have always been clear. Sometimes the parents may have been misled to the reality of what they were committing their children to. With the eradication of opium, traffickers needed new sources of revenue and human trafficking was a reliable source of income. Little was known about human trafficking during this period. While lowland Thai women were also vulnerable to traffickers and continue to be today, the Hill Tribe women were even more vulnerable. The Hill Tribe women were especially vulnerable to human trafficking, due to their low level of education and often limited Thai language capabilities.

#### **4.8.4. Thailand Assumes a Leadership Role in the Region**

Thailand continued to develop drug policies in the 1990's and cooperated with

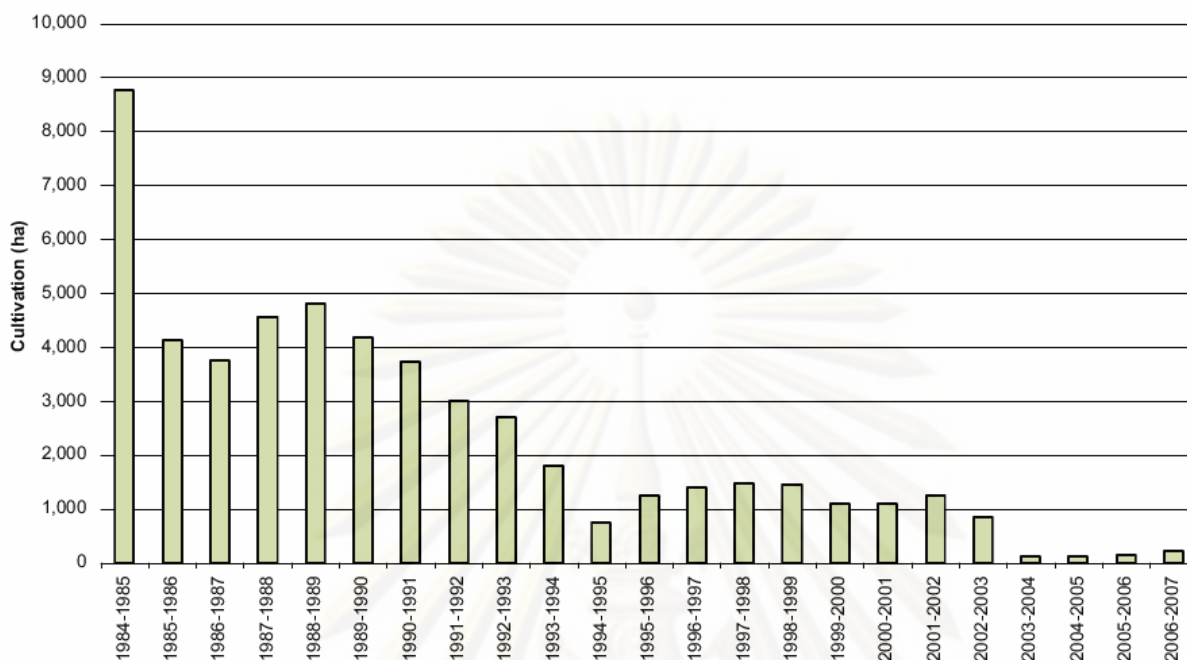
training and investigations with the United States and the international community. During the 1990's, Thailand took a leadership role in the region to work to counter the international drug threat on the borders of Thailand. In 1992, Thailand passed the Asset Seizure and Conspiracy Law. This law allowed assets of drug dealers to be seized and encouraged the investigation of corrupt officials involved with drug trafficking.

In 1994, the United States and Japan helped Thailand fund the Chiang Mai University Highland Agricultural Training Center. This center was beneficial in helping highland farmers learn new farming methods to encourage alternative development. This center also served as a regional center and hosted training programs for highland farmers from Burma and Laos.

The 1996 surrender of Kuhn Sa caused a temporary increase of opium growth in Thailand, but did not present a major threat of Thailand returning to becoming a major opium grower. The fall of Kuhn Sa, only made matters worse, as the United Wa State Army traffickers would only make matters worse with the massive amounts of heroin and ATS that would be trafficked through Thailand.

Today opium is only produced on a very small scale. Since 1999, Thailand has not produced enough opium to even meet domestic usage. The majority of opium and heroin in Thailand is produced in Burma. The Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB), the Police Narcotics Suppression Bureau (PNSB), and the Royal Thai Army (RTA) 3<sup>rd</sup> Region in Northern Thailand are responsible for national drug policy and programs.

The RTA conducts yearly opium crop surveys with the oversight of the ONCB. The RTA is also responsible for continuing to destroy small amounts of opium crops that still exist in Thailand today. Only an estimated 157 hectares of opium are produced in very remote areas mostly in Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, and Tak provinces exist today in Thailand. Thailand met its goal of being opium free by the year 2000. The small amount of opium grown in Thailand does not generally supply a large scale domestic use or a threat to international trafficking. The major threat that Thailand now faces is its position as a transit route for the huge amounts of heroin and ATS that flow into Thailand from all directions.



**Figure 4.8-Opium poppy eradication in Thailand 1985-2007**

## **4.9. Transition from an Opium Producer to an International Hub for Heroin and Amphetamine Type Stimulants**

### **4.9.1. Thailand Becomes an Increasingly Attractive Transit Point for International Traffic**

Once Thailand had finally eradicated opium, the country was now a major trafficking route for the drugs produced in Burma and Laos. “Most of the opium was exported by minority groups to finance the insurgencies they were fighting against the national governments. Expatriate Chinese facilitated international trafficking. Most was shipped out through the excellent transportation infrastructure of Thailand to markets in North America and Europe.” (Renard,2001:7). West African Traffickers also began to operate in Bangkok to facilitate drug trafficking to the United States.

It seems ironic that the development of infrastructure was a key element in eliminating opium production in Thailand and then in turn was a key factor in choosing to transport illegal drugs through Thailand for use within Thailand and to be shipped to international markets. Also with the decline of opium and the increased

suppression of heroin a new drug threat has developed in Thailand. The new threat to Thailand that supplemented and surpassed heroin was the new ATS threat.

#### **4.9.2. The ATS Threat**

ATS is even easier to produce and easier to smuggle than heroin. ATS quickly became both a Thai domestic and international problem in the 1990's. ATS became the drug of choice among Thai teenagers and hard labor sectors in Thailand. ATS, like heroin is mostly produced in Burma. Small amounts of ATS are produced in Thailand, but most of it is produced in Burma or Laos and then smuggled into Thailand. The ATS intended for international markets is almost all United Wa State Army (UWSA) ATS produced in Burma and Laos and then smuggled into Thailand for international export. The ATS produced in Thailand is generally low quality and used by poor Thais. The high quality AT S is referred to as "Crystal Methamphetamine", "Ice" or, "China White". The cheap low-quality ATS is produced in the form of "ya-baa".

Kuhn Sa introduced ATS to Thailand in the early 1990's, and it became the most popular drug in Thailand by the time Khun Sa surrendered in 1996. Khun Sa started producing ATS, because it was easier to produce and did not depend on weather conditions and large amounts of labor. The drug was cheaper to produce, transport, and distribute. Because of the cheap cost of ATS, it became popular in Thailand.

Ya-baa is the most popular form of ATS in Thailand, while a more expensive form of ATS called Crystal Methamphetamine, or "Ice" is usually transported to the United States and other international destinations. Before long, both Ice and ya-baa were being shipped through Thailand. "But that began to change in the early 1990's when methamphetamines deluged the streets of Bangkok and other Thai cities and the entire Southeast Asia region. Thailand was no longer just a transit point but a major consumer of methamphetamine."(Jelsma, Kramer, & Vervest,2005:119). By the mid 1990's, both heroin and ATS were being heavily trafficked through Thailand. The eradication of opium in Thailand was almost immediately followed by the explosion of ATS. ATS has now become Thailand's number one social and security threat.

Thailand faced a severe addiction problem in addition to continued growth as

a distribution center for Burma. By the mid 1990's the impact of ATS could be seen in Thailand, as a rise of crime, prostitution, youth drug addiction, murder, international criminal syndicates, official corruption and other problems grew in Thailand. Money laundering was a growing problem that accompanied the international drug trafficking. Thailand was an attractive place for international syndicates due to the ease of money laundering in Thailand. Thailand also grew as a center to traffic precursor chemicals into Burma. The precursor chemicals were widely available within Thailand and needed to produce heroin and ATS. Nigerian and other West African traffickers now based in Thailand facilitated much of the precursor chemical trafficking.

In 1994, the Thai government in cooperation with the United States, conducted a major operation focused on stopping the heroin and ATS smuggling by Khun Sa's Shan United Army (SUA). The operation also focused on corrupt high level Thai officials facilitating Burmese drug trafficking from within Thailand. The operation was called Operation Tiger Trap. The operation captured 13 SUA traffickers, many of whom were later extradited to the United States. Several high level Thai government officials were also implicated in the operation.

Phase two of the operation closed the border with Burma and restricted trade. This was only the beginning of a series of strict measure that the Thai government would take to restrict drug trafficking from Burma into Thailand. These measures were likely responsible for Khun Sa surrendering in 1996, as smuggling through Thailand's northern border became increasingly difficult. These strict measures also led to the development of new drug trafficking routes.

Major routes for heroin heading to the United States opened through China. Thailand remained a popular route for ATS and some heroin. The changing trends in routes from Burma to Thailand opened alternate routes through Laos and Cambodia. From Laos and Cambodia, drugs were re-smuggled through Thailand at various porous and lightly patrolled border crossings and then onto Bangkok and the United States. The Mekong River also became a popular route for trafficking heroin and ATS originating in Burma.

### **4.9.3. Thai Drug Law Reforms and Increased Operations**

The Thai government began to implement several reforms beginning in 1994. “The government continued to work on several policy initiatives begun in 1994, including trade restrictions on the northern border with Burma and drafting anti money laundering legislation.” (United States Department of State, 1997). The Thai government began to draft anti-money laundering laws in 1994. This was important to cut off the money supply to the international syndicates operating comfortably out of Bangkok. The Thai government also began to revise drug laws in 1994, which would result in harsher punishments for drug traffickers.

Cases of high level drug related corruption among politicians also began to become evident during 1994. “Parliamentary sessions in Thailand have degenerated into a jittery guessing game as lawmakers struggle to figure out who else among them has been labeled a drug dealer by the United States Government. One member of Parliament was forced to resign this month after a Federal court in California unsealed a 1991 indictment in which he had been charged with smuggling more than 45 tons of marijuana into the United States.” (Shenon, 1994). Several Thai officials were later extradited to the United States for their role in international drug trafficking. Increased numbers of high level Thai officials were also suspected of involvement with drug trafficking and corruption, which facilitated Bangkok as an international drug trafficking city and a threat to the United States. The Thai government has never condoned corruption and continued to struggle with cleaning up corrupt officials during the 1990’s.

In 1995 a new Northern Drug Task Force was formed to deal with the increasing threat of Burmese heroin and ATS flowing into Thailand. A specialized Drug Task Force was formed in Bangkok in 1996. In 1997, heroin entering Thailand decreased by 17%, however, ATS continued to increase. Drug lords and syndicates who had traditionally been involved in the heroin business were now increasingly dealing in both heroin and ATS. Before long, new trends would see an increasing reduction of heroin as traffickers preferred to deal with the more profitable ATS. This trend became increasingly evident as UWSA took over as the major drug producer in Burma.

The drug problem from Burma was also reaching Thailand’s southern border



and funding Muslim insurgents, who would also use international drug trafficking to finance their terrorist operations against the Thai government. In 1997, a new Joint Drug Task Force was established in Southern Thailand to counter this threat. The Thai government realized that ATS was now the number one threat to the nation and internationally.

In 1997, the Thai government changed policies to focus on countering ATS as the number one threat. The drug problem was only increasing, as 95,000 of the arrests in Thailand during 1997 were drug related and the number increased to 105,000 in 1998. The financial crisis made the counter drug effort worse, as anti-drug funding was cut to deal with the financial crisis. The threat of UWSA ecstasy first appeared in Thailand during 1998. Thailand increased international cooperation to counter illicit drugs in the region. In 1998, Thailand co founded the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Bangkok. The United States provided most of the funding and training, with the assistance of Thailand. ILEA began providing training for narcotics officials throughout Southeast Asia.

Thailand also began cross border law enforcement with the Burmese government in 1998. Special Narcotics Units were created in 1998 and were trained and funded by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). The Prime Minister issues Prime Minister Order 141 in 1998. Order 141 allowed for a consolidated and coordinated effort of government and non governmental agencies to cooperate in anti-drug trafficking efforts. ONCB was designated the coordinating authority. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Thai Army also became a primary agency responsible for national drug enforcement in addition to the ONCB and the PNSB. The ATS problem had also begun to spread to Hill Tribes by 1998.

In 1999 a second Special Narcotics Unit was established and trained. In March 1999, the Thai government passed their first money laundering law, which went into effect in August. This was an important measure in countering international drug trafficking and now qualified Thailand to accede to the 1988 United Nations Drug Convention. Although ATS continued to rise, heroin trafficked through Thailand remained a threat to the United States. "Thailand, nevertheless, is a major drug transit country as a significant amount of heroin transits Thailand on its way to the U.S. Indeed, Thai authorities recently made a number of large seizures of heroin headed for

the U.S.”(United States Department of State, 2000). Due to this threat and Thailand’s desire to stop it, the United States government continued to work with Thai officials to intercept heroin in Thailand, before it could reach the United States.

The heroin threat going through Thailand continued to be coming from Burma. A United States Department of State report confirmed that heroin was no longer produced within Thailand. Thailand also began to face problems with rehabilitation, as they realized that they were not equipped to deal with the new ATS drug addiction dilemma, which was much more dangerous and addictive than opium or heroin. Thailand also initiated plans to deal with the new trafficking routes coming from the Northeast and now developing in the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea.

A fourth Special Narcotics Unit was initiated in 2000 to deal with the interdiction of Sea Trafficking Routes which facilitated the trafficking of heroin and ATS into Thailand and from Thailand to the United States. In 2000, the Thai cabinet approved Thailand’s accession to the 1988, United Nations Drug Convention, but the final decision was still pending the approval of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Thailand signed, but did not ratify the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime in December 2000. International Transnational Crime was becoming the major threat in Thailand, as drugs were now increasingly linked to other organized criminal activities and providing financial support for criminal organizations.

#### **4.9.4. New Drug Trafficking Trends of International Syndicates Emerge**

As heroin became more expensive and ATS became more affordable, a new trend began to further reduce Burmese heroin and increase the production of Burmese ATS. This new trend was the introduction of Southwest Asian heroin smuggled from Pakistan into Bangkok and then redistributed throughout Asia and to the United States. With this new trend, the majority of Southeast Asian heroin being trafficked to the United States was originating in Southwest Asia.

Nigerian and other West African traffickers operating out of Bangkok would use couriers to smuggle SW Asian heroin into Bangkok, where it would be packaged and smuggled by air and sea to the United States. “Traditional trafficking

organizations are now more comfortable with the concept of increasing methamphetamine production as they face heightened competition from SW Asia for their traditional heroin product.” (United States Department of State, 2001). This trend led to the further increased production of ATS in Burma and consequently the result of ATS in addition to heroin becoming a major threat in the United States by 2000. With this increased threat for both Thailand and the United States, Thailand increased actions to counter the ATS threat as the number one threat to the nation.

The ONCB began a new Chemical Diversion Unit in 2000, to counter the precursor chemical threat. By preventing precursor chemicals from reaching Burma, ATS production could be curbed. By 2001, the Thai prison population had substantially increased during a 5 year period. Sixty-five percent of the Thai prisoners were convicted of drug related crimes. Thailand increased cooperation with Burma, China, and Laos in 2001, when they issued a Joint Statement to cooperate in countering drug trafficking. Task Force 399, a new specialized drug unit operating in the Northwest was founded and staffed by Border Patrol Police and Royal Thai Army units. The United States provided funding and training for Task Force 399.

A trend in West African traffickers using Eastern European and Russian women to traffic heroin from Southwest Asia was seen in 2001. These women may have been human trafficking victims used to traffic drugs. The Royal Thai Government further developed Thai drug policy in 2001, when they initiated a nine point national drug control strategy called the “Concentrated Effort of the Nation to Overcome Drugs”. This policy was followed by a seven point plan to address the supply and demand problem.

Thailand finally became a member of the 1988 United Nations Drug Convention on May 3, 2002. The Royal Thai government also further amended drug laws in 2002. Some of the changes allowed for wire tapping, witness protection programs, and other programs similar to the United States system. Cocaine and ecstasy became increasingly common in Thailand and facilitated by West African traffickers. These drugs were mostly used by the wealthy Thais and the foreigner population and did not generally pose a threat as being internationally trafficked. The main problem remained heroin from both Burma and Southwest Asia and the major threat of ATS. Smugglers from Burma continued to use armed couriers to carry ATS

across the border. Many of these couriers were Hill Tribes, who were no longer growing opium. Shootouts between Thai officials and couriers increased killing and injuring many Thai officials and couriers along the Thai-Burma border.

#### **4.9.5. Thaksin's War on Drugs**

All of these problems cumulated in 2003, when Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra launched a two phase war on drugs beginning in February 2003. Within the first three months of the war more than 2,500 suspected drug dealers were dead and tens of thousands were in jail. The war was focused on rooting out ATS. Thailand gained international criticism from human rights groups, as the Thai police were suspected of extrajudicial killings. The Thai government claimed that most of the deaths were caused by gang rivalries.

Thaksin declared victory in December 2003 and in 2004, the Thai government focused on rehabilitation programs and cleaning up corrupt officials. Despite the harsh methods, the drug war temporarily slowed down the ATS traffic and caused the price of ATS to rise. The drug war increased the amount of drugs trafficked from Burma through Laos to the United States, as well as developing increased routes through the Mekong River and through Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

#### **4.9.6. Thailand Encourages Neighbors to Fight Drug Trafficking**

Thailand met with India to discuss the control of precursor chemicals in 2003. The meeting resulted with the signing of a Joint Declaration. India is still a major provider of precursor chemicals to Burma. In December 2003, Thailand signed, but did not ratify the United Nations Convention Against Corruption. Armed border clashes occurred between Thai authorities and UWSA traffickers every month during 2003. The Thai government established the National Command Center for Combating Drugs (NCCD) in 2003.

In 2004, the Thai government adopted a policy of engagement to deal with Burma. The drug problem in Burma is Thailand's number one security threat. The policy of engagement makes sense, although the United States disapproved. In 2004, ATS in the form of Ice became increasingly common in Bangkok. Since Ice is the ATS preferred by the United States and international communities, it seemed that

international demand for ATS was increasing.

In 2004, the first major ATS production lab since 1997 was found in Thailand at Pathum Thani. Although this was disturbing, the majority of ATS still comes from Burma or is UWSA ATS produced or trafficked through Laos. ATS trafficking trends by speed boats on the Mekong River and by fishing boats from Burma increased in 2004.

The 2004 Special Investigations Act (SIA), allowed the creation of the Department of Special Investigations (DSI). The DSI was independent from the Royal Thai Police and would focus on high profile international cases and anti corruption cases. The DSI was a new unit designed to deal with countering drug trafficking and was funded by the DEA. The DEA and DSI also worked closely together on drug investigations. Due to the increased trafficking threat from the Northeastern border, the ONCB and PNSB began developing activities to meet the new threat. The ONCB also developed a fund to pay drug informants in 2005.

In 2006, Joint Thai-Lao Mekong River patrols increased to interdict drug trafficking from the Northeast and on the Mekong River. A new national counter drug awareness campaign was also introduced in 2006 by HRH Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya. In 2007, ONCB increased the amount of Border Liaison Offices (BLO) to coordinate joint efforts between Laos and Thailand in countering drug trafficking. The current situation with drug trafficking in Thailand and the threat remains critical. “Thailand remains an important regional transit country for heroin and methamphetamine entering the international marketplace, including the United States.” (United States Department of States, 2008). The borders of Thailand remain under constant penetration of Burmese drugs, which transit through Thailand to the United States. Drugs enter Thailand from the East, North, North-East, and West.

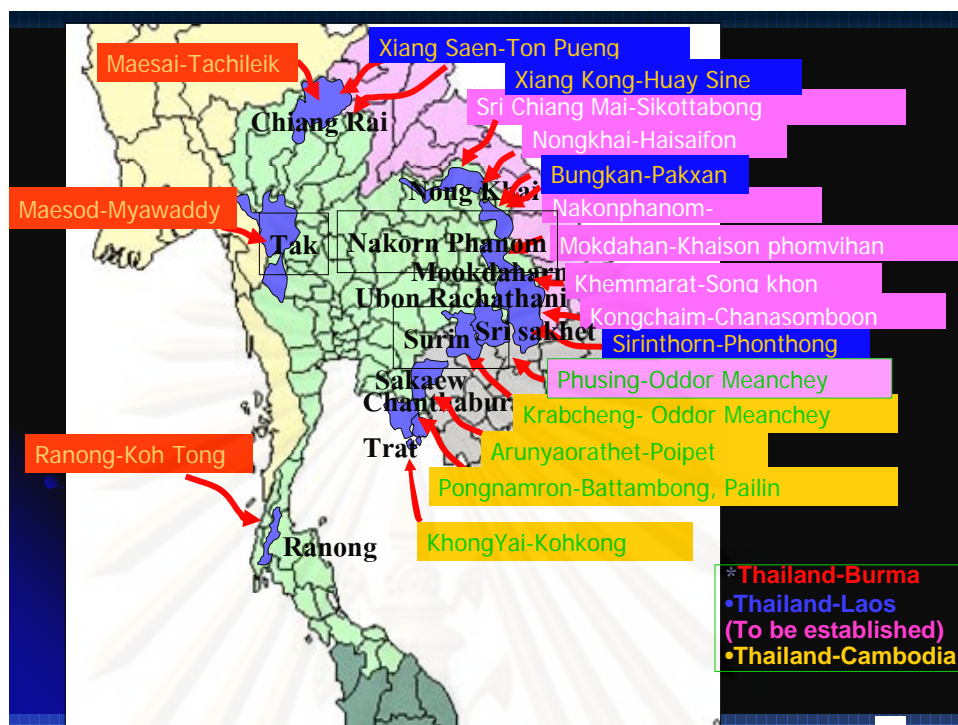


Image 4.9. Border Liaison Offices

#### 4.10. Conclusion

The drug situation in Thailand has changed significantly during the past thirty years. Thailand is no longer a major drug producing country. The threat to Thailand and the United States is now due to Thailand's role as a transit country for drugs originating in Burma and to a lesser extent Laos. The type of drug has changed from opium, to heroin, and now the ever increasing ATS. While Burmese heroin remains a threat, ATS has taken the lead in the major drug threat from Burma. Burmese heroin is still a problem and is still trafficked to the United States.

In addition to the dual threat of heroin and ATS from Burma, West African traffickers are now trafficking Southwest Asian heroin through Thailand as well. Thailand continues to serve as a leader in the Golden Triangle and is an important partner in decreasing the threat of illicit narcotics trafficked to the United States.

Although Thailand continues to develop drug enforcement and demand reduction initiatives, the major problem remains in Burma. Thailand has already taken measures to engage Burma to assist them in controlling the drug problem. The major drug threat to the United States from Thailand originates in Burma. Thailand, the

United States, and the international community must deal with Burma before the threat becomes uncontrollable.



ศูนย์วิทยทรัพยากร  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

## **CHAPTER V**

# **THE UNITED STATES AND THE THREAT FROM GOLDEN TRIANGLE**

### **5.1. Introduction**

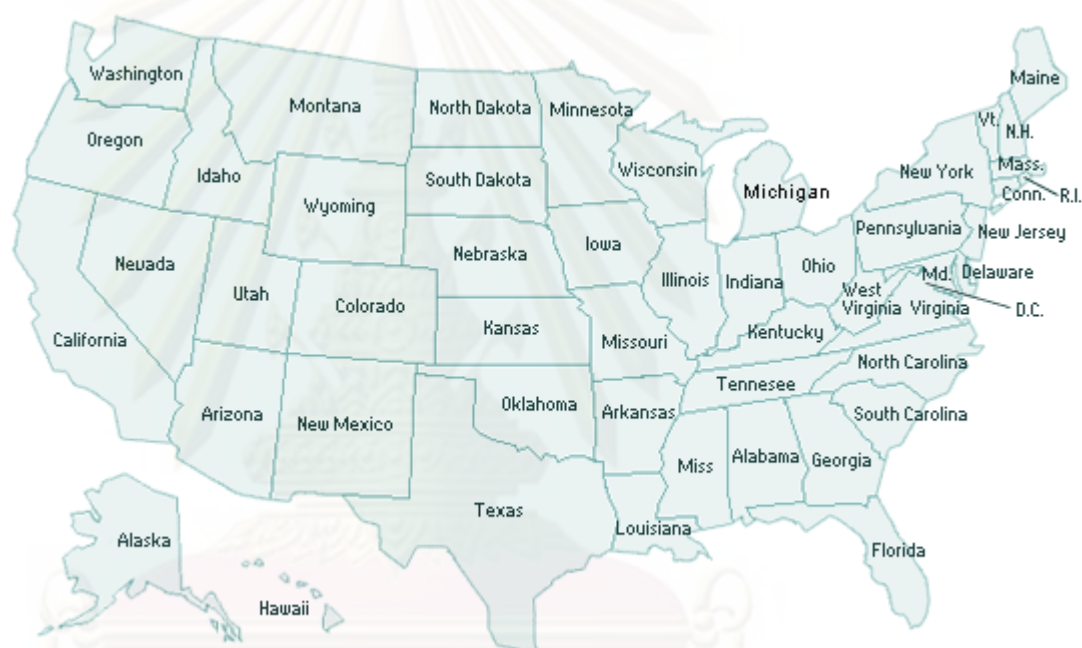
International drug trafficking from the Golden Triangle poses a critical threat to the United States of America. This threat has changed over the past decades, and is linked to involvement of the United States in Southeast Asia during the Cold War era. Before World War II, the Golden Triangle region produced very little illicit drugs for the international market. The drug threat to the United States from the Golden Triangle first became evident as United States military members fighting in the Vietnam War began returning home. Golden Triangle heroin, which had grown significantly due to the demand that United States military members created was now increasing in the United States. Golden Triangle heroin would soon be supplemented by the much more dangerous Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS). The drug threat to America costs the United States billions of dollars annually. The costs of the drug threat in the United States come in the form of social costs and criminal costs.

Drug users in the United States develop dangerous dependence on illicit drugs, which leads to health care problems and poses a danger to society. Many drug users resort to crime to finance their drug habit, which is very expensive in the United States. The facilitators of the illicit drug distribution in the United States are generally dangerous criminal organizations with international ties. Street gangs sell drugs which finance other illicit activities. The problems caused by illicit drugs in the United States are the root of crimes such as assault, automotive theft, burglary, human trafficking, kidnapping, larceny, prostitution, rape, robbery, murder, and many other crimes committed by drug abusers and criminal organizations facilitating drug trafficking. All of these crimes have been linked to illicit drugs.

Perhaps few consider that a murder or rape may have been prevented by preventing heroin or ATS originating in Burma from being produced and trafficked to the United States. The United States government has realized that the drug threat in



America needs to be fought not only in the United States, but needs to be eliminated at its roots in various countries around the world. The Golden Triangle is one of these regions and hundreds of United States diplomatic and law enforcement officials work with host nation officials in the region on a daily basis to solve the problem in the Golden Triangle and prevent it from further threatening the United States. The problems that lead to drug trafficking are various and complex. Poverty, civil war, government policies, ethnic rivalries, and other issues all lead to increased drug production and trafficking.



**Figure 5.1. Map of the United States of America**

## **5.2. United States Drug Eradication Strategies Compared to Other Western Nations**

The United States is not the only country that is affected by Golden Triangle Narcotics. The drug problem in the Golden Triangle threatens most of the western world. In many cases, Australia, Europe, and other Asian countries are more threatened by the drug threat from the Golden Triangle than the United States. Because many countries are threatened by the Golden Triangle, many different countries are involved in trying to solve the problem. The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime serves as an international coordinator. During various meetings,

representatives from around the world seek to improve a solution to the drug problem in the Golden Triangle.

The United States approach is quite aggressive as compared to the approach of the European Union (EU). The United States approach still seems to favor crop spraying and other forms of crop eradication. The United States also supports alternative development programs, but these programs often fail due to a lack of alternatives for farmers. The EU takes a less aggressive approach and does not support crop spraying. The United States approach of spraying herbicide on crops is dangerous for various reasons. First of all, crop spraying can destroy legitimate crops and increase further drug production as farmers are forced to rely even more on drug crops due to a lack of legitimate crops. Another problem is that crop spraying simply destroys a crop, but does not give an alternative livelihood to a farmer.

Crop spraying can accomplish an objective of destroying drugs that will enter the United States. The problem with this is that it only makes the matter worse. Crop spraying destroys legitimate crops and often causes health problems of an impoverished group that does not have access to health care. Next, these farmers often turn to drug lords for help after their crops are destroyed. This only creates a greater cycle of drug production and more support for the drug lords. The EU approach focuses less on forced eradication and less on a law enforcement approach. The EU approach focuses on alternative development and demand reduction.

It seems like either approach can be criticized. It is important to find a balance. It is also important to find an approach that is specific to a specific region. The danger of blanket policies can be seen with various U.S. policies that have allowed the drug problem to develop worldwide. What works in Southeast Asia, may not be the same policy that will work in South America. It is important that future policies are balanced and are formed after understanding the root of the problem. The root of the drug problem worldwide is due to insurgency and poverty. Simply spraying a crop may destroy the crop, but it will not solve the major problem of poverty and insurgency that allows the drug trade to flourish.

### **5.3. The effects of Golden Triangle Drugs in the United States**

#### **5.3.1. The Development of the Threat from the Golden Triangle**

The drug threat in the United States comes from various countries around the world. The Golden Triangle drug threat has only been a serious threat to the United States since the early 1970's. Illicit drugs trafficked to the United States are the root cause of crime and other social problems. Ironically, the drug threat from the Golden Triangle to the United States is the result of United States involvement in the region during the Cold War. The United States Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) Secret Wars supporting the Nationalist Chinese Kuomintang Army (KMT) in Burma during the 1950's, using the Hmong to fight against North Vietnam in Laos, and the United States military involvement in Vietnam, all led to the demand and increase of illicit drugs in the United States and allowed the illicit drug industry to develop in the Golden Triangle. By the 1970's heroin was rapidly entering the United States and crime was growing quickly.

During the 1970's the first of five drug wars were declared by government officials in the United States and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was formed in 1973. The United States began enacting tough drug laws in the 1970's. The DEA began increasing the number of DEA Agents working out of Bangkok in attempt to stop heroin before it reached the shores of the United States. The international criminal organizations were also working out of Bangkok, to ensure that Golden Triangle heroin could get to their criminal counterparts in the United States and fund other forms of crime.

The growth of drugs coincided with the growth of ethnic street gangs and organized criminal syndicates operating out of Southeast Asia and the United States. The mass influx of refugees from Southeast Asia also facilitated the increase of drug trafficking. Some of the new refugees had a drug use problem, some became gang members, and some were just trying to make extra cash to survive. The ethnic communities also served as criminal center to launder money and smuggle illegal aliens into the United States.

#### **5.3.2. The Effects of Drug Crime in the United States**

Drug costs to the United States come in the form of social problems and

criminal problems. These problems are interrelated. Problems such as violent crime, non-violent crime, illegal migration, disease, law enforcement programs, and social programs cost the United States government and taxpayers billions of dollars every year. A survey published in 2001, estimated that the annual drug cost to America was \$160.7 billion dollars annually. “By 2000, the economic cost of drug abuse is projected to be \$160.7 billion.”(Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2001). This cost continues to increase. This estimate included 14.9 billion dollars spent on health care costs, 110.5 billion dollars spent on productivity losses due to illness and incarceration, and 35.3 billion dollars spent on drug related criminal justice system costs.

In 1999, 625,358 people were already incarcerated for drug related crimes alone. In addition to crime, drug use caused problems such as increased social welfare costs for the state. Poverty increased, unemployment benefits and food stamps were related to drug related poverty. Drug abuse also caused many family problems such as child abuse and spousal abuse. Thousands of children have ended up in state run facilities, due to drug abuse. These children run the risk of becoming criminals in the future. The United States Department of Justice summarized the effects of the drug problem as follows:

Compounding the tremendous costs to society from drug-induced and drug-related deaths, the trafficking of illicit drugs burdens various components of domestic financial sectors as individuals and organizations frequently engage in illegal activities to generate income in order to purchase drugs or finance drug trafficking operations. Mortgage fraud, counterfeiting, shoplifting, insurance fraud, ransom kidnapping, identity theft, home invasion, personal property theft, and many other criminal activities often are undertaken by drug users and distributors to support drug addictions, to control market share, or to fund trafficking operations. (United States Department of Justice, 2007).

Some users in the United States often take a casual approach towards illegal drug use. Some may mention that it is their choice and their decision does not affect anyone but themselves. By looking at these statistics, the problem is obviously much more

complex than a personal action and personal consequences. California is a popular distribution center for illicit drugs, due to the large amount of ethnic groups with ties to relatives in drug producing nations living in the area. Most Golden Triangle heroin and ATS enters through Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area, before being distributed throughout the rest of the United States.

### **5.3.3. Los Angeles High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area**

Los Angeles and the surrounding Southern California communities have been designated a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA). According to a 2008 United States Department of Justice report, drug trafficking in Los Angeles is the link to various violent crimes run by Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO). “Many DTOs and criminal groups in the Los Angeles HIDTA that distribute illicit drugs and commit various other types of crimes-murder, alien smuggling, and weapons smuggling to further their criminal enterprises and generate profits.”(United States Department of Justice (Los Angeles), 2008:23). Drugs are clearly linked to large scale and diverse criminal activity in Los Angeles.

Methamphetamine or ATS is most popular drug of choice in Los Angeles. Heroin is popular as well, but is most popular in the Northeastern United States. ATS abuse is particularly dangerous due to its potency. ATS addicts frequently commit crime to get money to buy ATS. “Many drug abusers in Los Angeles HIDTA-particularly methamphetamine abusers-commit property crimes and identity theft to acquire money to purchase their illicit drug supplies.”(United States Department of Justice (Los Angeles), 2008:24). Incidents in Los Angeles show that crime affects innocent law abiding citizens to support drug users. Money laundering is also a crime linked to drug trafficking. Many of the ethnic gangs in Los Angeles launder money through the various ethnic enclaves in the city.

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**Figure 5.3.3. Map of Los Angeles High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area**

#### **5.3.4. San Francisco High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area**

The San Francisco Bay area and Northern California has also been designated a High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area. Large amounts of Golden Triangle drugs enter through Northern California. The major international postal facility receiving international mail from Asia is located in Oakland, California. This facility frequently intercepts drugs mailed from the Golden Triangle region. The drugs are sent from Laos and Thailand to friends and relatives living in California. “The high volume of packages transiting the area, particularly from Asia, make detection and interdiction efforts at these facilities extremely challenging for U.S. Customs officials.”(United States Department of Justice (Northern California),2008:17). Asian criminal organizations and Asian street gangs use drugs to finance their operations in Northern

California.

Some Asian gangs in California have been reported to be selling a mixture of ecstasy and ATS. Methamphetamine or ATS is also the largest drug threat in Northern California and is linked to serious crime. The drug related crime threat is as equally high as in Los Angeles. Money laundering is also a threat as in Northern California. Ethnic communities are also used to facilitate the laundering of drug profits. “Traffickers, particularly Asian criminal groups, also launder money through informal value transfer systems (IVTSs) such as hawlawas, hundi, and fei chien. Many of these IVTSs are culturally based and, because of their clandestine nature, are difficult to track.” (United States Department of Justice (Northern California), 2008:20). Another rising threat is the increasing trend of pharmaceutical drugs being trafficked from Bangkok to the United States. These drugs contain precursor chemicals that can be used to produce ATS in the United States and then quickly distributed to consumers in the United States.



**Figure 5.3.4. Map of Northern California High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area**

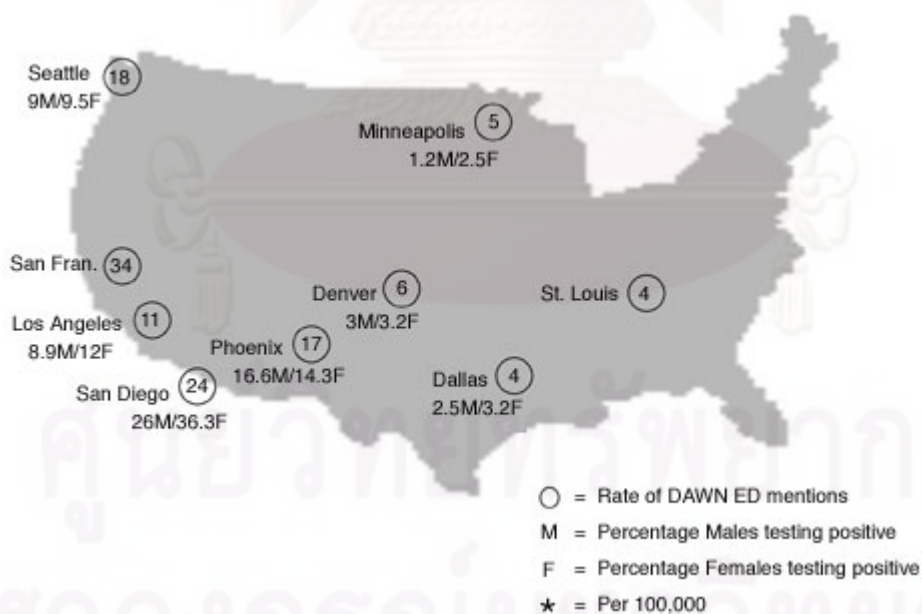
### 5.3.5. Transnational Organized Crime

As seen, drug trafficking is linked to several types of transnational crime.

Human trafficking is increasing due to the same conditions that create an environment

conducive to drug trafficking in Burma and Laos. Just as people are encouraged to deal with the drug trade, they are encouraged to migrate illegally. Many of these migrants contact a broker, who is also drug trafficker. Many of these migrants end up as victims and participants of drug related crime in the United States. Once in the United States, many of these migrants are forced to work for criminal organizations, as few other legitimate options are available. Burma, Laos, and Thailand are not only sending drugs and crime to the United States, but illegal migrants as well.

The crime that results from drug trafficking is alarming. The United States government deals with drug crime by attempting to reduce the demand of the users in the United States and by trying to decrease the supply internationally. This international supply decrease is challenged by many factors such as political relations between the United States and foreign countries, poverty levels of drug producing countries, political situation in drug producing countries, and many other complex issues. The United States has been actively involved in the Golden Triangle region for decades.



**Figure 5.3.5. ATS Addiction in the United States**



## **5.4. United States and Burma**

### **5.4.1 Overview of U.S. and Burma Relations**

The involvement of the United States in Burma has varied according to United States foreign policy. United States foreign policy has changed quite a bit during the last sixty years. United States foreign policy in Burma has allowed the drug problem in Burma to develop and now run virtually unchecked. The foreign policy of the United States government allowed the Chinese Nationalist Kuomintang Army (KMT) to sell opium to finance their insurgency against Communist China during the Cold War. The results of this led to the KMT developing the drug trade in Southeast Asia and the world. After the end of the Vietnam War, the drug problem in Southeast Asia that the United States had allowed to flourish had spread to the streets of the United States. During the 1970's, the United States government was forced to deal with the drug problem that now threatened America.

The United States government changed their foreign policy to support the Burmese government and provide funding for drug suppression and send personnel to train the drug enforcement authorities in Burma. The United States government was forced to change their policy toward Burma after the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), Burma's new military junta, brutally violated the human rights of pro-democracy demonstrators in 1988.

Since 1988, the United States government has imposed sanctions on Burma and has continued to increase sanctions, as the Burmese government continues to violate human rights, fails to combat illicit drugs, and condones money laundering. Since the 1988 sanctions, the drug situation has only gotten worse in Burma. The situation of the Burmese people has also gotten worse. The sanctions imposed by the United States government, led to underemployment and increased poverty.

The unemployment and increased poverty led to increased government corruption, increased black market trading, increased drug trafficking, increased illegal migration, increased sex trade work, and human trafficking. The situation in Burma only continues to decline and drug trafficking continues to increase.

### **5.4.2. U.S. Involvement in Burma During World War II**

Modern United States policy regarding Burma began after Burma became

independent from British colonization in 1948. During World War II, opium was illegal in the United States, but was not yet a global problem. During World War II, the United States military would actually pay local troops and villagers with opium. “The opium was distributed by American commanders to their subordinates who used it for different purposes. First, it was given to villagers to pay for information about enemy movements. Secondly, whenever there was a shortage of cash, opium was used as ‘money’ to pay for chickens, eggs, rice, salt and so on in the villages. Thirdly, Kachin soldiers under US command could be paid in opium if they asked for it.” (Lintner,1999:70). This shortsightedness of the United States and the allied troops was only the beginning of the use of opium to finance secret wars in Asia and the use of opium to fight communism.

At that time, opium was an Asian problem and it did not affect the United States. Most likely, the United States government would never have imagined that within only a few decades they would have contributed to their own drug problem. The illicit drug problem that spread to the streets of America and led to the spread of crime, all started with the actions of the United States military and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), only a few decades earlier. After Burma gained independence in 1948 and then almost immediately broke out in civil war, the ethnic insurgents began trafficking opium to support their insurgencies.

#### **5.4.3. U.S. Involvement Support of KMT in Burma**

After China fell to Communism in 1949, large numbers of KMT troops fled into Burma. The KMT troops took refuge in insurgent controlled territory, mostly in the Shan State. The Burmese government protested the KMT presence, but they could not do much about it, since they had their own civil war going on. The United States supported the KMT, and hoped that they would reinvade China and suppress the new Communist government. “The covert KMT operation that followed was the first of many similar “secret” wars that US security agencies carried out in Third World countries such as Cuba, Laos, Nicaragua, Angola, and Afghanistan.”(Lintner, 1999:119). The United States gave support to the KMT, but additional money had to come from the opium trade. The United States condoned the growth and sales of opium to finance insurgencies in the name of suppressing Communism.

Because of the United States policy of supporting the KMT in Burma's territory, relations between Burma's central government and the United States were obviously not good during this period. The KMT, were never able to re-conquer China. After decades of developing the opium trade, the KMT had become a powerful armed drug trafficking organization, and pretty much gave up on the idea invading China and focused on the lucrative drug trade. After the KMT escalated the production of opium in Burma, they were able to move into Thailand and facilitate the world wide drug trade, now run by ethnic Chinese. As the KMT, moved into the drug business, they began to play an essential role in facilitating the trafficking of heroin to the United States.

#### **5.4.4. U.S. Policy Change and Support for Burma**

As the heroin began to flood the streets of the United States, the United States government realized that they had made a policy error, in supporting the KMT and helping them become opium traffickers. "When GIs gradually returned home, the narcotics problem went from Saigon's army barracks to the middle-class suburbs in the United States. The public became alarmed and the authorities started taking measures aimed at solving the problem. Washington's first step was to build up its powerful Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)." (Lintner,1999:278). With the formation of the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), in 1973, the United States had begun a new war. This new war was a "War on Drugs". The Cold War was still ongoing, but now the drug problem was a major problem that threatened the United States.

The Cold War still had to be fought, but no longer by condoning drug trafficking. The United States government developed good relations with Burma and gave support to Burma in suppressing the opium problem that was growing and supporting the insurgencies in Burma. From 1974 until 1988, 15 bilateral pacts were signed between the United States and Burma. During these years, the United States funded drug programs in Burma, to include the donation of weapons, trucks, aircraft, communication equipment, and other equipment to combat drug armies. The United States government spent 86 million dollars on this drug enforcement aid from 1974 until 1988.

During this period, Burma's military junta had already begun to develop bad habits. The military junta in Burma was already violating human rights and abusing the drug aid equipment to fight insurgent groups, who were not involved in drug trafficking. The United States did not approve of these incidents, but needed to suppress the growing illicit drug problem. From 1985 to 1986, the United States government funded a crop spraying project. This project proved to be controversial, as villagers and farmers complained of health problems. The crop spraying also proved to be ineffective and often destroyed legitimate crops. The United States also funded a few early United Nations development projects, which failed to solve the problem.

#### **5.4.5. U.S. Sanctions Imposed and Drugs Increase**

In 1988, the SLORC brutally cracked down on civilian pro-democracy protests. The incident left thousands of innocent civilians dead. The United States government and many other western governments imposed sanctions on Burma. This decision was based on human rights violations and the undemocratic principles of the Burmese junta. The United States Department of State and the DEA had different priorities. The DEA was aware of the human rights violations and was concerned, but the drug problem had to be solved. The problem with the foreign policy of the United States was that it focused on central Burmese politics. The drug war was being fought in the remote highlands of the Shan State.

Once the United States imposed sanctions on Burma, all of the 12 million dollars per year of anti-narcotics funding also stopped. The DEA's role in helping the Burmese government suppress illicit drugs was limited to a role of intelligence sharing and conducting joint investigations. Within a year of the sanctions, the opium production in Burma doubled and then continued to grow. The Communist Party of Burma (CPB) fell in 1989, which was victory towards the Cold War, but only increased the drug trade as the United Wa State Army (UWSA) became one of the most powerful drug armies in the world and even more of a threat to the United States than before. As the insurgent groups reached ceasefires with the Burmese government, drug trafficking continued to increase. Many of the insurgents were no longer interested in democracy, and were now fighting to maintain their drug empires.

While all of this development in the drug trade was increasing, the role of the

United States was limited due to United States policy. In the meantime, the drug problem in Burma and the United States continued to grow. The United States participated in joint Burma-United States annual opium surveys from 1993-2004. After 2005, the Burmese government refused to cooperate with requests for a joint opium survey. Beginning in 2005, the United States government had to rely of the surveys conducted by the UNODC. The United States helped fund UNODC surveys and also monitored crops by satellite.

As Burma continued to violate human rights and democracy, the United States continued to impose even harsher sanctions. The United States had issued an indictment for the arrest of Khun Sa in 1990. After Khun Sa's surrender in 1996, the Burmese government refused to extradite Khun Sa to the United States. Additionally, the Burmese government refused to punish Khun Sa. The Burmese government allowed Khun Sa to invest his drug money into the legitimate economy of Burma. The actions of Burma allowing a known drug trafficker to escape punishment violated the terms of the 1988 United Nations Drug Convention, which Burma had ratified in 1991. This led to a harsher stance of the United States towards Burma.

#### **5.4.6. U.S.-Burma Relations Continue to Decline**

In 1997, the United States government prohibited American companies and American citizens to invest in Burma. During this period, Burma's economy grew weaker as foreign investment fled the country. In 2000, the United States began indirectly funding drug prevention efforts in Burma. In 2000, the United States began funding the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Wa Development project in the Wa State. The Wa project aimed at finding alternative development for farmers in the Wa State.

In 2003, the United States funded the Kokang and Wa Initiative (KOWI), another UNODC development project which aimed to sustain crop eradication efforts in the Kokang and Wa States. The United States also began funding a small crop substitution project ran by a United States Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) called "Project Old Soldier". The financial support stipulated that no money or benefit be directly given to the Burmese government. In May 2003, the United States government officially labeled the UWSA as a "Narcotics Trafficking Organization".

In 2004, Burma continued to have a poor track record on suppressing drugs. In 2004, Burma was the only country in the world to fail the annual United States drug certification process. From 2005-2008, Burma continued to fail this process, but was joined by Venezuela. The United States also continued to pressure Burma to reform banking and money laundering laws. Both former drug lords Khun Sa and Lo Hsing Han, have been allowed to become powerful businessmen in Burma. The Burmese government continued to condone money laundering and at times have outright encouraged it. "This was further enhanced in the early 1990's, with the Burmese economy on the brink of collapse, the generals turned to traffickers to invest their money in legal and semi-legal business." (McCartan, 2008). More sanctions were imposed on Burma, as they failed to suppress money laundering.

The Burmese government made some improvement in developing money laundering laws, but still faces many challenges. In 2005, the United States government issued indictments of seven UWSA leaders for conspiracy to traffic drugs to the United States. The UWSA leadership responded by threatening the lives of several DEA Agents. As a result of these death threats, the United States withdrew funding for the UNODC Wa development project. 2005 was a successful year for joint drug investigations and resulted in the capture of high level drug traffickers.

Public corruption has continued to be a problem in Burma. The United States government knows that the Burmese Army is involved in drug trafficking and suspects high level leaders of being involved. The Burmese government has never prosecuted a high level official. The United States is concerned with high level corruption and the lack of Burmese leadership in suppressing corruption, Burma does not have any laws against corruption. Due to corruption and the most recent 2007 human rights violations, the United States passed new laws to further impose sanctions against the Burmese government in 2007. The Burmese government once again reacted with military force against peaceful demonstrators in 2007. In September 2007, the United States government issued Executive Order 13310, which imposed an asset block on 25 senior Burmese government officials. The asset block was further expanded in October 2007 when Executive Order 13348 was issued. Executive Order 13348 blocked assets for officials who violate human rights and guilty of public corruption. In 2007, one of the UWSA leaders wanted by the United

States died; another was arrested in Hong Kong. Khun Sa, who was wanted for drug trafficking in the United States since 1994 died in October 2007.

In February 2008, the United States imposed more sanctions on 33 Burmese Generals and imposed sanctions on Lo Hsing Han and his son Steven Law, who have used their drug money to become powerful business men in Burma. On April 30, 2008, Executive Order 13464 froze all property and assets in the United States owned by the Burmese government or anyone connected with the Burmese government.

#### **5.4.7. The Effects of U.S. Sanctions**

The effects of the sanctions are obvious in Burma. The sanctions are intended to punish the Burmese junta leaders; however, they hardly affect them. The Burmese junta leaders make most of their money through trade with other countries in Asia and most likely through corruption and drug money. The victims of the sanctions are the Burmese citizens, who the United States has aimed to protect their human rights. The sanctions have only led to more suffering, disease and crime that affect the average citizen who is not involved in politics.

Thailand alone has more than 2 million illegal Burmese migrants that have fled Burma. Many of these migrants work in the sex trade and return to Burma with HIV. Many of these migrants are trafficked to the United States, where they further fuel organized crime in America. Many young women leave Burma to work in the sex trade, due to massive unemployment and poverty. "The same syndicates which smuggle drugs to the west now also control the traffic of illegal migrants, mostly from China's coastal Fujian province, to the United States, Australia, and Europe." (Lintner, 1995:2). Many of these women become victims of human trafficking. The human traffickers are the same organized gangs that are involved in drug trafficking. Due to unemployment, the domestic drug use in Burma is rising and HIV has spread due to needle sharing of heroin users. Due to poverty and the lack of unemployment, many are encouraged to enter the drug business either as drug producers or traffickers.

The United States government is well aware that Burma needs international help to solve these serious problems that create drug trafficking. The United States refuses to remove sanctions until Burma improves their human rights records, respects

democracy, fights money laundering, fights corruption, and stops drug trafficking. These problems are unlikely to be solved anytime soon. Since the government of Burma cannot conduct legitimate trade with half of the world, they are forced to turn to income through illegitimate means.

Even if the United States continues to impose sanctions, some revisions of these sanctions towards international development and narcotics suppression plans are desperately needed. If the United States is not careful, this problem will become uncontrollable. Just as United States policy against containing Communism led to the spread of heroin bombarding the United States, the current United States policy is already creating future problems with ATS and human trafficking. This problem is not just a problem that will stay in Burma. If the United States does not help solve the problem, it will only continue to spread to the streets of the United States.

## **5.5. United States and Laos**

### **5.5.1. Overview of U.S. Involvement in Laos**

The United States government takes a particular interest in funding counter narcotics programs in Laos. Just as Laos was a key country to be controlled during the Cold War, Laos is a key country to control the threat of illicit narcotics entering other Southeast Asian countries and ultimately the United States. Just as few American citizens were aware of United States actions in Laos during the Cold War, likewise few are probably aware that the United States is actively engaged in counter-narcotics work in Laos today. Since the major threat in Laos today is ATS and heroin trafficked from Burma, the United States government takes a particular interest in helping the Lao government develop law enforcement resources, develop alternative development projects, rehabilitate drug addicts, eliminate poverty, and prevent precursor chemicals from being smuggled into Burma.

The actions of the United States in Laos are critical due to the inability of the United States to solve the problem within Burma. This is due to current foreign policy regarding Burma. Since the current United States policy limits drug enforcement and reduction efforts in Burma, the Burmese problem and the Lao problem have to be solved together from Laos. United States policy towards Laos has evolved over the years; however, the importance of controlling events in Laos has not changed.



### **5.5.2. The Increase of Drugs Trafficked to the U.S. from Laos**

The threat of illicit drugs from Southeast Asia to the United States did not become an issue until the United States started enforcing Cold War policies through Secret Wars in Burma and Laos. In Laos, the Hmong were used to fight the Secret War for the CIA. This Secret War increased opium production and eventually contributed to number 4 heroin being processed in Laos and shipped to United States troops in Vietnam.

As United States military members returned to the United States, so did the drug problem. Former United States military members would often receive heroin in the mail from friends still in Vietnam and in return could sell it on the streets of the United States. Several former military members operating out of Thailand, facilitated heroin smuggling to the United States as well. As the United States began pulling out of Vietnam, organized criminal organizations began large scale heroin trafficking from Southeast Asia to the United States. The Chiu Chao syndicate was the major international drug trafficking organization operating in the Golden Triangle and developed a strong presence in Laos. In the early 1970's drug shipments from Laos began threatening the United States.

In April 1971, Lao Prince Sopsaisang was arrested in France with 60 kilograms of Double UO Globe heroin that was destined for New York City. It is believed that he was trafficking the heroin for General Vang Pao, who was running a heroin refinery out of Long Tieng, Laos at that time. On November 1971 a Filipino Diplomat and an ethnic Chinese business man from Bangkok left Laos with 15.5 kilograms of Double UO Globe heroin and were arrested after they arrived in New York City.

In April 1972, Chinese Sailors were arrested in New York City with 5 kilograms of UO Double Globe heroin that was transited through Bangkok. During the same month another group of Chinese sailors were arrested in Miami with 10 kilograms of Double UO Globe heroin. Just as the problem of drug trafficking from Laos was beginning, the United States pulled out of Laos beginning in 1974 after the Paris Peace Treaty and by 1975 only a small United States Embassy staff was left in Laos under the charge of a Charge D Affaires. This left Laos vulnerable to increased

drug trafficking and no international support was left in Laos to help solve the problems. Laos only continued to develop as a major drug producing and transit country after its fall to Communism. The threat to the United States continued to develop.

### **5.5.3. Hmong Refugees in the United States and the Increase of Drug Crime**

With the influx of Hmong refugees after 1975, many were relocated to the United States. Many of the Hmong refugees had trouble adapting to life in the United States. The new Hmong refugee population created a new problem for crime in the United States. Some of the Hmong refugees formed street gangs. Many of the street gangs facilitated drug trafficking from Laos and sold drugs in the United States to finance their gang activities. The Lao Crips in California are a major domestic drug threat in the United States today.

Cambodia, Chinese, and Vietnamese gangs also use drugs originating from the Golden Triangle, often trafficked through Laos, to finance their criminal activities. Many Hmong in Laos were still fighting the Pathet Lao, but without the support of the United States. These freedom fighters depended on drug trafficking for financial support, just like insurgent groups in Burma. Many of these groups had Hmong contacts in the United States and began sending opium and heroin through the mail in addition to the huge shipments facilitated by ethnic Chinese criminal organizations with worldwide connections.

During the mid 1980's the United States government no longer supported the Hmong and recognized the new Lao government. The Neo Hom and Hmong were quickly fading as being freedom fighters and would soon be viewed as terrorists. Cooperation with Laos was necessary for the United States to solve the narcotics problem coming from Laos. Laos became particularly important to the United States after 1988 when diplomatic relations and drug support were broken off with Burma.

### **5.5.4. The U.S. Changes Policy to Support the Communist Lao Government**

The pattern of breaking diplomatic ties with Burma and establishing

diplomatic ties with Laos was a logical decision. Within months after breaking off diplomatic support for Burma, the United States and Laos signed a Bilateral Cooperation on Narcotics Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) in 1989. “Since 1989, the United States has provided more than \$42 million to support the GOL crop control, demand reduction, and law enforcement programs.”(United States Department of State, 2008). This MOU allowed for training and funding of Counter Narcotics police, demand reduction programs, and development projects.

In 1989, the United States and Laos also signed the first Lao Crop Control Project and agreed to sign new agreements annually. In March 1990, the United States initiated efforts to improve infrastructure by funding a road building project in Houng Phan, Sam Nuea Province. In May 1990, the United States Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs discussed the threat of the heroin trade from the Golden Triangle and the importance of improving United States-Lao relations.

In November 1991, the Charge D Affaires at the United States Embassy in Laos was replaced with an Ambassador and full diplomatic relations was restored between the United States and Laos in 1992. After diplomatic relations was restored in 1992, a United States and Lao Bilateral Law Enforcement Agreement was signed. Although Laos has still not agreed to sign an extradition treaty with the United States, Laos has cooperated by informally returning drug fugitives wanted in the United States. The first example of this was seen in 1992, when the Lao government extradited a United States citizen captured by Lao authorities, who was wanted for drug trafficking charges in the United States. In March 1992, the United States donated helicopters and provided pilot training to the Lao government for use in counter narcotics operations.

#### **5.5.5. The U.S. Increases Anti-Drug Funding to Laos**

In 1996, the United States began funding drug rehabilitation programs in Laos. In 1997, the United States and Laos agreed to extend crop control projects to Oudomxai province. In 1997, the United States also agreed to fund seven more Counter Narcotics Units. A plan was initiated to create a total of ten Counter Narcotics Units in Laos. The United States Customs Service and the DEA increased training of Lao officials beginning in 1997.

In 1998, the United States funded the creation of a third drug rehabilitation center in Laos. In 1998, the United States agreed to fund a new crop control project in Phongsali Province. In 1998, the first DEA Agent since 1975 was assigned to Laos. In 1999, the United States funded the creation of a fifth and sixth drug rehabilitation centers in Laos. In addition to local training, Lao officials began being sent to the newly created United States funded and operated International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Bangkok. The drawback was that only senior officials could go to ILEA and street level officials continued to lack proper training.

In 2002, a new demand reduction MOU was signed between the United States and Laos. The United States agreed to fund new rehabilitation programs to treat heroin and the new threat of ATS. In 2002, United States Customs Service seized a large number of opium and heroin parcels entering the United States from Laos. Many of these parcels were being mailed by Hmong living in Laos to Hmong relatives and friends living in the United States. To counter this problem, the United States bought X-Ray machines for the Lao government that could detect narcotics. The United States donated these X-Ray machines to Laos and provided training on how to properly use the X-Ray machines to detect and interdict smuggled narcotics.

In 2003, Lao Customs cooperated with the DEA to arrest a United States drug fugitive in Laos and informally transferred him to the custody of United States authorities. By 2004 United States counter narcotics policy in Laos focused on four major areas. The focus was on eradicating opium poppy in Laos, suppressing the trafficking of illicit drugs and precursor chemicals, and funding demand reduction programs. 2004 also marked an increased number of Hmong opium shipments being intercepted at postal facilities in Oakland, California. This increase was frustrating, since the United States had recently purchased X-Ray machines for the Lao government.

#### **5.5.6. The U.S. and Laos Work Together to Eliminate Drugs**

Relations between the United States and Laos improved again in 2004, when the President of the United States signed a bill that extended normal trade agreements with Laos. In February 2005, the United States signed a Bilateral Trade Agreement with Laos. The Bilateral Trade Agreement has helped to improve the Lao economy.

In 2007, Vang Pao who had previously led the army for the CIA in Laos during the Vietnam War was arrested in California. Vang Pao was implicated in a plot to buy weapons to supply to rebel Hmong fighters in Laos. His plan was to violently overthrow the Lao government. While Cold War policy supported Vang Pao's cause, the new War on Terror policy now labeled him a terrorist. Vang Pao is currently awaiting trial and is charged with violating the Neutrality Act. The United States now has diplomatic relations with Laos, and no longer recognizes Vang Pao's cause. If convicted, Vang Pao could face life imprisonment.

Since 2006, Laos is no longer a major threat to the United States regarding opium and heroin. Although this threat has been reduced, it may only be temporary. Half of the former opium growers are at risk of returning to opium growing due to a lack of alternative livelihood options. ATS is only rising. Since ATS is a fairly new threat, the exact amount of ATS arriving in the United States from Laos and the Golden Triangle is still unknown.

The United States Department of State's 2007 International Narcotics Report reported that ATS and opium are being trafficked to the United States from Laos, with ATS being more of a threat than opium and heroin. The opium problem is minor, compared to the potential explosion of ATS. ATS is the drug of choice in Northern California and other United States cities. Cambodian, Lao, Vietnamese, and Chinese criminal organizations operate within the United States. These organizations depend on illicit drugs, weapons, and human trafficking from the Golden Triangle to fund their crime conducted in the United States.

## **5.6. United States and Thailand**

### **5.6.1. The Development of U.S.-Thai Anti-Narcotics Cooperation**

The United States and Thailand have enjoyed a long friendly working relationship first in countering Communism and then in countering drugs. United States and Thailand's Cold War policy led to the growth of drugs in Thailand. Thailand has suffered from the threat that has risen from Burma and Laos as a result of Cold War policies that led to an increase of heroin and recently ATS trafficked through Thailand. Thailand overcame its own illicit opium and heroin problems, but

continues to face the constant threat as a transit state for heroin and ATS headed to the United States and other international ports. Thailand and the United States continue to work together to combat drugs in Thailand, before they reach the streets of the United States.

The United States has only relatively recently realized the drug threat coming from Thailand. The first United States drug enforcement office was established in Bangkok in the late 1960's with only three employees. In 1971, the first narcotics control agreement was signed between the United States and Thailand. In the early 1970's, as the Vietnam War ended, the increase of Golden Triangle heroin heading to the United States transited through Bangkok. Bangkok became the major transit center for Golden Triangle heroin trafficked to the United States. As this threat became evident, the United States increased anti-narcotics activities in the region. By 1974, the United States narcotics office in Bangkok had grown from 3 employees to a staff of 30 DEA Agents. DEA agents began to work with Thai officials to try to intercept heroin shipments before they could reach the United States.

#### **5.6.2. U.S.-Thai Cooperation in Joint Operations and Training**

In 1991, the United States and Thailand signed an extradition treaty. Since 1991, Thailand has been extremely cooperative in extraditing international drug criminals to the United States. In 1994, the DEA cooperated with Thai officials in Operation Tiger Trap, which resulted in the capture of 13 Shan State Army (SUA) drug traffickers and the implication of corrupt Thai officials involved in drug trafficking.

In January 1996, a Thai politician was the first Thai citizen extradited to the United States. Thanong Siriprechapong was extradited to the United States after being found guilty of drug trafficking to the United States. During the 1990's the United States government worked with the Thai government to develop several bilateral programs to prevent drug trafficking. These programs focused on anti-drug training for Thai law enforcement officials, funding for crop control programs, and funding for demand reduction programs. DEA has taken the lead in United States counter drug efforts by conducting joint investigations with the Thai authorities as well as providing training to the Thai Army and Police.

The United States Department of Defense and Customs also work with Thai officials to provide training and have helped with anti-smuggling projects. Joint DEA-Thai investigations in 1996 led to the arrest of several Nigerian drug traffickers in both Thailand and the United States. In 1997, Thailand extradited 17 criminals to the United States of which 16 were drug related cases. Seven of the seventeen were Thai citizens, while the rest were Chinese and West African traffickers responsible for international drug trafficking from Thailand to the United States.

In 1997, three more high-level drug traffickers were extradited to the United States; two of these criminals were caught during the 1994 Operation Tiger Trap. Beginning in 1997, the United States government coordinated for high level support to aid the Thai government in legal reforms. The United States Embassy in Bangkok coordinated to send an Assistant United States Attorney and a Federal Judge to work directly with the Thai Ministry of Justice. This program was called "The Professionals in Residence Program". The United States also arranged video conferencing to facilitate the consultation between drug officials in the United States and Thailand.

In 1998, 14 more criminals were extradited from Thailand to the United States, 11 of which were drug related cases. Of these criminals, 5 were Thai, and the remainder were Chinese and West African traffickers. The United States funded the creation of the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in 1998. ILEA was co founded by Thailand and located in Bangkok, to serve as a counter drug training center for law enforcement officials in the region.

In 1999, the Bangkok DEA introduced the Drug Abuse and Resistance Education (DARE) program to Thailand. DARE was intended to aid Thailand in drug reduction and awareness programs. DEA trained 33 members of the Royal Thai Police, who then became DARE officers. The United States continued to fund crop control projects, annual surveys, and other counter-drug activity during 1999.

In 2000, the United States and Thailand signed an Asset Sharing Agreement, which aided in seizing funds of international traffickers. In 2000, The DEA and the Thai authorities began investigations which led to a series of raids on Thailand based organizations running on-line companies selling illegal pharmaceutical drugs to consumers in the United States. Joint DEA and Thai investigations provided intelligence regarding Thai and Chinese traffickers shipping heroin from Bangkok to

several United States cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York. DEA and Thai investigations in 2000 also led to the dismantling of 3 major West African syndicates who were trafficking heroin from Bangkok to criminal street gangs in Chicago.

### **5.6.3. The Threat of ATS**

As ATS became a major threat to Thai society in Thailand, United States drug experts were already beginning to fear that a similar ATS epidemic would spread to American youth. By 2001, these predictions had become true. By 2001, the United States was now facing a threat of both heroin and ATS being trafficked from the Golden Triangle to major cities in the United States. ATS seizures increased in 2001 and heroin continued to flow in as well. ATS began arriving in the United States via the postal service.

In 2001, several cases of ATS from residents in Thailand were mailed to Thais living in California. “There were reports that ATS produced in facilities operated by the United Wa State Army in Burma were being exported by Thailand-based traffickers to customers in the United States. Parcels mailed from Thailand to Thai nationals living in north-central and southern California have been found to contain methamphetamine tablets, and the quantities being seized increased in 2001.”(United States Department of State, 2002). A new trend of Burmese ATS was now threatening the United States in addition to heroin. This ATS threat continued to increase in 2002.

In 2002, the ATS threat from Burma could be seen transiting through both Laos and Thailand, as an increase in packages from Laos and Thailand were mailed to both Lao and Thai living in California. DEA and Thai authorities also dismantled another major West African drug syndicate providing heroin to dealers in the Midwestern United States in 2002. The trend of rising ATS shipments and continued heroin shipments entering the United States from Bangkok showed that drug threats to the United States were only increasing from the Golden Triangle region.

In 2003, the United States and Thailand signed a Bilateral Agreement on Narcotics and Law Enforcement assistance. The Bilateral Agreement continued to be signed annually and continued to fund and improve ILEA and other projects directed



at countering drug trafficking. Mailed shipments of ATS to the United States continued to increase in 2003. Joint DEA and Thai investigations in 2003, linked West African Syndicates to facilitating the increase of Southwest Asian heroin trafficked through Thailand and to the United States. The investigations linked the West African traffickers operating in Bangkok to organized criminal organizations responsible for dealing drugs in major United States cities. Smaller cases intercepted small time traffickers of cocaine and ecstasy to the United States through Bangkok. The major trend however remained ATS and heroin. In 2004, more ATS and heroin trafficked from Bangkok was seized in several United States cities.

#### **5.6.4. Continued Cooperation and Developments**

2004 also marked an increase of illegal pharmaceutical drugs being trafficked to the United States from Thailand. The Thai cooperation on these drugs remained a low priority, since most were not actually illegal in Thailand. Increased legal reforms in 2005, allowed the DEA to use Thai wiretaps to convict international traffickers in United States courts.

In 2006, the United States government supported the Thai-Lao Mekong River patrols by purchasing boats for drug patrols. The United States also funded a new Drug Intelligence Center in Northeastern Thailand to counter the increasing new drug routes from Burmese traffickers into Northeastern Thailand. The United States also funded a program to evaluate Thai drug rehabilitation programs in 2006 and again in 2007.

Thailand continues to extradite drug traffickers to the United States. Two international criminals were extradited to the United States from Thailand in 2006 and five more were extradited in 2007. The United States provided more funding for Thai-Lao border drug enforcement initiatives in 2007 by funding the expansion of Border Liaison Offices (BLO).

Heroin continues to be trafficked through Thailand into the United States by transnational organized crime syndicates. ATS continues to be trafficked into the United States by mail as well as by sea and air. United States and Thai anti-drug trafficking cooperation remains strong and critical in reducing the drug threat to the United States.

Drug trafficking is increasingly linked to human trafficking and Thailand has also become a major center for human trafficking either as a final destination or a transit point for the United States and other destinations. The United States continues to fund various anti drug programs through annual Letters of Agreement (LOA) signed annually between the United States and Thailand. Thailand is critical in containing the drug threat to the United States; however, long term solutions to dealing directly with the situation in Burma are needed, before the drug threat to the United States can be substantially reduced.

### **5.7. The Role of China in Combating Drug Trafficking**

The role of China has changed from a traditional Cold War enemy of the United States and other Southeast Asian countries, to a partner in winning the war on drugs. Ironically, the Cold War against China allowed the drug problem in Southeast Asia to evolve. The involvement of China is very important for many reasons. First of all, opium addiction has destroyed Chinese society and the lives of ethnic Chinese all over the world. The Chinese government has a long history of trying to control opium and other drugs.

The opium problem in China is linked to the British and French, who forced China to accept opium trading after fighting two opium wars and imposing unequal treaties on China. Also, after the Communist Party took over in China in 1949, opium suppression was a major objective of the new government. The Communist suppression of opium producers and users pushed these people along with the nationalist Kuomintang Army into Burma, Laos, and Thailand. The United States, on the other hand was focused on winning the Cold War at all costs, even if it meant an increase in opium in Southeast Asia. As a result of U.S. Cold War policies, the KMT and other ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia and all over the world became major players in the drug trade

China is now an important player in helping the United States and Southeast Asian countries to prevent and suppress drug trafficking. China plays an important role by working with Southeast Asian countries through bilateral, multilateral, and regional agreements. China is a major player in working with ASEAN to combat drug trafficking. China is also important, since they are the closest ally to Burma. China

also works closely with Laos and Thailand. China has a considerable interest in the Golden Triangle region, since the Golden Triangle drug threat both involves and threatens China. Drug trafficking through China is now a major route for narcotics produced in Burma. This route goes through China to the South China Sea and then onto the United States. China is also a major producer of precursor chemicals and a provider of Chinese chemists, who work help drug lords in Burma produce heroin and ATS.

China also helps develop alternative options to drug production and trafficking, by helping Burma, Laos, and Thailand to further develop a licit economy. China does this through free trade agreements. Free trade between ASEAN countries and China is constantly improving. This can be seen with the building of an international interstate linking Kunming, China with Bangkok. Of course, the negative impact of this interstate is that it can also further facilitate drug trafficking. In 2000, China and ASEAN countries signed an agreement to cooperate to combat drug trafficking. This agreement is known as the ASEAN and China Cooperative Operations in Response to Dangerous Drugs (ACCORD). Under the ACCORD agreement, China works with Burma, Laos, and Thailand to prevent drug trafficking and other transnational crime. China has also helped Burma, Laos, and Thailand with law enforcement training.

China also cooperates with United States law enforcement officials to combat international drug trafficking to the United States. Chinese authorities cooperate with DEA investigations and work with U.S. officials to stop illicit drugs transiting China enroute to the United States. China is also an important partner for the United States, due to their close political relationship with Burma. Chinese cooperation is also important, since international criminal organizations of Chinese ethnicity and or Chinese citizenship have operations with connections in Burma, China Laos, Thailand, and the United States.

## **5.8. Conclusion**

The links between illicit drugs, crime and various threats to society in the United States are very clear. The United States government has recognized the

importance of taking an active role in the Golden Triangle to work towards eradicating drugs in the region, which will then reduce the threats to the United States. The trends have changed, but the threat remains. Thailand has remained an important leader and partner in the region. Laos is quickly developing positively to counter drug trafficking, but still faces many challenges. Burma continues to remain the major threat. Drug related crime continues to threaten the United States domestically and the United States continues to work to counter the drug problem both domestically and abroad.



Figure 5.8. International Drug Trafficking Routes

ศูนย์วิทยทรัพยากร  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1. Summary of Findings**

##### **6.1.1 An Overview of the Golden Triangle Drug Problem**

The Golden Triangle remains a volatile region. The problems of civil war, poverty, political issues, and socio-economic problems create an environment conducive to drug trafficking. The drug problem has developed due to colonialism and United States involvement in the region during the Cold War region in addition to ethnic minority insurgents that turned into heavily armed drug lords. The threatening situation in the Golden Triangle is made possible by the continued unstable factors and weak governments in the region.

As infrastructure has been developed, trafficking increases. With the reduction of opium, many people do not have access to alternative livelihoods and face new problems that often encourage them to return to opium growing, become involved with the trafficking of Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) trade, or illegally migrate. ATS has more than taken up the slack left by the decrease of opium and heroin. ATS is a much more powerful drug. It is easier to produce, traffic, and it is harder to interdict. Just as Laos and Thailand began to eradicate the opium and heroin threat, ATS emerged. ATS is a fairly new drug in the region and will require a substantial effort to suppress.

Opium, heroin, and an emerging trend of ATS threaten the United States. To counter this threat, the United States is involved with development and interdiction work in Laos and Thailand. The United States goal is to try to stop the spread of drugs in Southeast Asia, before it can further increase the livelihood of organized criminal organizations with ties to organized crime in the United States.

This research found that the drug production and trafficking trends in the Golden Triangle region have changed during the past sixty years. The findings indicate that the threat to the United States has continued to increase, particularly within the past thirty years. The threat of Golden Triangle drugs to the United States is linked to past policies and actions of the United States in the region. The United

States involvement in the region became quite strong during World War II.

After World War II, colonization was declining and the United States Cold War had begun. The United States Cold War policy was largely responsible for the increased production of opium and heroin in the region. With the fall of China to Communism in 1949, remnants of the Chinese Nationalist Kuomintang Army (KMT) fled into Burma. The United States backed the KMT Army with the help of Thailand, who had already developed contacts with them during World War II. The United States tolerated the KMT's opium trafficking into Thailand because it financed a secret war against China. Also, even though opium was illegal in the United States, it was not yet illegal in most of Southeast Asia.

The Cold War Policy also led to another secret war in Laos. The secret war in Laos coincided with the United States war against Northern Vietnam. The United States used Hmong tribal fighters to fight against the North Vietnamese. In return, Hmong opium growing and trafficking was tolerated by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). These policies of financing secret wars against Communism by tolerating opium and heroin trafficking, led to the creation of the Golden Triangle.

By the late 1960's refineries were producing number 3 heroin and number 4 heroin was soon developed with the help of Hong Kong chemists. These heroin refineries in Burma and Laos provided a spike in the amount of heroin trafficked into Thailand and South Vietnam. During the 1960's and early 1970's, little heroin was exported internationally. The reason for this was because the market and the demand for heroin was located in Southeast Asia. The major users were the thousands of United States service members stationed in Vietnam and in Thailand. Ironically, the CIA was supporting the opium production of the Hmong, which was in return being sold to American troops in the region.

After the United States began withdrawing troops in the early 1970's, the market was drying up in Southeast Asia. To compensate for this loss, international criminal syndicates began to send the heroin to where the demand had transferred. That new demand was now in the United States. In addition to Chinese, Thai, Lao, and Burmese traffickers, many former United States military members became involved in trafficking heroin to the United States. Most of the international trade was now run by ethnic Chinese traffickers with worldwide connections.

Before the early 1970's, drugs in the United States were only a minor problem experienced by the poorest of Americans. After the end of the Vietnam War, heroin was now a problem experienced by the middle and upper class. Heroin was sweeping the United States like a plague. It took quite sometime for the United States government to realize where the heroin was coming from. In the early 1970's, United States officials began intercepting heroin shipments that had been smuggled from the Golden Triangle region. The United States government reorganized several government organizations and focused on combating the new drug threat. In order to combat this threat, the United States government passed several tough drug laws and created the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). During the early 1970's, several DEA agents were sent to work with local government officials in Bangkok. Their mission was to intercept drug shipments destined to the United States.

Heroin only increased, due to government policies in Laos and Burma. These policies caused more drugs to be smuggled into Thailand and into the United States. Opium and heroin production continued to rise throughout the 1990's. By the late 1990's, opium and heroin production began to decline in Burma, Laos, and Thailand. The negative side of this decline presented an even greater threat to Southeast Asia, the United States, and the world. While opium and heroin production have declined, opium and heroin are still heavily produced in Burma today. With the decline of opium and heroin, drug lords and traffickers now focus on the more dangerous Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS).

ATS is a more dangerous drug, because it is easier to produce, cheaper to produce, easier to smuggle, and harder to detect. ATS does not depend on large labor to produce and does not depend on weather conditions. As opium is being eradicated, former opium farmers face poverty. Former opium farmers face a lack of alternative development and the risk of farmers returning to growing opium is greater with the lack of opportunities, relaxed law enforcement, and the rising price of opium and heroin due to a shortage. The lack of alternative development also leads to other problems. Former opium farmers now serve as couriers for ATS; it is their new profession as opium is decrease. The threat is now much more serious. The flow of drugs and illegal migrants to the United States finances organized criminal organization in the United States and leads to increased drug use and the increase in

crime rates in the United States and Southeast Asia. Poverty and political problems in the Golden Triangle continue to fuel the demand, supply, and the threat to the United States.

### **6.1.2 Drugs in Burma**

The drug situation in Burma is the root of the drug problem in the Golden Triangle. The majority of illicit drugs are produced in Burma and then smuggled into Laos and Thailand and then onto the United States and other international markets. Burma is the world's number two opium and heroin producer and Asia's number one ATS producer. The corrupt government in Burma along with the ongoing civil war has produced an environment conducive to drug trafficking. Burma is one of the poorest nations in the world. The lack of legitimate opportunities have led to illegitimate opportunities which include drug trafficking and illegal migration, which has also led to human trafficking and the transfer of international crime out of Burma to international markets.

Several different groups are involved in drug production and trafficking from Burma. The major power holders have changed over the years. The current most powerful drug trafficking organization in Burma is the United Wa State Army (UWSA). UWSA controls the drug trade in Burma. Smaller groups are also involved under the umbrellas of the UWSA. While the UWSA controls drugs coming in to Thailand from the north and the northeast, the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA) controls drugs entering Thailand from the west. Organized criminal syndicates are responsible for the international traffic of drugs from Burma to the United States.

The Burmese government claims to not be able to control the groups. It seems however, that the Burmese government has maintained a pattern of allowing certain groups to traffic drugs in exchange for helping the Burmese government fight against other ethnic groups. This pattern is evident throughout history as can be seen in the case of the Ka Kwe Ye Homeguard Units, the deals made with Khun Sa and Lo Hsing Han, allowing former drug dealers to invest drug money in the legitimate economy, and now most recently the deal made with various drug armies in the ceasefire agreements. The recent ceasefire agreements have made matters even worse. With the



ceasefire, drug armies produce drugs with decreased interference from the Burmese government. The Burmese government has not made matters any better by ruthlessly suppressing democracy and siding with different drug lords. Burmese policy in dealing with drug armies has led to the increase of the drug trade in Burma.

Burma is a threat to the neighboring countries in the Golden Triangle. Drugs from Burma are trafficked through China, Laos and Thailand and onto the United States and other international markets. UWSA has diversified operations by operating heroin and ATS refineries across the border in Laos. United States sanctions prevent any significant international aid for improving the economy and the solving the drug problem. As long as United States sanctions remain, the drug threat to Burma's neighbors and to the United States will also remain. Burma's goal is to be drug free by 2014. It appears that Burma will most likely not reach this goal.

### **6.1.3 Drugs in Laos**

Drug trafficking in Laos has evolved due to French colonial policies and the United States involvement in Laos during the Vietnam War. Additionally, Laos has suffered from years of civil war which have led to increased conditions conducive to drug trafficking. Most of the opium production in Laos has taken place in the northern mountains of Laos. The growers are mostly Hill Tribes living high in the mountains. The opium grown by the Hill Tribes is used as medicine and as a cash crop to buy food. Some of the opium and heroin refineries have been run by Hmong rebels fighting against the central Lao government. A large majority of the heroin and now ATS refineries that are operated in Northwestern Laos are operated by UWSA in Burma.

The major threat of Laos is now as a major trafficking route for heroin and ATS produced in Burma. Drugs from Burma are trafficked through Laos and then re-smuggled into Cambodia, China, Thailand, and Vietnam before being trafficked to the United States and other international markets.

In 2006, Laos declared its status as opium free. Laos declared that it was no longer a major threat toward international drug trafficking. This good news was followed by worse news; the bad news is that Laos struggles with sustainment of opium eradication and the rising threat of ATS.

Another threat is that 50 percent of former opium growers in Laos risk returning to opium growing and production. The growers who have stopped are also involved with smuggling ATS. The major challenge in Laos is sustainment of eradication efforts. Finding an alternative form of employment for former opium producers is still a major problem. Laos is one of the poorest countries in the world.

Laos has only recently opened up to the world and the United Nations and other organizations are helping the Lao government meet international drug trafficking standards. Lao authorities are still having challenges addressing issues such as corruption and getting the police to actually stop drug trafficking.

With the decrease of opium, ATS has now become the major problem in Laos. The increase of ATS, led to increased addiction within Laos. Laos became a major trafficking route, as Thailand increased border security in the north. Heroin and ATS from Burma became easier to smuggle into Laos, due to the relaxed law enforcement and corruption. After drugs are smuggled into Laos, they are then re-smuggled into Thailand at different points along the porous border.

The Hmong and other ethnic minorities in Laos are still sending opium to relatives in the United States. These shipments have already begun to be supplemented by ATS. Even though the demand for ya-baa in the U.S. is not yet a major demand, perhaps this is just the sampling phase. Ya-baa is cheap and a demand could easily develop in the United States. Many of the relatives of the Hmong in the United States threaten the safety of United States citizens. Many of the Hmong in the United States are known to be involved in street gangs, who also use drugs to finance their activities.

Even though Laos has passed anti-drug legislation, the reality of the drug situation on the ground does not match the official law. The budget of the Lao government and the low pay and training of officials is still a problem. Law enforcement and the enforcement of drug use and trafficking are still very weak. This needs to be improved domestically, before the international problem can be solved. International tourists still find Laos a popular destination for drug tourism. Many drug tourists are found dead from drug overdoses in their hotel room, of course this news is kept out of the media by the Lao government.

One only needs to take a day trip to Laos to see the situation for themselves.

One will notice the large population of drug using foreigners, who went to Laos with the specific objective of using drugs. As one walks down the street on Vientiane, they will be offered drugs by nearly every tuk tuk driver in Laos. The tuk tuk drivers offer a wide variety of drugs from Marijuana, ATS, and now even cocaine. As one returns to their hotel, they can smell Marijuana from the next room and the sounds of hysterical laughing and the intense coughing from tourists high on drugs may prevent a good night's sleep.

Cocaine is a new drug in the region, which has only recently showed up in Laos. The appearance of cocaine is due to the recent presence of West Africans moving into Laos. As Thai authorities crack down on the West Africans operating international drug trafficking out of the Nana District of Bangkok, they are moving to Laos and taking the same tactics with them. The West Africans are marrying local Lao women and then using them to assist them in trafficking drugs. This is the pattern of West Africans traffickers. They are also importing cocaine from South America into Laos. West Africans are also using Laos as a storage point for drugs that will eventually be trafficked or re-trafficked into Thailand and then onto the United States and other international markets.

The United States and the United Nations are heavily involved with helping the Lao government develop drug eradication programs and eradicate poverty. The United States and Laos signed a Bilateral Trade Agreement in 2004. In addition, the United States gives a great deal of foreign aid to Laos. The situation within Laos is improving, but much work is still needed. The biggest drug threat in Laos is due to the continued poverty, the Burmese drug lords operating on the border and in remote areas of Laos, and now most recently West Africans operating out of Laos.

#### **6.1.4 Drugs in Thailand**

Thailand has served a leader in suppressing drug trafficking in the Golden Triangle region. Over a 30 year period, Thailand has been able to eradicate the majority of opium and heroin production within its own borders. Thailand is no longer a major drug production state. Thailand continues to be a major transit state for international drug trafficking organizations. ATS has replaced heroin as the major drug trafficked to and through Thailand. The majority of ATS trafficked through

Thailand originates in Burma. Thailand continues to operate closely with United States authorities and extradites international drug traffickers to the United States on a regular basis.

With the reduction of opium and the development of infrastructure, Thailand became the major transit and trafficking route for international markets. International drug trafficking syndicates based themselves out of Bangkok. As opium was eradicated, heroin refined in Burma and Laos flooded the streets of Bangkok and then sent to the United States. With the end of the Vietnam War, Saigon temporarily closed as a trafficking port and drugs previously trafficked through Saigon were now diverted to Bangkok. Bangkok had good business ties with the United States. This meant that a large amount of trade was being conducted between the United States and Thailand. This trade facilitated drug smuggling by sea and air.

As ATS production rose in Burma and Laos, it was trafficked to Thailand. ATS presented even a greater threat to Thailand. ATS posed a threat to Thailand as a domestic drug abuse problem, in addition to being trafficked to international markets. ATS presented a challenge because it was easy to produce and hard to detect during smuggling operations. ATS is also cheap to produce and affordable for all classes. The addiction problem spread to school children, truck drivers, and farmers in Thailand and also to a broad range of classes around the world.

Drugs enter Thailand from Burma and Laos. These drugs are smuggled into Thailand by various ethnic minority groups. The drugs easily cross Thailand's very long, rural, and porous border. The drug smuggling into Thailand comes in from all directions. Drugs enter Thailand from the east, north, northeast, and west. The largest threat has traditionally come from the north, but is now changing and coming in from the northeast.

Diverse ethnic groups traffic drugs from Thailand to international markets. UWSA and other ethnic groups in Burma with their own armies use ethnic minorities with family or tribal connections in Thailand to carry the drugs across the border. Akha, Hmong and other ethnic minorities in Thailand, who used to grow opium, now control internal drug trafficking networks in Thailand and serve as cross border couriers. These groups have connections in Burma. The Hmong continue to threaten the United States by mailing opium and ATS to relatives living in California and other

states in the United States.

The major organized criminal syndicates operating out of Thailand are Chinese and West African groups. Several smaller groups also participate in drug trafficking to the United States. The West Africans have recently become more of a threat than Chinese syndicates. West Africans have become a major group in the region during the past decade. The West African groups marry local Thai women and use them as couriers. West Africans not only use Bangkok as a transit point for international markets, but also import drugs into Thailand. A large amount of the heroin entering the United States from Thailand is controlled by West Africans. As opium and heroin decrease in Burma, West Africans have begun trafficking heroin from Southwest Asia to Bangkok, repackaging it, and then sending it to the United States. West Africans use couriers to traffic drugs as well as various other methods. West African groups tend to use Thai and Eastern European women to carry the drugs.

Thailand has always had a relatively good relationship with the United States and other western countries. This positive relationship and Thailand being the major transit point in the Golden Triangle made Thailand an ideal place for international drug trafficking cooperation. The United States, United Nations, and other international organizations set up centers to combat drug trafficking in Thailand. The international criminal groups also chose Bangkok as their headquarters as well.

#### **6.1.5 The Golden Triangle and the United States**

The threat of Golden Triangle drugs continues to affect the United States. While Golden Triangle drugs are only a portion of the illicit drugs that enter the United States everyday, they are a serious threat. The effect of illicit drugs in the United States has led to a serious increase in crime rates. The drug threat from the Golden Triangle has only developed within the last few decades and was largely due to U.S policies and activities in the region. The threat peaked in the middle 1990's and now has slightly declined.

Despite the decline, the possibility of a future increase is a potential threat. The threat could be especially great, if ATS from this region becomes more popular in the United States. Golden Triangle ATS has only recently begun being trafficked to

the United States during the last 7-8 years. It is already known that ATS produced in the United States is a very popular drug, so the likelihood of an increased demand for ATS produced in Burma could be only a matter of time. If this demand were to be created, there is no doubt that ethnic minorities would increase postal shipments and that international syndicates would begin sending it as well. It is very plentiful in the region and much easier to produce and traffic than heroin.

Drugs finance criminal gangs and drug addicts commit crime to gain money needed to buy drugs. The drug problem costs the United States billions of dollars annually and threatens innocent citizens, who are often the victims of crimes that began with the production of heroin or ATS in Burma. The United States faces a criminal threat rooted from drug trafficking and the criminal organizations that facilitate the trafficking.

Drugs are trafficked to the United States from all over the world. The Golden Triangle is only one of the many drug threats that face the United States; however it is a major threat. Just as the problem in the Golden Triangle was allowed to develop due to past policies and operations of the United States in the region, it can just as easily develop into an even greater threat in the future. This is especially true as drug trafficking is increasingly linked to international crime and now terrorism. Terrorist target the United States and it is now well known that terrorists use drugs to finance their operations. Just as drug armies in Burma use drugs to buy weapons to fight the central government, terrorist cells operating in Southeast Asia use drug trafficking to finance operations against the United States and other countries. It is already known that drugs produced in Burma are sent to terrorist organizations in Southern Thailand. These groups use drugs to finance an insurgency against the Thai government and they are linked to international terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda, Jemayah Isalama, and other terrorist groups who want to destroy the United States.

Heroin is still a major threat to the United States. Golden Triangle heroin has declined in the United States; however, the rise of ATS and other transnational organized crime continues to increasingly threaten the United States. The United States has recognized these changing trends and is involved trying to solve the problem in the Golden Triangle region. Due to current United States policy, the work of United States in suppressing drug trafficking in Burma is limited. This has led to

the increase in drug production and trafficking since the 1988 sanctions.

The increased drug problem in Burma only makes matters worse for Laos, Thailand, and ultimately the United States. The United States has taken an active role and funded several programs in Laos and Thailand. The United States also funds and conducts drug enforcement training for law enforcement personnel in the region. This training is conducted through the United States funded and staffed International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) in Bangkok. The United States continues to work with host nation representatives and international organizations in the Golden Triangle region to suppress drug trafficking and reduce the threat of drug trafficking to the United States.

## **6.2. Analysis of Findings**

### **6.2.1. An Overview of the Development of Drug Problem in the Golden Triangle and the United States**

The drug problem in the Golden Triangle was originally not viewed as a problem, since it was a legally traded commodity under the British and French and local governments in the region. Opium became a tool to attain political objectives after World War II during the Cold War. During this period, opium was a valuable tool to fund secret wars and insurgencies against central governments and Communism.

Opium became an important source of income to recruit local forces to fight against Communism. This can be seen through the use of it to fund the KMT in Burma, the Hmong in Laos. The use of opium to fund insurgency was also adopted by various insurgent groups in Burma fighting against the central government. This pattern has evolved as the same groups that used opium to finance their insurgency, simply used the same tactic as heroin and ATS emerged. The same groups that used opium, simply shifted their product and used heroin and then ATS to finance their insurgency.

United States Cold War policy supported the production and sale of illegal drugs in the region from the 1950's until the early 1970's. The Cold War policy aimed at eliminated Communism at all costs. This policy created the drug problem in the

United States. Once the drug problem became an American problem, new policy needed to be formed to fight against illegal drugs.

The United States Cold War policy and the creation of the drug problem in Southeast Asia is similar to the problems that have allowed the drug trade to flourish in other regions of the world. The United States supported various insurgent groups during the Cold War era. This support often allowed the trade of illegal drugs to finance insurgencies. This can be seen with the case of Afghanistan during the 1980's and with various groups in South America. The United States support of the Contra group in Nicaragua is similar to the Cold War Policies that supported the KMT and the Hmong. The support of Contra rebels and allowing them to trade cocaine to support their insurgency was the same Cold War tactic that brought the drug problem to the United States.

Today, the drug threat is not as simple as just drugs. Today, the drug problem funds international crime and terrorism. The drug problem that has developed over the past sixty years threatens the safety of citizens throughout the world. Terrorist groups use illegal drugs to fund their operation and criminals use drug funding to fund more crime. Drugs are a menace to the international community and need to be stopped.

### **6.2.2. The Changing Drug of Choice in the Golden Triangle**

During the past sixty years, the type of drug has changed in the Golden Triangle region. Even though much of the region has lagged behind in development, one area that has evolved has been drug production. In 1948, opium was widely used in the region mostly under official government monopolies.

After World War II, opium increased in Southeast Asia, as it was used to finance wars against Communism and used to finance insurgencies of ethnic minorities fighting against the central government in Burma and Laos. During this period, opium was uniquely a Southeast Asia problem and was not a major problem in the United States.

With the events of the Vietnam War, the United States CIA encouraged Hmong in Laos to use opium to help finance their army. The Hmong fought the war in Laos against North Vietnam for the United States. The war in Vietnam brought a large amount of American soldiers into the region. These American soldiers created a



large scale demand for heroin. This demand was met by drug lords in Burma, who began to produce heroin and send it to United States troops in Thailand and Vietnam. At the end of the Vietnam War, United States soldiers returned to the United States and so did their demand for heroin. International syndicates stepped up operations and heroin began entering the United States on a large scale.

In the 1990's, ATS began to appear as a new drug of choice. The ATS problem began with ya-baa and soon ICE or crystal meth was also being produced in Burma and being sent into Thailand for international distribution. ATS is much easier to produce and easier to traffic. ATS is now the major problem in Thailand. The threat to the United States peaked in the 1990's, but has not yet been eliminated. The United States is still a popular destination for opium, heroin, and now an emerging trend of ATS.

### **6.2.3. The Changing Causes of Drug Production and Trafficking**

The reasons for drug production have changed, while some basic factors have remained the same. Poverty is a factor that continues to allow drug trafficking to exist. Insurgency has been financed by drug trafficking and allowed it flourish. Insurgency has now also become a convenient excuse for the real motivation of drug traffickers, which is pure greed.

Drug trafficking initially began in the region because of the policies of western governments. Colonial policies and activities established the opium trade in Southeast Asia. The United States Cold War Policy created a drug threat that would come to haunt the United States decades later. The original purpose for opium trafficking was in the name of fighting Communism. The problem first began to develop in the 1950's when the United States backed Chinese Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT) troops. The KMT troops fled from China and began operating out of Burma. They used opium to finance their war, The United States CIA and Thailand coordinated the sale of weapons to the KMT in Burma in exchange for opium, which was then imported into Thailand and used in the Thai opium monopoly. The same Cold War policies were used in the Secret War in Laos. In this war opium was used to finance Hmong troops, who fought against North Vietnam. Opium as a means to finance insurgency was also adopted by various groups in Burma fighting against the central

government.

Poverty has been a cause to drug trafficking that has not changed. Although poverty continues to allow the drug trade to exist, efforts to reduce poverty have changed over the past sixty years. Thailand set the best example of developing rural areas and by creating alternative means of income for ethnic minorities. Because of these policies, Thailand was able to reduce major drug production within Thailand during a 30 year time frame. By the mid-1990's, Thailand was no longer a major producer of opium.

Laos has also worked on reducing poverty and developing rural areas and finding alternative livelihoods for ethnic minorities. By 2006, Laos was no longer a major producer of opium for international export. The problem with Laos is that fifty percent of former opium growers risk returning to opium growing as alternative livelihoods are hard to find. As production was decreased in Laos and Thailand, both countries became trafficking routes for drugs produced in Burma. The poverty groups that were formerly involved in growing opium have now become couriers of cross border ATS trafficking.

#### **6.2.4. The Changing Methods of Drug Trafficking**

Just as drug production has changed, so have the patterns of drug trafficking. In the beginning, opium was a problem in Southeast Asia. The Cold War policies allowed the drug production to develop. As the production developed and United States military members took it to the United States, new methods of smuggling drugs were developed, just as they continue to be today.

During the Vietnam War, heroin from Burma was trafficked through Laos and Thailand. During this period, the final destination was Bangkok and Saigon. The final destination did not become the United States until the early 1970's as the war in Vietnam came to an end. The destinations for international ports were both Bangkok and Saigon. After Vietnam fell to the Communism, Saigon was closed as a major drug port for drug traffickers. Bangkok became the new international hub in Southeast Asia.

Drug traffickers began sending drugs to the United States by using couriers. Couriers would carry heroin on their bodies and ride airplanes. Soon, improved

methods such as concealing drugs inside items shipped by sea and air were adopted. Drugs from Burma entered Northern Thailand quite easily, due to the very remote and porous border.

As the Thai authorities fought against drug trafficking, the northern border security became quite well developed. After the northern border became difficult to smuggle drugs, traffickers have now developed alternate routes. Drugs now enter Thailand from all different directions. Drugs enter Thailand from the western border in Tak Province along the Moei River. The new major and developing route for drugs produced in Burma is from Northeastern Thailand. Burmese drug lords now prefer to traffic drugs through Laos and then into Northeastern Thailand along the Mekong River.

Drugs enter Northeastern Thailand through various remote points along the Mekong River. Mukdahan is the number one drug trafficking point in Northeastern Thailand; Nong Khai is the number two threat. From these points, the drugs are consolidated in Udon Thani Province and moved to Bangkok. Bangkok is the destination for the majority of drugs entering the Thai border. Once the drugs reach Bangkok, they are then used by the Thai population and sent to the Gulf of Thailand, where they are loaded on boats and then sent to international destinations.

As heroin has decreased in Burma and ATS rises, West African traffickers have supplemented the decrease of Southeast Asian heroin by importing heroin from Southwest Asia to Bangkok and then sending it to the United States and other destinations. West Africans use Thai and Eastern European females to act as couriers. A new trend of female ethnic minorities as couriers to carry drugs into Thailand from Burma has risen. This new trend is due to the fact that there are few Thai female officials in border areas, and only a female official can search a female suspect.

The Hmong and other Hill Tribes in the region are still involved with the drug trade, but their role has changed. The Hmong in Laos and Thailand have decreased their involvement in growing opium and are now involved in facilitating the movement of drugs across borders in the region and to the United States. Thanks to the Vietnam War and Hmong refugees being relocated to the United States, the Hmong now have relatives in the United States. The Hmong in Laos and Thailand continue to send opium to the United States by using the postal service. Recently,

these shipments have been supplemented by ya-baa. The trend of ya-baa being sent to the United States, could lead to an increased demand for it in the United States in the future. The Hmong are also known to be running cross border coordination to help move drugs from Burma into Thailand.

### **6.2.5. The Changing Players in the Golden Triangle Drug Trade**

The traffickers in the drug trade have changed during the last sixty years. The original players were United States and Thai government officials. This was due to the Cold War policies aimed at fighting Communism at all costs, even if it was at the expense of a little bit of opium trading. Of course this little bit of opium trading turned into a lot of opium trading, then a major heroin problem, and now ATS.

The KMT troops were the first major drug lords. The KMT eventually moved into Thailand and took more of a role in coordinating for international shipment with other Chinese syndicates. Lo Hsing Han was able to become a major drug lord in Burma during the 1970's, with the help of the Burmese central government. Khun Sa rose to power as the major drug lord in Burma in the 1980's. Both of these drug lords were able to develop a major drug production and trafficking operations with the cooperation of the Burmese government. The Burmese government allowed drug trafficking in exchange for the drug armies attacking insurgent groups. This tactic of the Burmese central government has not changed, only the groups that the deal is made with have changed. After Khun Sa surrendered in 1996, he was allowed to launder his drug money into the Burmese economy along with Lo Hsing Han. In the 1990's the UWSA became the new drug force in Burma and remains so today. The ceasefire agreement with the Burmese government allows the UWSA to freely traffic drugs and less need for insurgency. The DKBA in the Karen State seems to have the same sort of deal. They get to traffic drugs into Western Thailand, in exchange for attacking the Karen National Union (KNU) troops (the Christian Karen group), who have not reached a ceasefire agreement with the government.

Various ethnic minorities continue to be involved with the drug trade. The role of these minorities continues to be linked with poverty. The method of involvement has changed from being opium farmers to becoming couriers. Some groups, such as the Hmong, seem to be actually running drug trafficking movements and taking it

upon themselves to send postal shipments of drugs to friends and relatives in the United States.

International syndicates have changed. The Chinese were the original international syndicates, who facilitated major movements of drugs to the United States. The Chinese helped run refineries and work with drug lords in Burma to move the drugs from Bangkok to the United States. This worked well, since Chinese criminal syndicates in Southeast Asia had links to ethnic Chinese criminals in the United States.

Recently, West Africans have become the major international drug traffickers in Southeast Asia. West Africans mostly operate out of Bangkok and have recently begun moving into Laos. West Africans have only become prevalent in the region during the last decade. West Africans have worldwide connections and large numbers have been arrested for trafficking heroin into the United States from Bangkok.

#### **6.2.6. The Changing Involvement of the United States and the Changing Threat**

The role of the United States in the Golden Triangle has changed significantly. The original role of the United States in the region was to fight Communism at all costs. At this time, opium was a Southeast Asian problem and did not affect the United States. During this period, the United States supported the use of opium to finance secret wars against Communism. After the end the Vietnam War, heroin became a major threat in the United States. In early 1970's, the United States government declared a new war, this war was the "War on Drugs".

The number one threat of heroin was now coming from the Golden Triangle. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) was created in 1973 and by 1974; large numbers of DEA agents were operating out of Bangkok to stop drugs from entering the United States. The United States also started funding development projects in Thailand to help provide alternative livelihoods for opium farmers. The United States also worked with the Burmese government and gave 12 million dollars per year to Burma to suppress drug trafficking. During this period, little was done in Laos, due to the fact that Laos was under Communist rule and relations between the United States and Laos were not good.

After the Burmese Junta suppressed democracy in the 1988 massacres, the United States imposed sanctions on Burma and stopped all aid including the 12 million dollars per year of anti-drug funding. After Burma was cut off from the world, poverty increased in Burma. More people in Burma became involved in the drug trade, as the alternative options were increasingly unavailable. After 1988, drug production in Burma continually increased and by the early 1990's ATS was becoming a major problem in addition to heroin.

In 1989, the United States began working with Laos by providing funding to suppress drug trafficking and by funding alternative development projects. It seemed that after all assistance to Burma was cut off, the new strategy was to try to contain the threat in Laos and Thailand. The threat was harder to contain. As Burma continued to increase drug production, the product bombarded Laos, Thailand, and eventually the United States.

The heroin threat to the United States peaked during the 1990's. Ya-baa only started showing up in the United States around 2001. The major threat to the United States from the region is heroin and small amounts of opium and ya-baa are mailed by Hmong to their relatives in the United States. Threats to the United States due to Cold War policies in the region still threaten the United States today. Hmong refugees who were relocated to the United States became involved in street gangs, which deal in drugs. These gangs continue to endanger the safety of United States citizens. West Africans and Chinese syndicates continue to traffic heroin to the United States. Terrorism is also a big threat and drugs from Burma are used to finance terrorist activities that can threaten the United States in the future.

During the last decade, the United States government has decreased anti drug funding and personnel in the region. The United States is still involved, but on a smaller scale. Less funding is provided to Thailand and not enough to Laos. Worst of all, no assistance at all is given to Burma. The United States sees the major drug threat to the United States as coming from South America and Mexico. This is true, however; the threat from the Golden Triangle cannot be ignored.

Authorities in the region still face many challenges. Thai border officials face the challenges of controlling an extremely porous border and do not have the manpower or technical equipment to control it. Most border checkpoints along the

Thai-Burma and Thai-Lao border have limited personnel and no technological equipment. Nong Khai for example, does not even have an x-ray machine. They only have about 10-15 officials and a dog. The law enforcement officials in the region are low paid and under trained. This leads to the problem of official corruption.

Although the threat to the United States may seem to have declined, there is a serious threat of the drug problem from this region increasing again in the future. It is important for the United States to continue to work with authorities in the region and help them improve drug suppression efforts. Just as the threat of opium did not seem to be a problem during the Cold War and then suddenly became a major threat to the United States in the 1970's, if the problem in the Golden Triangle region is not completely eliminated, it could become even more of a major threat to the United States in the future.

### **6.3. Recommendations**

The United States and Thailand have contributed to excellent work in suppressing the illicit drug problem in the region. Laos is also starting to show progress as well. Burma remains the major threat. Due to current United States policy, drug reduction efforts are severely limited in Burma. The threat in Burma must be directly addressed. Current U.S. foreign policy has Burma cut off from the world. Suppressing the drug threat in Burma has been approached by trying to contain international drug trafficking origination in Burma, by developing programs in Laos and Thailand. With Burma cut off, the drug production and lawlessness in Burma is only increasing and due to the underdevelopment in the region as well as the porous borders, drugs, crime, migrants, and refugees, cannot be contained.

Since the United States imposed sanctions on Burma in 1988, the drug problem has not only increased, it has evolved. The problem of heroin has now expanded to ATS, human trafficking, and other transnational crime that directly affects Laos, Thailand, and the United States. The United States and the international community need to deal with the drug problem in Burma directly from Burma. The threat of Burma needs to be better addressed.

Poverty and underdevelopment need to continue to be addressed, before the drug problem can be solved. Poverty and underdevelopment are often due to poor

government policies and actions. Poverty is also caused by insurgencies, which use drug trafficking to buy weapons and finance their insurgency. International policies also lead to poverty. If poverty and underdevelopment continue to exist, so do legitimate options for citizens.

When citizens are faced with a lack of legitimate options, they will resort to illegitimate options as a means to survive. The environment in Burma and to a lesser extent in Laos has created a situation where very poor people are tempted to participate in aspects of the drug trade just to survive. The international community needs to continue to support the creation of conditions in which poverty can be reduced and countries in the region can be developed.

The United States government, as well as regional governments, should ensure that policies and actions developed to fight the current drug threat do not create problems for future generations to deal with. Examples of this can be seen in the effects of Cold War actions of the United States in Southeast Asia and the creation of the current War on Drugs.

### **6.3.1. Recommendations for Burma**

The problem of drug trafficking in the region is largest in Burma. The ultimate permanent solution has to be reached in Burma. The major problem in Burma is the fact that there has been an ongoing civil war since 1948. The Burmese government needs to gain control of the ethnic minorities. The Burmese government needs to do this by acting responsibly and respecting human rights. The ceasefire agreements have made matters even worse as it seems like the Burmese government is condoning drug trafficking in exchange for peace agreements.

The United States needs to consider revising their policy in Burma. The current policy towards Burma has already possibly led to a more serious problem than just heroin, as the international community is now faced with ATS and transnational crime today. The United States needs to continue to work with regional partners to eliminate poverty, conflict, and transnational crime originating in the Golden Triangle with a final destination in United States cities.

It seems like United States policy towards Burma is a result of a blanket principle that imposes sanctions on any country that does not respect democracy.



Some sort of sanctions should probably be imposed, however; blanket sanctions will not solve the problem. The sanctions against Burma have only increased the suffering of Burmese citizens. The Burmese government is not affected by these sanctions, as they get plenty of funding for the gem trade and drug trade.

The United States should help Burma create a legitimate economy. The solution would include developing agriculture as well as international trade and markets. The current policy only encourages drug trafficking. People without food are forced to work for drug traffickers. Many of the impoverished couriers feel that smuggling drugs into Thailand is worth the risk, since life in a Thai prison is better than freedom in Burma.

### **6.3.2. Recommendations for Laos**

Laos has come a long way in eliminating opium cultivation within its borders. The new threat in Laos is now as a drug transit route from Burma. Since 50 percent of opium farmers face returning to opium growing, sustainment has to be a priority. The access to alternative forms of livelihood need to be improved. Law enforcement needs to be improved in Laos. Lao law enforcement personnel are underpaid, undertrained, and subject to corruption. Also, demand reduction in Laos needs to be continued to be developed. Joint Mekong River patrols need to continue to be developed.

The United States has already invested quite a bit of funding in Laos, however; compared to the funding that drug traffickers have, it is not enough. The United States should increase funding for development projects and continue to facilitate international trade. Also, low level officials need to receive quality training. High level officials have received training at ILEA, but the low level officials who actually do work on the streets, still lack proper training. The United States should increase funding to help the Lao government buy drug detection equipment.

### **6.3.3. Recommendations for Thailand**

The major threat to Thailand is as a drug trafficking route and transit point for international shipments. Thailand is also a major consumer of illicit drugs. Thailand needs to continue programs to reduce the drug demand. The major weakness of Thailand is the porous border. Border checkpoints are undermanned and have low

technology. Another problem is the informal trade that occurs on the borders. It is easy to cross the border from Burma and Laos into Thailand. This is especially true in remote areas, but it also occurs in areas that are not that remote.

Thailand needs to do a better job at controlling their border. Unofficial agreements exist in border areas that allow drug trafficking to happen. Mae Sai, for example, has an agreement that allows Burmese to cross into Thailand and conduct trade within 5 kilometers of the border. In this 5 kilometer zone, drug couriers can easily transfer drugs to Thai citizens, which are then sent to Bangkok. Another example is in Mae Sot. In Mae Sot, there is only 1 official border crossing, however; there are 18 unofficial border crossings. One of these unofficial border crossings is only 1 kilometer away from the official border crossing. At this crossing, there are no officials present and citizens from Burma freely move across the Moei River with merchandise that is not processed through Thai Customs. Another problem is that an international agreement has made the river a neutral zone. The Thai officials do not have authority in this zone and buying and selling of drugs freely takes place in this area.

Immigration needs to be improved in Thailand. Because of fairly relaxed immigration policies, drug traffickers feel comfortable in Thailand and make it their home. This can be seen with Chinese drug traffickers and now most recently West Africans who have made Bangkok a major base for their operations.

The United States needs to continue to work with Thailand. Even though, development is no longer a problem, Thailand is still the number one threat in the region as a transit route to the United States. The United States should continue to help Thailand develop their law enforcement capabilities. The United States may want to consider helping Thailand with border security development. This can be in the form of training as well as funding. The funding of border security initiatives could come in the form of high-tech equipment. Most border checkpoint officials only search suspects that display suspicious or nervous behavior. They do not have much needed x-ray machines to detect drugs. If the United States funded or donated high tech equipment to these checkpoints, this could help reduce the amount of illicit drugs entering Thailand and ultimately the United States.

#### **6.3.4. Recommendations for the United States**

The United States faces the largest problem of all, because a large amount of drug addicts in the United States create a demand that is filled by Southeast Asian producers and traffickers. The United States needs to fight this war both at home and abroad. The United States fights the threat abroad from many nations. This can be seen in the fact that the DEA has 87 overseas offices in 63 different countries. Drug addiction in the United States is extremely high and a large percentage of crime in the United States is related to drugs.

The United States should continue to work with authorities in Laos and Thailand. The United States should not get a false sense of security in the Golden Triangle region. By looking at opium and heroin trends, it appears that the battle against opium and heroin has been successful. The fact that opium and heroin have been reduced is true, but the fact that ATS has replaced opium and heroin as even a more dangerous threat should not be ignored. New threats are now linked even more with transnational crime and terrorism that can easily threaten the United States. Golden Triangle ATS is not yet an item in major demand; however, it is likely only a matter of time before it can become a major problem just as heroin was in the past.

The United States should work with authorities in the region to maintain the efforts that have taken 30 years to build. If the Golden Triangle region is ignored, the work of 30 years can easily be reversed in a very short period and then it will take many more years to solve again. So, the key suggestion for the United States in the region is to sustain what has been accomplished and continue to develop efforts in Laos and Thailand.

The final and most important recommendation for the United States is to find a way to deal with Burma. Hard tactics of isolation and increased sanctions may send a political message, but they do help solve the ever increasing drug problem. The tactic of trying to contain the drug problem in Burma is a poor one. The long porous borders in Laos and Thailand will likely never be controllable. The area is just too large and drugs can easily cross into Thailand. Stopping drug production in Burma is the only permanent solution to the Golden Triangle drug trade. Other solutions can help reduce the amount of drugs, but they will not attack the root of the problem. Ignoring Burma, will only allow drug production to increase and allow drug lords to

gain even greater power.



Image 6.3.4 The International Drug Problem

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ศูนย์วิทยุตำรวจ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย



## APPENDICES

ศูนย์วิทยทรัพยากร  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย



## APPENDIX A

ศูนย์วิทยทรัพยากร  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

## **The Golden Triangle Drug Trafficking Timeline**

- 1948-** Burma gains independence and civil war ensues between various ethnic groups.
- 1948-** Communist Party of Burma (CPB) goes underground and trains for rebellion against the central government.
- 1948-** French encourage Hmong to grow opium, which the French use to finance their war against North Vietnam. French increase Hmong taxes, forcing them to produce more opium.
- 1948-** Hill Tribes migrate to Thailand from China, after a Thai initiative recruited Hill Tribes to grow opium in Thailand for the Royal Thai opium monopoly.
- 1949-** China becomes Communist. Opium growers and traders from China migrate to Shan States of Burma and resume activities. The Nationalist Kuomintang Army (KMT) sets up operations in the Shan States to prepare to reinvade China.
- 1949-** CPB begins to develop a relationship with Communist China and goes to China for training.
- 1949-** Opium growers, traders, and KMT from China move into Laos.
- 1950-** U.S. CIA and Thailand support KMT's Anti-Communist insurgency. Encourage and support KMT opium trade to support the fight against Communism.
- 1950-** Thai Military and Police cooperate with the CIA to provide weapons to KMT in exchange for opium.
- 1950-** U.S. begins sending war equipment to support the French in their efforts against the North Vietnamese to reconquer Indo China.
- 1950-** The U.S. begins an airline to support the French in Indo-China called Civil Air Transport (CAT). CAT later became Air America.
- 1954-** The French are defeated in Indo-China and the Geneva Peace Accords are signed.
- 1954-** Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) formed to prevent Laos and Cambodia from becoming Communist.
- 1955-** Law passed in Thailand make opium illegal.

- 1955-** Thai Border Patrol Police established.
- 1956-** The Royal Forestry Department of Thailand conducts the first aerial opium survey.
- 1957-** The Shan State requests to succeed from the Union of Burma. Request is denied.
- 1957-** Pathet Lao wins seats in Lao congress.
- 1957-** Sarit Thanarat seized power in Thailand and implemented military rule.
- 1958-** Pathet Lao wins the majority vote in national elections.
- 1958-** The first Shan Rebellion Army (Noom Suk Harn) is formed to fight the Burmese government.
- 1958-** The Shan State Independence Army (SSIA) is formed.
- 1958-** In Thailand, King Bhumibol Adulyadej personally goes to Chiang Mai to visit Hill Tribe areas.
- 1959-** A 3 way civil war breaks out in Laos.
- 1959-** North Vietnam invades Laos to assist the Pathet Lao.
- 1959-** Thailand begins enforcing drug laws after the Harmful Habit-Forming Drugs Act is passed.
- 1959-** Thailand establishes the Department of Public Welfare to work with developing Hill Tribes.
- Early 1960's-** The Burmese government forms home guard units called Ka Kwe Ye (KKY) to fight against insurgents in exchange for being allowed to traffic drugs. Khun Sa got his start in the business as a KKY leader.
- 1960-** Pro American and Anti- Communist government elected in Laos.
- 1960-** CIA begins Secret War in Laos. Hmong under the leadership of Vang Pao fight the war for the CIA, in exchange for assistance in their opium business. U.S. also funds Royal Lao Army.
- 1961-** The United Nations Single Convention on Narcotics Drugs in 1961 issues international laws to make drugs illegal.
- 1961-** Thailand issues the First National Economic and Social Development Plan to develop rural areas and eliminate opium.
- 1961-** The Young Survey is conducted in Thailand to measure opium growth.
- 1962-** In Thailand, the Department of Public Welfare conducts a Socio Economic

Survey to examine the opium problem.

- 1962-** Ne Win seizes power in Burma and makes Burma a Socialist nation. The economy is ruined and opium production increases.
- 1962-** The Shan National United Front (SNUF) is formed to serve as a political organization for the Shan Rebellion.
- 1962-** Geneva Accords reduce U.S. military support to Laos.
- 1962-** The Lao government takes control of the opium trade. Prime Minister Souvanna Phoumi begins overseeing the opium trade from Vientiane. General Ouane oversees import of Burmese opium in the Northwest. Vang Pao oversees the opium trade in the Northeast.
- 1964-** The Shan State Army (SSA) is formed.  
-The CIA begins recruiting Shan fighters to help fight the Secret War in Laos.
- 1964-** Souvanna Phoumi forced out of Laos after a new coup is staged.
- 1964-** The Hill Tribe Development and Welfare Program is established in Thailand.
- 1965-** General Ouane and General Kouprasith took over the drug trade in Laos.
- 1965-** A law making opium production in the Shan States is passed. KKY units peak in state sponsored drug trafficking.
- 1965-** Thailand conducts the Socio Economic Survey of the Hill Tribes in Thailand.
- 1965-** A Hill Tribe Research Center is established in Chiang Mai, Thailand.
- 1966-** The Thai Royal family founds the Royal Assistance Unit to help develop poor areas of Thailand.
- 1966-** Hill Tribe Mobile Development Teams begin operating in Northern Thailand.
- 1967-** An opium war between Khun Sa and the KMT crosses into Lao territory.  
General Ouane seizes the opium and makes trade concession for future opium imports.
- 1967-** The United Nations conducts a survey to measure the economic and social development needs of the opium producing areas in Thailand.
- 1968-** The CPB invades the Shan State with the help of the Chinese insurgents and CPB cooperate to fight the Burmese government.
- 1969-** In Thailand, the Royal Assistance Unit begins working with Hill Tribes in Northern Thailand.
- 1969-** Khun Sa arrested and imprisoned for drug trafficking.



- 1969-** Lo Hsing Han becomes the most powerful drug lord/KMT leader in Burma.
- Late 1960's-** Opium begins to be refined to heroin in Burma. U.S. troops fighting in the Vietnam War create a demand for heroin in the region.
- Late 1960's-** Laos becomes a transit route for Burmese heroin supplied to U.S. troops in Vietnam. Heroin refineries also begin operating in Laos.
- Early 1970's-** Shan and KMT drug groups operate out of Northern Thailand. Heroin refineries boom on both sides of the border.
- Early 1970's-** U.S. begins withdrawing troops from Vietnam.
- 1970-** A new trafficking route of Burmese and Lao opium heading to U.S. troops Vietnam opens through Cambodia.
- 1971-** Lao Prince Sopsaisang was arrested in France with 60 kilograms of Double UO Globe heroin that was destined for New York City.
- 1971-** Filipino Diplomat and an ethnic Chinese business man from Bangkok arrested in New York City after trafficking 15.5 kilograms of UO Globe Heroin for Laos.
- 1971-** The first narcotics control agreement was signed between the United States and Thailand
- 1972-** Chinese Sailors were arrested in New York City with 5 kilograms of UO Double Globe trafficked from Bangkok.
- 1975-** Chinese sailors were arrested in Miami with 10 kilograms of Double UO Globe Heroin trafficked from Bangkok.
- 1972-** International drug syndicates begin mass shipments of heroin to the United States, as U.S. troops begin returning home.
- 1972-** KMT leader General Li Wenhuan dismantles his Army. High level KMT become involved in international drug trafficking syndicates and troops join other drug armies. Most KMT move out of Burma and into Thailand.
- 1973-** KKY units disbanded by Burmese government. KKY armies refuse to disband and keep trafficking drugs.
- 1973-** Lo Hsing Han arrested in Thailand.
- 1973-** Khun Sa released from prison, after his army held 2 Russian doctors hostage in exchange for his release.
- 1973-** Khun Sa becomes the most powerful drug lord in the region, operating out of

Northern Thailand.

- 1973-** Vietnam and the United States agree to a ceasefire and U.S. troops withdrawal begins.
- 1973-** Royal Lao government and Pathet Lao sign a cease-fire agreement.
- 1973-** Heroin becomes a problem on the streets of the United States. The U.S. changes its policy in Southeast Asia and declares a “War on Drugs”
- 1973-** The United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is formed to lead the new “War on Drugs”.
- 1974-** U.S. sends large numbers of DEA Agents to work in Thailand.
- 1974-** Provisional government set up in Laos and the last Americans leave.
- 1975-** U.S. troop withdrawal from Vietnam complete.
- 1975-** Vietnam reunified, closing Saigon as an international drug port. Bangkok becomes the new major international drug trafficking port in Southeast Asia.
- 1975-** The Pathet Lao takes control of Laos. Laos becomes Communist and the Lao-Thai border closes. Refugees flee Laos. Hmong in Laos rely on opium and heroin to finance their insurgency against the Pathet Lao.
- 1975-** U.S. Embassy staff in Laos reduced and leadership reduced to a Charge D Affaires.
- 1976-** The United Nations Convention of Psychotropic Substances is passed.
- 1976-** Rebel groups in Burma including the CPB form the National Democratic Front (NDF).
- 1976-** Khun Sa forms the Shan United Army (SUA), using the word Shan with hopes of Thai support.
- 1976-** The Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) is created as the central drug Thai drug enforcement agency.
- 1978-** Regime change in China forces CPB to increase involvement in the drug trade.
- Late 1970’s-** Vang Pao and Hmong Refugees relocate to the United States. Many Hmong fail to adapt and begin gangs and drug trafficking in the United States.
- Early 1980’s-** Vang Pao becomes the Hmong leader in the United States. Vang Pao founds the United Lao National Liberation Front (UNFLF) or the Neo Hom in California to provide support for Hmong rebels still in Laos.

- 1983-** Khun Sa kicked out of Thailand. Resumes operations on the Burmese side of the border.
- 1985-** Khun Sa consolidates more power and merges with other drug armies to form the new Mong Tai Army consisting of 20,000 troops.
- 1985-** U.S. government funds a crop spraying program in Burma from 1985-1986.
- 1987-** The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) takes over in Burma. The SLORC ruins the economy and caused political turmoil in Burma.
- 1987-** Burma applies for “Least Developed Nation” status with the United Nations.
- 1988-** SLORC brutally suppresses political demonstrations.
- 1988-** The United States and other nations impose sanctions on Burma, cutting off \$12 million dollars of anti-narcotics funding. The drug trade increases.
- 1989-** Neo Hom stage a rebellion in Laos and sets up an interim government. The Lao government suppresses the rebellion with the help of Vietnam.
- 1989-** United States and Laos signed a Bilateral Cooperation on Narcotics Memorandum of Agreement (MOU).
- 1989-** United States and Laos also signed the first Lao Crop Control Project and agreed to sign new agreements annually.
- 1989-** The CPB collapses. The CPB army splits into regional armies that now focus on drug trafficking. The UWSA emerges as the most powerful group and begins to threaten Khun Sa.
- 1989-** The Burmese government makes a deal with Lo Hsing Han to help negotiate ceasefire agreements, in exchange for his return to the drug business.
- 1989-** The SLORC enters into ceasefire agreements with the majority of ethnic armies in the Shan State. These agreements lead to increased drug production and trafficking.
- 1989-** The SLORC makes a deal with the UWSA to attack Khun Sa, in exchange for freedom to traffic drugs.
- 1989-** Heroin continues to increase and Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) quickly gain popularity in the region.
- Late 1980's-** Khun Sa expands into Northwestern Laos and sets up heroin and ATS Refineries in remote Lao territory.

- 1990-** Laos implements its first drug law after drug addiction becomes a serious threat in Laos.
- 1990-** United States Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs recognizes the importance of working with Laos to solve the Golden Triangle drug threat.
- 1990-** The United States increases funding development projects in Laos.
- 1990-** The U.S. funds a road building project in Houng Phan, Sam Nuea Province, Laos.
- 1990-** The SLORC refuses to honor election results of Aung San Suu Kyi.
- 1990-** New drug smuggling routes open through China.
- 1990-** The United States issues a warrant for Khun Sa's arrest.
- 1991-** Thailand and Laos begin discussing cooperation in combating drug trafficking.
- 1991-** United States and Thailand signed an extradition treaty.
- 1991-** The U.S. issues a warrant for the arrest of a Thai politician suspected of trafficking drugs to the United States.
- 1992-** U.S. restores full diplomatic relations with Laos.
- 1992-** United States and Lao Bilateral Law Enforcement Agreement is signed.
- 1992-** United States donates helicopters and provides pilot training to the Lao government for use in counter narcotics operations
- 1992-** UNODC and Lao officials begin joint annual opium surveys.
- 1992-** Thailand passes the Asset Seizure and Conspiracy Law.
- 1993-** The U.S. and Burma begin conducting joint opium surveys.
- 1993-** The U.S. funds and trains the first Counter-Narcotics Unit in Laos.
- 1994-** The U.S. and Japan help fund the creation of the Chiang Mai University Highland Agricultural Training Center in Thailand.
- 1994-** U.S. and Thailand conduct Operation Tiger Trap targeted at Khun Sa.
- 1994-** The Thai government begins drafting anti-money laundering laws.
- Mid 1990's-** Thailand is no longer a major opium producer. Thailand now faces new challenges as a growing major transit route.
- 1995-** Thailand establishes a new Northern Drug Task Force to combat drug trafficking along the northern border.
- 1996-** Thanong Siriprechapong, a Thai politician charged with drug trafficking, becomes the first Thai citizen extradited to the United States.

- 1996-** Joint U.S.-Thai investigations result in the arrest of Nigerian drug traffickers in the U.S. and Thailand.
- 1996-** Thailand establishes a specialized drug task force in Bangkok.
- 1996-** Laos revises drug laws.
- 1996-** United States begins funding drug rehabilitation programs in Laos.
- 1996-** Kuhn Sa surrenders and the UWSA becomes the most powerful drug army in the region.
- 1996-** Opium production declines in Burma . ATS production and trafficking peak in Burma and ATS becomes the major problem in Laos and Thailand.
- 1997-** Thailand extradited 17 criminals to the United States. Seven were Thai citizens, the rest were Chinese and West African.
- 1997-** The Thai government focuses drug policies on countering ATS.
- 1997-** A new joint drug task force is established to counter the rising drug threat in Southern Thailand.
- 1997-** Laos ratifies the United Nations Convention of Psychotropic Substances.
- 1997-** U.S. provides funding and training for seven new counter-narcotics units in Laos.
- 1997-** The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) becomes the name of Burma's new regime.
- 1997-** The U.S. forbids American companies to invest in Burma.
- 1998-** The threat of UWSA produced ecstasy appears in Thailand.
- 1998-** Thailand extradites 13 criminals to the United States. Five of these were Thai citizens, the rest were Chinese and West African.
- 1998-** A U.S. DEA Agent is assigned to work in Laos for the first time since 1975.
- 1998-** The U.S. funds the creation of a 3<sup>rd</sup> drug rehabilitation center in Laos.
- 1998-** The International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) opens in Bangkok to train police to counter the drug threat throughout Southeast Asia.
- 1998-** Burma and Thailand form an agreement to conduct cross-border law enforcement cooperation.
- 1998-** Hill Tribes become ATS addicts in Thailand.
- 1999-** The DEA introduces the Drug Abuse and Resistance Education (DARE) program to Thailand.

- 1999-** Thailand passed their first money laundering law.
- 1999-** The Lao government issues the “Balanced Approach to Opium Elimination in Lao PDR” plan. Under this plan, Laos would be opium free by 2006.
- 1999-** U.S. funds creation of two more drug rehabilitation centers in Laos.
- 2000-** United States and Thailand sign an Asset Sharing Agreement.
- 2000-** Joint U.S.-Thai investigations result in the dismantling of 3 major West African syndicates who were trafficking heroin from Bangkok to criminal street gangs in Chicago.
- 2000-** Thailand meets its goal of being “opium free”. ATS replaced opium and heroin as the popular drug of choice.
- 2000-** Thailand establishes a special narcotics unit to focus on sea interdiction.
- 2000-** Thailand signs, but does not ratify the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.
- 2000-** The Thai Cabinet approves the accession to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.
- 2000-** Thailand ONCB establishes a new chemical diversion unit.
- 2000-** New heroin trafficking routes established by West African traffickers. New trend trafficked SW Asia heroin to Bangkok and then onto the United States.
- 2000-** Laos once again revises national drug laws.
- 2000-** The U.S begins indirectly funding anti-drug development projects in Burma. The U.S. provides funding for the UNODC Wa development project in Burma.
- 2000-** Illicit drugs cost the U.S. government \$160.7 billion dollars annually.
- 2001-** The Golden Triangle ATS threat becomes a threat to the United States.
- 2001-** The government of Laos declares combating drug trafficking as a national priority. A national anti-drug program is initiated.
- 2001-** Lao government declares Neo Hom an “international terrorist organization”.
- 2001-** UWSA operated ATS refineries found to be operating in Northwestern Laos.
- 2001-** Burma, Laos, and Thailand agree to increase cooperation on countering drug trafficking.
- 2001-** U.S. funds the creation of Task Force 399 in Northwestern Thailand.
- 2001-** A trend of West African traffickers using Russian and Eastern European to

smuggle drugs through the region emerged.

- 2001-** Thailand drug policy revised with the issuing of the “Concentrated Effort of the Nation to Overcome Drugs” plan.
- 2002-** Kokang opium ban ended in failure. Famine and school drop out rates were the result.
- 2002-** U.S. Customs seizes large amounts of opium and heroin sent from Laos and Thailand.
- 2002-** The U.S. buys Lao customs X-ray machines to detect drugs sent by mail.
- 2002-** Laos focuses its drug policy on combating the ATS threat.
- 2002-** A new demand reduction MOU was signed between the United States and Laos.
- 2002-** Thailand becomes a member of the 1988 UN Drug Convention.
- 2002-** Thailand amends drug laws.
- 2002-** The DEA dismantles another Bangkok based Nigerian trafficking group sending drugs to the Midwestern United States.
- 2003-** Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra declares a “War on Drugs” in Thailand.
- 2003-** U.S. and Thailand sign a Bilateral Agreement on Narcotics and Law Enforcement assistance and agree to renew the agreement annually.
- 2003-** Joint U.S.-Thai investigations link West African groups to trafficking Southwest Asian heroin through Bangkok and then into the United States.
- 2003-** Thailand and India sign a Joint Declaration to control precursor chemicals.
- 2003-** Thailand signs, but does not ratify the UN Convention of Corruption.
- 2003-** The Kokang region officially declares opium illegal.
- 2003-** The Mekong River becomes a new popular trafficking route for drugs originating in Burma.
- 2003-** U.S. provides funding to UNODC Kokang Development project (KOWI) in Burma.
- 2003-** U.S. provides funding for a small crop substitution project in Burma ran by an NGO. The project is called “Project Old Soldier”.
- 2003-** The U.S. officially labels UWSA as a drug trafficking organization.
- 2003-** Golden Triangle ATS seizures increase in the United States.
- 2004-** This year marked the peak of Hmong opium sent from Laos is intercepted in

California.

- 2004-** Laos becomes a party to the 1988 UN Drug Convention.
- 2004-** The President of the United States signed a bill that extended normal trade agreements with Laos.
- 2004-** Many former opium growing communities in Laos begin to declare to be opium free.
- 2004-** Thailand adopts a policy of engagement to deal with Burma.
- 2004-** The Department of Special Investigations (DSI) was created in Thailand to deal with high profile international criminal cases. The unit was funded by the U.S. DEA.
- 2004-** Illegal pharmaceutical drugs smuggled from Bangkok increase in the United States.
- 2005-** Thai drug law reforms allow the DEA to use Thai wiretaps to convict international traffickers in United States courts.
- 2005-** The Burmese government declines to facilitate joint U.S.-Burma opium surveys that had been conducted from 1993-2004.
- 2005-** The U.S. begins funding UNODC opium surveys in Burma.
- 2005-** UWSA declares opium illegal. ATS production increases.
- 2005-** Chinese ATS Crystal Meth (ICE), begins to be produced and trafficked out of Burma.
- 2005-** The United States government issued indictments for seven UWSA leaders for conspiracy to traffic drugs to the United States
- 2005-** U.S. cuts off funding to Wa development project after UWSA threatened the lives of U.S. DEA Agents.
- 2005-** United States signs a Bilateral Trade Agreement with Laos.
- 2006-** Laos is no longer an international producer of opium. The domestic opium problem remains. The new major challenge in Laos is as a transit route for heroin and ATS from Burma. ATS addiction is also a threat.
- 2006-** Joint Lao- Thai Mekong Patrol Increase.
- 2006-** The U.S. purchases boats for the Thai-Lao Mekong River.
- 2006-** The U.S. funds the creation of a new Drug Intelligence Center in Northeastern Thailand.



- 2006-** HRH Princess Ubolratana Rajakanya introduces a new drug awareness campaign in Thailand.
- 2006-** The U.S. funds a program to evaluate drug rehabilitation in Thailand.
- 2007-** Thailand and Laos anti-drug cooperation increases, when Thai increased the amount of Border Liaison Offices (BLO).
- 2007-** The U.S. encourages Thai-Lao border drug enforcement initiatives by funding the expansion of Border Liaison Offices (BLO).
- 2007-** Laos and India become new major international drug trafficking routes.
- 2007-** Vang Pao arrested in California after trying to buy weapons from an undercover Federal Agent. He planned on shipping the weapons to Neo Hom to be used to overthrow the Lao government. Vang Pao charged for acts of terrorism.
- 2007-** Khun Sa dies as a free man.
- 2007-** A senior leader of the UWSA is arrested for drug trafficking in Hong Kong.
- 2007-** Burma violates human rights again during peaceful protests.
- 2007-** U.S. increases sanctions on Burma after human rights violations.
- 2008-** U.S. government imposes more sanctions on government leaders and on Lo Hsing Han and his son.



**APPENDIX B**

ศูนย์วิทยทรัพยากร  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

## INTERVIEW

No. 1

Date: October 22, 2008

Location: Chiang Mai Thailand

Organization: Thailand Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB)

Name and Title of Interviewee: Mr. Janya Sramajcha Director of Office of Narcotics Control Region 5.

1. Q: Can you please explain the mission of the Thailand Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB)?

A: ONCB is responsible for developing national drug policies and programs in Thailand. ONCB also has law enforcement duties. ONCB has the overall responsibility for suppressing illegal drugs in Thailand.

2. Q: What are the major drug problems facing Thailand?

A: Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) is the major drug problem in Thailand today. Since Kuhn Sa's surrender in 1996, heroin has ceased to be the major problem in Thailand. ONCB has not found many heroin refineries on the Thai border. ATS has replaced most of the heroin.

3. Q: How has the drug problem changed during the past 30 years in Thailand?

A: Thirty years ago, the main problem was opium and opium addiction. Now opium growth in Thailand is very small, only about 1,800 Rai is grown in Thailand today. In the past, the main focus of the Thai government was on suppressing the Communist Party of Thailand. After the Communist Party of Thailand was no longer a problem, the Thai government was then able to focus on opium eradication matters. The Royal projects of the King of Thailand were major factors in the success of opium eradication in Thailand. The United Nations Drug Control Program (UNDCP), which is now the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the U.S. Narcotics

Affairs Unit (NAU), which is now called the Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) from the U.S. Department of State helped quite a bit. A special task force was formed to deal with drugs, counter terrorism, human trafficking, and transnational crime. The task force works closely with the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Twenty years ago, as opium was being reduced in Thailand, large amounts of heroin began to be smuggled into Thailand from Burma. After Khun Sa's surrender, ATS then became the new major threat to Thailand. Ya-Baa was first seized at Mae Hong Son. That was the first seizure of Burmese ATS. Now the Shan State Army (SSA) under Yawd Serk has taken over much of Khun Sa's former area and facilitates drug trafficking in addition to the United Wa State Army (UWSA). Opium poppy fields have been reduced in Burma, because ATS is easier to produce and harder to detect. ATS can be produced in just 2 days as compared with a 4 month production period required to grow opium and then another 7 days to refine opium to heroin. ONCB has implemented a policy to control precursor chemicals, especially in the border provinces such as Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong San, Nan, and Tak. The Commodity Control Act is used to enforce precursor chemical regulations. The military has been the main enforcers of this act and the act gave the military arrest powers in drug related matters.

4. Q: What sort of drug threat does Thailand face as a trafficking route from Burma and Laos?

A: Meth and Ice (both types of ATS). The majority of the ATS is smuggled from Burma and a smaller amount is smuggled from Laos. Most of the drugs from Laos come in the form of raw opium and marijuana. Very little heroin and ATS come from Laos, most of it comes from Burma.

5. Q: Does the ONCB work jointly with United States government officials? How do the ONCB and the United States work together in Thailand?

A: We have worked together since 1975. At that time a combined task force of ONCB, Thai Police, and DEA all worked together. An intelligence center was

established and drug related intelligence continues to be shared. The U.S. sent DEA Special Agents and U.S. Army Special Forces (Green Berets) to train Thai counter-narcotics officials. The U.S. Department of State NAS section assisted in development programs. The U.S. provided financial support and provided a vehicle necessary for development. The U.S. aided in alternative development and suppression efforts. The U.S. and Thailand still work together, but the budget and funding have been reduced, due to the removal of Thailand from the U.S. Narcotics Watch list. The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) 7<sup>th</sup> Fleet has established a Narco Terror Unit. The DOD Task Force deals with drug related terrorism and transnational crime. Several agencies participate, such as the DOD, FBI, and even the Bank of America in money laundering investigations. The International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA) trains Thai officers to fight organized crime, this involves drug enforcement training. The U.S. position is no longer to just give money, the U.S. role is now to teach and train as opposed to just giving money. All ASEAN countries except for Burma train at ILEA. The Burmese government needs help. China is helping Burma with police training. China also invites Thai officers for police training as well.

6. Q: What threat does the drug problem pose toward the United States of America?

A: Heroin is still a threat to the United States. Hill Tribes in Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam are sending drugs to relatives in the U.S. Many of the Hill Tribe relatives went to the U.S. as refugees. Most of the international traffickers are West African and Taiwanese. In the past, American and European traffickers were involved, but now there are not many. The traffickers use Thai women to carry heroin across borders. Many women are unaware that they are carrying the drugs. Thai women are used to traffic the drugs through China, because no visa is required for Thai citizens. Most of the Thai women involved are very poor from Northeastern Thailand. Many of the girls think that the African traffickers are dark skinned Americans.

7. Q: What sort of drug is produced in Thailand? What is the threat of opium and heroin in Thailand?

A: Opium, but only a very small amount for personal consumption is still produced in Thailand. There are still a lot of opium addicts. Hill Tribes still believe that opium is medicine. ATS is used by youth in entertainment clubs. ATS all comes from Burma. Laboratory testing has allowed us to pinpoint the location of where the drug is produced. The 3 major ATS producing areas in Burma are all located in the UWSA area.

8. Q: What is the threat of Amphetamine Type Stimulants in Thailand?

A: It is the most serious threat. 48% of ATS addicts are youth compared to most heroin addicts being adults. ATS contributes to the HIV problem.

9. Q: To what extent is human trafficking and arms trafficking linked to drug trafficking?

A: Several years ago it was all related. Now, we do not have a lot of information on how it is all linked together. UWSA used to control both drugs and human trafficking. Now, less incidents of the combination of the two are found. Now they seem to be separate, because the traffickers do not want to lose their drugs if the illegal migrants are caught. Most of the information is only rumors and it is hard to prove.

10. Q: Are former opium growers involved in ATS production?

A: They are not involved in the production of ATS. They are, however, involved with the smuggling of ATS across the borders. Hill Tribes have relatives across the borders and it is easy for them to smuggle ATS into Thailand. The pay for drug smuggling is very good for the Hill Tribes, it is much better pay than growing tea and coffee. They are also told that if they are arrested, life in Thai jail is much more comfortable than everyday life in Burma. Most of the Hill Tribe drug smugglers are women and smuggle drugs to help their family. The men have mandatory military commitments to either the Burmese Army or the UWSA Army, so the women need to help with the

financial burden. Women carry drugs to earn money for the family. Male Thai authorities cannot search a female. A female officer needs to search the suspect. Burmese from the Shan state can blend into Thai society, so it is harder to detect them. The risk is worthwhile since Thai jail is better than Burma.

11. Q: Who are the drug producers?

A: Now UWSA is the number one producer, SSA is the # 2 producer, and the Kokang Army is the #3 producer. 70% of ATS in Burma is produced from the same UWSA factory. UWSA controls the market. All rebel groups cooperate with narcotics matters. The Burmese government is the common enemy for all groups. The UWSA Army is stronger and better trained and equipped than the Burmese Army. China supports UWSA. China tells UWSA not to send narcotics through China.

12. Q: Who are the drug traffickers that smuggle drugs into Thailand?

A: Many people. The trade is controlled by the UWSA, Chinese groups, and West African groups.

13. Q: Who are the drug traffickers that smuggle drugs from Thailand to the United States?

A: Many people. The trade is controlled by the UWSA, Chinese groups, and West African groups

14. Q: Do illegal migrants that enter Thailand from Laos to Burma ever carry drugs with them?

A: Not so often. In the past it was a big problem, but now not so much.

15. Q: Does the United States assist the Thai government with money for combating drug trafficking or assist in anti-narcotics training for police?

A: The budget has been reduced. Now most assistance is mostly in the form of training assistance, human resources development programs, and intelligence

sharing.

16. Q: What links exist between drug trafficking and other transnational organized crime?

A: Drug trafficking is related to money laundering and terrorism. Narco-terrorism is especially a problem in Southern Thailand. Terrorists in the South are using drugs to finance terrorism. This is against the Muslim religion and is not officially sanctioned. We are still trying to understand the link between terrorism and narcotics. Muslims prohibit the consumption of alcohol, but it is ok to use narcotics.

17. Q: What major challenges does Thailand face in combating international drug trafficking?

A: Cocaine is being trafficked into Thailand by African syndicates. African syndicates also export heroin through Thailand to various countries. Bangkok is the headquarters for the international traffickers, especially around Soi Nana for African and Chinese traffickers. Pratunam is also a popular area for the traffickers. They pretend to operate legitimate businesses.

18. Q: Can you please discuss future plans of action to suppress drug trafficking?

A: We will continue to develop cooperation between Thailand and neighboring countries, reduce poverty, and increase alternative development programs. Also intelligence sharing between Burma and Thailand is important. Thailand will continue to develop relations within the Greater Mekong Sub Region and with China and India. India still does not have a law to control precursor chemicals. China now has stronger measures to control precursor chemicals. Burma and Thailand have a traditional exchange agreement to exchange prisoners and are allowed to pursue traffickers across the Thai-Burma border. Thailand also plans on continuing work with ASEAN. Each ASEAN country plans to eliminate drugs by 2015 according to the ASEAN drug plan. Burma claims that they will be drug free by 2010. The Thai strategy of working with Burma and Laos is aimed at helping the



ordinary people, not their government. Their government cannot do anything. Thailand will continue to use its own experience to help its neighbors. Thailand contributes 20 Million Baht per year to Burma for sustainable development programs. ONCB works closely with the Burma Border Affairs Minister (NATALA). Thailand provides training to Burmese officials for sustainable development activities. Thailand encourages non-violent solutions in Burma. If Burma uses its Army, it will make matters worse and continue to increase the refugee problem in Thailand.



ศูนย์วิทยทรัพยากร  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

## INTERVIEW

No. 2

Date: November 13, 2008

Location: Honolulu, Hawaii

Organization: Honolulu Police Department

Name and Title of Interviewee: Lt. Darren Chun Honolulu Police Department  
Narcotics/Vice Division

1. Q: Can you please explain what sort of drugs in Honolulu come from the Golden Triangle Region of Burma, Laos, and Thailand?

A: Methamphetamine, Heroin (“China White”), and Ecstasy.

2. Q: What sort of crime are illegal narcotics linked to?

A: Generally - robbery, burglary, other property crimes, assault, weapons offenses, and homicide.

3. Q: Are illegal narcotics linked with human trafficking cases?

A: There have been cases where people have been forced into being “mules” for drug dealers.

4. Q: How are Asian Organized Criminal Organizations linked to the illegal narcotics trade?

A: Asian OC have been linked with being international narcotics traffickers.

5. Q: Do Asian Gangs in Honolulu have links to international gangs involved with drug trafficking and other international crime?

A: There are some Asian narcotics traffickers that have links to other narcotics trafficking organizations in foreign countries.

6. Q: What sort of heroin or Methamphetamine is most common in Honolulu?

Where are most of these narcotics trafficked from?

A: “Black Tar” heroin is most frequently seen in Honolulu. It is commonly trafficked from Mexico.

7. Q: What is the legal status of ethnic gangs involved with illegal narcotics? Are the majority U.S. citizens or recent immigrants?

A: Many are immigrants in the U.S legally, not necessarily U.S. citizens, and we do find some that are here illegally.

8. Q: What links exist between drug trafficking and other transnational organized crime such as human trafficking and weapons smuggling?

A: These links commonly exist with each other.

9. Q: Can you describe the links to that criminal organizations in the Golden Triangle have with criminal organizations in the United States?

A: Criminal organizations in foreign countries are commonly related with criminal organizations in the U.S. through narcotics trafficking. Supplying and distributing narcotics.

10. Q: What are the methods used to traffic narcotics from the Golden Triangle to the United States?

A: There are numerous ways to traffic narcotics, some are via parcels, body carrying on planes and boats, and sending via cargo.

## INTERVIEW

No 3

Date: November 20, 2008

Location: Bangkok, Thailand

Organization: Thailand Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) Bangkok.

Name and Title of Interviewee: Mr. Pithaya Jinawat, Deputy Secretary General,  
Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB).

2. Q: Can you please explain the mission of the Thailand Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB)?

A: The ONCB has 2 functions. The first function is as the secretary of the Narcotics Control Board. Second function is a strategic function. In addition to developing policy, we also submit policy for approval to the cabinet to develop government narcotics drug policy. Each year, we have to prepare annual and quarterly narcotics plans. We ensure that the policy is implemented by the appropriate agency. General Kovit Watana is the director of the National Narcotics Combat Center and oversees ONCB policy. ONCB is also an enforcement agency. We have a monthly meeting with General Kovit. Each month the National Narcotics Combat Center reviews the plans. ONCB is a coordinating agency and responsible for monitoring and surveillance. We need to know what the national drug situation is and we report to the National Narcotics Combat Center. We deal with inter agency coordination for narcotics. We are also the implementing and enforcement agency as well.

2. Q: What are the major drug problems facing Thailand?

A: Methamphetamines. Also, less serious drugs such as marijuana and chemical substances are found in Thailand. The poor rural children like to use chemicals. Heroin is also a problem, but it is not widely used. Opium cultivation has declined. Heroin is trafficked from Burma through Thailand. We still have some small opium plantations in the north, such as Mae Hong

San, Chiang Rai, and Chiang Mai. There are only 1,500 Rai cultivated in Thailand today. The main domestic problem is ATS (Amphetamine Type Stimulants) like ya-ba.

3. Q: How has the drug problem changed during the past 30 years in Thailand?

A: 30 years ago, the problem was with opium and Hill Tribes. After that it was heroin. After we solved the heroin problem, ATS became the problem. It depends on supply and demand. We still had opium addicts after we stopped opium growing. Heroin, then became a problem. Groups in Burma produce ATS. There is also a small production of ATS around Bangkok. Generally, ATS is not produced in Thailand. It is mostly made in Burma. Marijuana is a small problem. Marijuana comes from Laos and goes through Thailand on its way to Malaysia. Heroin's destination is not Thailand; it is destined for international markets. Supply is the most important factor. 30 years ago, we had opium and it was in demand. Supply creates demand more than demand creates supply. There are many factors involved.

4. Q: What sort of drug threat does Thailand face as a trafficking route from Burma and Laos?

A: Methamphetamine. In the past, drugs were trafficked from the north. The routes have changed and are now coming into Thailand from North Eastern, Thailand. They are also going through Cambodia and Vietnam. They use containers and other methods. The domestic problem is ATS, to include ICE and ecstasy. Marijuana also comes in from Laos. The neighboring countries are underdeveloped and poor. It is easy to recruit couriers, because they are so poor. They will hide the drugs in a condom and smuggle across the border. It is profitable for them, because they are poor. We catch a lot of Burmese, Cambodian, and Lao smugglers.

5. Q: Does the ONCB work jointly with United States government officials? How do the ONCB and the United States work together in Thailand?

A: The United States has been involved in Thailand for 30 years. The United

States began assistance with eradicating opium. They helped develop one of the first opium development projects. The Mae Jam project was one of the first projects. It is named after a district in Chiang Mai. There was a lot of opium there during that period. The U.S. has helped with technical, financial, and information exchange. They have also funded rehabilitation programs. The United States is an important donor country. Now, the U.S. does not help much, because Thailand is developed and has more money. Now they help poorer countries such as Indonesia and Afghanistan. After Thaksin's "War on Drugs", the US reduced assistance due to human rights violations. Department of State policy has reduced assistance from the Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS). The US used to help with opium survey funding, but now they do not give us money for that. DEA helps with joint operations and information exchange. The U.S. is not very interested in the Thailand drug situation anymore. They now focus more on the Golden Crescent and South America. Afghanistan and Pakistan heroin is trafficked through Thailand by African groups.

8. Q: What threat does the drug problem pose toward the United States of America?

A: The export of heroin. ATS going to U.S. is small. Heroin from Afghanistan goes to US through Thailand. Hmong and Hill Tribes send some opium by mail to relatives in America. Heroin is the main threat towards America.

9. Q: What sort of drug is produced in Thailand? What is the threat of opium and heroin in Thailand?

A: Nothing dangerous is produced in Thailand. Some opium is produced, but it is insignificant.

8. Q: What is the threat of Amphetamine Type Stimulants in Thailand?

A: A major threat. It is produced in neighboring countries and sent to Thailand. Many people use this drug. It is the most popular drug in Thailand. ICE is used as a higher class drug. Ecstasy comes directly to Thailand from

the Netherlands. Ya Ba is used by low class users. ICE and ecstasy are used by the high class. ATS is a major threat to the youth. In Burma, Wa produce ATS, and there is a possibility that they are now producing a low quality ecstasy. After the 2003 “War on Drugs”, the amount of ya ba in Thailand has been reduced.

10. Q: To what extent is human trafficking and arms trafficking linked to drug trafficking?

A: Organized Crime groups are involved in many different types of crime. Usually drug traffickers focus on drugs and do not get involved with human trafficking. We suspect they are all linked under a high level of organized crime, but it is unclear. It is hard to prove. Enough is not known about this yet. There are 3 groups. One group is an Asian groups linked with Singapore. The second group is West African, especially Nigerian. They use Thai women to traffic drugs. Many Thai women get caught. They also bring cocaine into Thailand and send heroin out. The third group is the Burmese and Chinese. They send drugs through China and Thailand. In the past, there was a problem with westerners, but now not so much. Drugs are used to control sex workers. They use it to improve their sex work. It will take time to figure out the connection between human trafficking and drugs trafficking. We believe there is probably a connection between the two, but we do not have proof.

10. Q: Are former opium growers involved in ATS production?

A: They are ATS users. They do not produce it. They do not have the connections to produce it. The opium growers are usually poor. They do not have the money to produce ATS. The ATS producers are rich. The Hill Tribes are couriers. They smuggle ATS across the borders. They are too poor to rise to the level of ATS producer. They do not have access to the precursor chemicals and technology. They are poor farmers and couriers. In Thailand, we found Hmong, who have risen to financing opium growing, employing other Hill Tribes. Haw Chinese are plentiful in the north. They do not produce opium, they sell it. They are smart business men. They send it to Taiwan. The

Chinese Haw role has been reduced now.

11. Q: Who are the drug producers in the Golden Triangle Region?

A: Usually they are minorities in Burma. Burma is number one and Laos number two. Karen have not been traditional producers, but now they have started growing opium as well, because they are poor. Several tribes are involved. Most of them are minorities in the Shan State of Burma. UWSA is the ATS producer. The priority of Burma is internal security, not drugs. That is why the government uses certain groups such as UWSA to control other groups, allowing them to produce drugs.

12. Q: Who are the drug traffickers that smuggle drugs into Thailand?

A: Hill Tribes. Many groups. Hill Tribes are poor and know the mountains. They can navigate across the borders better than anyone else.

13. Q: Who are the drug traffickers that smuggle drugs from Thailand to the United States?

A: Traffickers that smuggle to the United States have to be smart. It is hard to smuggle internationally. They must know how to hide the drugs and use containers and sophisticated methods. Organized crimes are involved; Hill Tribes do not know how to do this. They must have international connections and know how to deal with authorities. They have to know how to package the drugs. They mix it with other merchandise on a container. It is hard to smuggle on airplanes, since customs officials are very good at detecting drugs.

14. Q: Do illegal migrants that enter Thailand from Laos to Burma ever carry drugs with them?

A: Yes, they are poor and easy to recruit. We have a big problem with them putting drugs in a condom and hiding it in their body. The male officials cannot search a woman, so a lot of women smuggle drugs. We have a problem with Burmese, Cambodians, and Lao bringing drugs to Thailand and selling them. They come to sell them in Bangkok. They are hard to detect. They come



across the borders in very large numbers, so many and hard to detect. It is because their country is so underdeveloped and poor.

15. Q: Does the United States assist the Thai government with money for combating drug trafficking or assist in anti-narcotics training for police?

A: The U.S. has lowered the amount of assistance. There are a lot of conditions. They do not help much anymore. They have reduced funding due to human rights violation after the 2003 “War on Drugs”. Since we are developed, we are expected to use our own funding.

18. Q: What links exist between drug trafficking and other transnational organized crime?

A: We think there is a link, but it is still unclear. There are Russian Mafia in Pattaya and groups around Soi Nana, but they are mostly involved with drugs. We still do not have proof of the links between human trafficking and drugs.

19. Q: What major challenges does Thailand face in combating international drug trafficking?

A: International drug trafficking and organized crime. They are sophisticated. We need to improve international cooperation and intelligence exchange. We need help with funding for training and to buy equipment. Electronic equipment is expensive. International cooperation is important to solve the drug problem. We also need to solve out problem with official corruption. Some officials are easily bribed. We involve the community and encourage them to report corruption, so we can solve official corruption. We need the public’s help with this.

18. Q: Can you please discuss future plans of action to suppress drug trafficking?

A: We will have a good monitoring and surveillance system. We will also continue to focus on research and development. We have the help from the universities in Thailand and other countries. We will also focus to continue knowledge management. We need to go to other countries for meetings to

improve and exchange knowledge. We will continue to improve plans according to the changing situation. We will also work on improving interagency coordination in Thailand. We are concerned with the drug problem among children.



ศูนย์วิทยทรัพยากร  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

## INTERVIEW

No. 4

Date: November 22, 2008

Location: San Jose, California

Organization: San Jose Police Department

Name and Title of Interviewee: Officer Doug Tran, Narcotics Unit

1. Q: Can you please explain what sort of drugs in San Jose come from the Golden Triangle Region of

Burma, Lao, and Thailand?

A: There has not been any report as to drugs that came from the Golden Triangle Region to San Jose. According to my experience, I do not know at this point if San Jose drugs came from the Golden Triangle Region.

2. Q: What sort of crime are illegal narcotics linked to?

A: There are many crimes that illegal narcotics are linked to indirectly. A lot of the crimes such as burglary, robberies, prostitution, and theft are linked to illegal drugs because some suspects steal to fund their addiction to illegal drugs. Some homicide, although rare in San Jose, are linked to illegal drugs. Drug rip and those who believe to work for the police are sometimes murdered. Additionally, shootings and stabbings occurred because of territorial issues and turf wars.

3. Q: Are illegal narcotics linked with human trafficking cases?

A: I am sure that there are some instances that it does where those victims of human trafficking are used to transport narcotics for those in charge of human trafficking. However, I have no knowledge of any case in San Jose.

4. Q: How are Asian Organized Criminal Organizations linked to the illegal narcotics trade?

A: Usually these organizations trade illegal drugs to fund the organization and expand the organization. The organization forms a pyramid type business that trickles from a head person to the seller below. Some organizations can be very complicated and does business throughout different area of the country. Sometimes one organization will align with another organization to trade drugs more efficiently and more profitable. It is well known that Asian organized criminal groups are very complicated and are very discreet in their operations.

5. Q: Do Asian Gangs in San Jose have links to international gangs involved with drug trafficking and other international crime?

A: Asian Gangs in San Jose are known for nationwide crime but not international crime at this time.

6. Q: What sort of heroin or methamphetamine is most common in San Jose? Where are most of these narcotics trafficked from?

A: San Jose mostly has problem with Methamphetamine (Meth), specifically, "Crystal" Meth. Heroin is rare in San Jose, but does exist. Heroin is also known as tar. Although other ethnicity trade Meth, most Meth comes from Hispanic suspects. Asians suspects in San Jose usually do not involve themselves in Meth. Most of the drug in San Jose is Meth.

7. Q: What is the legal status of ethnic gangs involved with illegal narcotics? Are the majority U.S. citizens or recent immigrants?

A: As far as San Jose, the majority of gangs in San Jose who involve themselves in illegal drug trafficking are recent immigrants, especially with the Hispanic suspects. However, this is not to say the others do not involve themselves in drug trafficking. It seems from my experiences, that the more sophisticated suspects and gangs that traffic drugs are not recent immigrants as they are likely to know more about the legal, law enforcement system and American society to dodge authorities.

8. Q: What links exist between drug trafficking and other transnational organized crime such as human trafficking and weapons smuggling?

A: The best source for human trafficking and weapons smuggling is the FBI and or DEA Agencies as they are more experience and up to date about what affects our borders. But as far as if drug trafficking involves weapons smuggling in San Jose, there are very few cases that we know of.

9. Q: Can you describe the links to that criminal organizations in the Golden Triangle have with criminal organizations in the United States?

A: I have no obvious links from the two at this time.

10. Q: What are the methods used to traffic narcotics from the Golden Triangle to the United States?

A: Most narcotics that came from overseas are through cargo ships (boats) rather than by plane.

11. Q: Can you provide any other information that would be useful to this research?

A: I believe that most international questions in your research should be directed to Federal Law Enforcement agencies such as the FBI or DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) as they have more to do with our border. Unfortunately, as for as San Jose, I have more experience in the Bay Area and some knowledge nationwide.

## INTERVIEW

No. 5

Date: December 2, 2008

Location: Honolulu, Hawaii

Organization: Joint Interagency Task Force-West U.S. Pacific Command.

Name and Title of Interviewee: SSgt David Boddie and CDR Kenneth A. Pierro

1. Q: Can you please explain the role of the Department of Defense regarding the suppression of illicit narcotics in the Golden Triangle region (Burma, Laos, and Thailand)?

A: Recommend that you review the following website for DoD policy on counter-narcotics:

[https://www.defenselink.mil/policy/sections/policy\\_offices/solic/cn/index.htm](https://www.defenselink.mil/policy/sections/policy_offices/solic/cn/index.htm)  
1

2. Q: Can you please explain the mission of the Joint Interagency Task Force West (JIATF West) in the Golden Triangle Region?

A: The Joint Interagency Task Force West (JIATF WESTest), in cooperation with the U.S. interagency and foreign partners, conducts activities to detect, disrupt, and dismantle drug-related transnational threats in Asia and the Pacific in order to protect U.S. security interests at home and aboard.

3. Q: What is the impact of Golden Triangle opium and heroin on the United States? How does Golden Triangle opium and heroin affect crime, security, and society in the United States?

A: Golden Triangle heroin and opium currently has little impact on the U.S. Since the mid 1990s most of the heroin produced in the Golden Triangle is consumed in China. The United Wa State Army (UWSA) in Burma is reported to have some involvement in shipping GT heroin to U.S, however exact details on the amount and methods are unknown at this time.

4. Q: What is the impact of Golden Triangle Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) on the United States? How does Golden Triangle ATS affect crime, security, and society in the United States?

A: From 1999-2001 several thousand Yaba (methamphetamine mixed with caffeine) tablets were seized by the U.S. post office. These shipments were ultimately linked to ethnic Thai Hmong and Yao in Thailand. There is very limited reporting on this type of activity since 2001.

5. Q: What are the conditions that cause the drug problem in the Golden Triangle? Are these factors political, socio-economic, or a combination of many factors?

A: Conditions causing the drug trade problem in the GT are mainly socio-economic as those involved in production at the lowest levels are poor farmers. In addition, most users are also near the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. This is reflected in the increased production and consumption of Yaba over heroin in this region. Yaba is cheaper and easier to obtain than heroin.

6. Q: Who are the key players in the production and trafficking of Golden Triangle opium and heroin to the United States?

A: The UWSA is the biggest drug producing organization in South East Asia with ~20,000 armed troops and personnel. (See question number 3).

7. Q: Who are the key players in the production and trafficking of Golden Triangle ATS to the United States?

A: The UWSA (NFI) is the key player.

8. Q: What links exist between drug trafficking and other transnational organized crime such as human trafficking and weapons smuggling?

A: Historically there have been drugs for arms smuggling networks in Southern Thailand which are linked to regional insurgent groups in Burma,

North Eastern India, and Sri Lanka. Traditionally many organized crime groups are involved in poly-criminal activities such as drug/human trafficking, and document forgery.

9. Q: Can you describe the links to that criminal organizations in the Golden Triangle have with criminal organizations in the United States?

A: Chinese organized crime groups operate on both sides of this crime line, however currently we have no specific targets.

10. Q: What does U.S.Pacific Command and its task force, JIATF-W do in Southeast Asia to suppress the production and trafficking of Golden Triangle drugs to the United States?

A: Apply military competencies to the interagency process; conduct activities to support U.S. Law Enforcement Agencies in dismantling drug-related Transnational Criminal Organizations (TNCOs); build partner nation counter drug capabilities to enforce the rule-of-law; and align with USPACOM's Theater Security Cooperation, War on Terrorism and Maritime Security objectives.

11. Q: How does U.S. Pacific Command and its task force, JIATF-W work with local governments in the Golden Triangle region to suppress illicit narcotics?

A: JIATF West uses contacts with host nation officials developed by US Embassy country team members on the Law Enforcement Working Group (LEWG) to identify mutual areas of concern for the US Government and the host nation. All activities of JIATF West are at the request of the US Country team and must support both Country team and USPACOM interests in the region.

12. Q: How does U.S. Pacific Command and its task force, JIATF-W work with other U.S. government and International agencies to suppress drug trafficking?

A: Intelligence Analysis using both DoD and law enforcement analytical investigative methods. Analysts stationed in the U.S. and in-country support



domestic and international drug-related transnational criminal investigations and cases. We assist U.S. law enforcement with partner nation capacity building through 1) Provide assistance to foreign nations through the construction of Interagency Fusion Centers and the construction or remodeling of check points and other facilities ; 2) Counterdrug training: Land and maritime unit level training missions supporting partner nation military and law enforcement.

13. Q: Can you please discuss future plans of action to suppress drug trafficking in the Golden Triangle?

A: We continuously evaluate what we are doing and adapt our efforts relative to the changing nature, priority and potential impact of the threat.



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## INTERVIEW

No. 6

Date: December 9, 2008

Location: Sacramento, California

Organization: California Department of Justice Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement

Name and Title of Interviewee: Special Agent Michelle Gregory

1. Q: Can you please explain what sort of drugs in California come from the Golden Triangle Region of Burma, Lao, and Thailand?

A: Opiates, pills (rave drug types), marijuana, shrooms.

2. Q: What sort of crime are illegal narcotics linked to?

A: Theft, crimes against persons (murder, assaults), burglaries, and identity theft is big right now.

3. Q: Are illegal narcotics linked with human trafficking cases?

A: Not that I am personally aware of. I have not had a case like this but you might want to check with the Feds (DEA/FBI).

4. Q: How are Asian Organized Criminal Organizations linked to the illegal narcotics trade.

A: Indoor marijuana grows (a big problem in California), club drugs.

5. Q: Do Asian Gangs in California have links to international gangs involved with drug trafficking and other international crime?

A: It is possible, some of our Hispanic gangs do.

6. Q: What sort of heroin or methamphetamine is most common in California? Where are most of these narcotics trafficked from?

A: We are seeing heroin come back and it is in all forms. Meth which continues to be a problem for California and the nation is seen in crystal "ice" form or powder. The meth (finished product) seems to come mostly from Mexico as this is where a lot of the meth labs moved to when we made tougher laws regarding pseudoephedrine. Other ingredients used to make

some of these drugs can come from Canada and the Middle East.

7. Q: Where are most of these narcotics trafficked from?

A: We are seeing heroin come back and it is in all forms. Meth which continues to be a problem for California and the nation is seen in crystal “ice” form or powder. The meth (finished product) seems to come mostly from Mexico as this is where a lot of the meth labs moved to when we made tougher laws regarding pseudoephedrine. Other ingredients used to make some of these drugs can come from Canada and the Middle East.

8. Q: What is the legal status of ethnic gangs involved with illegal narcotics? Are the majority U.S. citizens or recent immigrants?

A: Depends on what drug you are talking about....illegal marijuana gardens in our public and private lands are usually Mexican national drug trafficking organizations, indoor grows are Mexican or Asian related depending on the area. A lot of times, at lab sites or outdoor grows, the people tending to these are illegal immigrants.

9. Q: What links exist between drug trafficking and other transnational organized crime such as human trafficking and weapons smuggling?

A: Being a state agency we don't deal with these types of cases. The feds (FBI or DEA) may have better answers to this type of question.

10. Q: Can you describe the links to that criminal organizations in the Golden Triangle have with criminal organizations in the United States?

A: This would best be answered by the Feds.

11. Q: What are the methods used to traffic narcotics from the Golden Triangle to the United States?

A: Again something to ask the Feds.

12. Q: Can you provide any other information that would be useful to this research?

A: The internet and the Federal Agencies such as INS, DEA, FBI.

## INTERVIEW

No. 7

Date: December 18, 2008

Location: Mae Sai District, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand

Organization: Royal Thai Immigration: Immigration Officer

1. Q: Can you tell me about the border operations in Mae Sai?

A: The border is open every day from 3:30 A.M. until 6:30 P.M. People cross the border for tourism and business. 5,000 people cross the border everyday during the low season and 8,000 people cross every day during the high season. There is a local agreement that allows the people from Burma to cross the border any time, as long as it is within 5 kilometers. People from Burma come to Mae Sai every day to sell items and then return at night.

2. Q: Is there a problem with cross-border drug smuggling?

A: Yes. Drug smuggling is a major problem. Drug refineries operate across the border on the Burma side and are smuggled across the border into Thailand. The Office of Narcotics Control Board can answer your questions better than I can. They deal with drugs.

3. Q: What kinds of drugs are smuggled across the border?

A: Opium, heroin, and ya-baa.

4. Q: Who smuggles the drugs?

A: Mostly Hill Tribes. They have connections on both sides of the border.

5. Q: What other problems occur on the border?

A: Illegal migration is a major problem for Thailand. We cannot arrest anyone, unless the travel out of the 5 kilometer area of the border.

## INTERVIEW

No. 8

Date: December 19, 2008

Location: Chiang Rai, Thailand

Organization: Akha Foundation

1. Q: What does the Akha foundation do to prevent drugs?  
A: We develop drug prevention and rehabilitation programs. We involve the community and the family. We try to develop alternatives by promoting education.
2. Q: Are Akha villagers involved in drug trafficking?  
A: Yes, many are. They are poor and do not own land. They work as labor and smugglers for the drug lords. They are just poor and trying to make money.
3. Q: What is the major drug problem in this area?  
A: ATS is the major problem. There has been a large increase in ATS addicts.
4. Q: Do Akha tribes in Thailand cooperate with Akha tribes in Burma and Laos to traffic drugs?  
A: Yes. The tribes in Thailand have links with the tribes in Burma and Laos. They can cooperate to carry drugs across the border.
5. Q: How does the Akha foundation help with drug rehabilitation?  
A: We develop many programs to keep people off drugs. We give incentives to stay off drugs. We have events such as sports competitions. The programs are community centered and involve the family of the addict. We discourage drug use through community learning and education.

## INTERVIEW

No. 9

Date: December 19, 2008

Location: Chiang Rai Province, Thailand

Organization: Royal Thai Military Radio Station Unit 914: Akha Radio Broadcaster

1. Q: Are Hill Tribes in this area involved with the illegal drug trade?

A: Yes. The old people use opium as medicine and often become addicts. It is more affordable than medicine from the hospital and going into the town is inconvenient. Also, opium works better than the regular medicine. Many people have taken regular medicine and have not been cured. They are only cured after using opium. Many teenagers use ya baa. Many of them steal to get money to buy drugs. I am afraid to go out at night, drugs make our community dangerous. My older brother became addicted to opium, it was very bad. He took methadone, but eventually went back to using opium.

2. Q: Which tribes are involved with the drug trade?

A: They are all involved. They will not admit to it. It is a very secret circle. Many foreigners may not realize the extent of the problem, but it is a big problem. The group keeps a very good secret. If any one asks, they will deny any involvement. It is hard to prove anything.

3. Q: Is there a drug trafficking connection between the Hill Tribes in Thailand with tribes in Burma and Laos?

A: Yes. There is a connection. Tribes in Burma can easily carry drugs across the border into Thailand. They meet each other in the village and make the exchange. It is difficult for anyone to notice the transaction.

4. Q: Who trafficking the drugs to Bangkok?

A: Mostly Thai people. They come and hire a Hill Tribe person with cross border connections to bring the drugs across the border into Thailand. After

that, the Thai person will transport the drugs to Bangkok.

5. Q: How do you feel about the drug problem?

A: Am really tired of it! The situation was much better under Prime Minister Thaksin's drug policy. Thaksin suppressed drug trafficking and the Hill Tribes were afraid to get involved with drug use and drug trafficking. Now, they are starting to be brave again and are not afraid to get involved with drugs. Drugs are increasing again.



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## INTERVIEW

No. 10

Date: December 20, 2008

Location: Chiang Kong, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand

Organization: Royal Thai Police, Undercover Thai Police Officer

1. Q: What are the major drug problems that occur in this area?

A: First of all, I want to say that this is unofficial. I am speaking to you man to man and not as a police officer. Drugs are a major problem in this area. They are smuggled across the border from both Burma and Laos.

2. Q: Who is responsible for smuggling drugs across the border?

A: Various groups and sub groups. Their ultimate target is to smuggle them to the United States. It is hard to tell who is trafficking drugs, because a drug smuggler looks like a normal person. There is not just one group. There are groups of Burmese, Lao, Thai, and Vietnamese that smuggle the drugs. People of all ages smuggle the drugs. Some parents use their children to smuggle drugs. One example was a case of a young boy smuggling drugs. I saw him and I thought to myself “what an adorable little kid”. It turned out that the kid was smuggling drugs across the border. The smugglers pretend to be tourists, they can easily cross the border into Thailand to travel or see relatives. The trends are changing and they are increasingly smuggling them across the Mekong River.

6. Q: What kinds of drugs are smuggled across the border?

A: All types. People smuggle opium, heroin, and ATS across the border.

7. Q: What sort of problems do drugs cause in your community?

A: The problem involves both drug smuggling and drug addiction. Many people are addicted to opium and ya-baa. People also get involved with the sex trade and other illegal activities.



8. Q: Is there a rehabilitation program in this community?

A: Yes. The local hospital has a rehabilitation program. It is rather expensive and many people do not want to go into town to seek treatment.

9. Q: Do the Thai authorities have a cross-border law enforcement agreement with Burma and Laos?

A: Yes. We have an agreement that allows us to cooperate with each other to catch drug traffickers. We can pursue suspects across the border. There are several Border Liaison Offices that coordinate for cross border cooperation with Burma and Laos.

10. Q: What challenges do Thai authorities face in combating drug smuggling?

A: We lack quality equipment and funding. Our equipment is old and low technology. Our equipment cannot effectively detect cross-border drug smuggling.



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## INTERVIEW

No. 11

Date: January 4, 2009

Location: Mae Sai Border Checkpoint, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand

Organization: Royal Thai Immigration

Name and Title of Interviewee: Thai Immigration Officer

1. Q: What sort of problems with drug smuggling occur in this area?

A: People do not generally smuggle at this checkpoint, because we have so many officials here. They prefer to smuggle the drugs across the river in remote areas with fewer officials. The Office of Narcotics Control Board are more qualified to answer this question than I am.

2. Q: Who distributes and smuggles illegal drugs in this area?

A: Various groups sell drugs. Most of the groups bring the drugs into Thailand from Burma. Tai Yai in Burma and various hill tribes smuggle the drugs. We search suspicious looking people. We might suspect someone who comes across the border quite often, making many trips in a short period. Both men and women smuggle drugs across the border.

3. Q: How are the drugs smuggled into Thailand?

A: Most of the drugs are smuggled by boat using the Kong River. From Tachilek, drugs can easily be smuggled to various points along the river. From Tachilek, drugs can easily be sent down to Chiang Saen by river. Most people smuggle the drugs across at remote checkpoints, where few people and few officials are present.

4. Q: What type of drugs are smuggled into Thailand?

A: Yaa baa and Yaa Ice are the major drugs smuggled into Thailand.

5. Q: Who have you arrested for drug trafficking?

A: We have caught many different groups of people. Both men and women carry drugs, but we mostly catch the men.



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## INTERVIEW

No. 12

Date: January 4, 2009

Location: Mae Sai Police Station, Chiang Rai Province, Thailand

Organization: Royal Thai Police

Name and Title of Interviewee: Police Captain Surasak Saleesonsom

1. Q: What sort of problems with illegal drugs occur in this area?

A: First of all, people are unaware of the recent laws regarding drug trafficking. Most people know it is illegal, but they think that they will only do a few years in jail if caught. The law has changed and people will face life imprisonment if caught trafficking drugs. They will also face property seizure. The government can seize their house and car in addition to life imprisonment. Another problem is that drugs are smuggled into Thailand from neighboring countries by river.

2. Q: Who distributes and smuggles illegal drugs in this area?

A: Burmese, Tai Yai, and Akha. Both men and women are involved, but mostly men are caught in this area.

3. Q: How are the drugs smuggled into Thailand?

A: Many methods are used. The first method is to throw the drugs across the river from Burma to another person in Thailand. Another method is for people to hide the drugs in the soles of their shoes or clothing. The third method used is to hide the drugs inside orifices of their body.

4. Q: What other drugs are linked to drug smuggling in this area?

A: Most of them are related to smuggling illegal items through customs. The same groups of people also sell illegal viagra, cigarettes, and other items.

5. Q: Why do people smuggle drugs?

A: Because they are poor and want money. Many have money, but want to be rich. A lot of people do it to buy a house or a car. The very poorest groups are not involved.

6. Q: What type of drugs are smuggled into Thailand?

A: Yaa Baa, Ice, and Heroin. They are smuggled from Burma, there are lots of factories that refine yaa baa and heroin on that side of the border.

7. Q: Who are the major groups responsible for large scale drug trafficking?

A: There are many major groups. We most catch the low or mid level traffickers. There are a lot of Chinese Haw or Thai groups running big drug trading operations.

8. Q: What is being done in this area to prevent drug trafficking?

A: We work on public awareness campaigns. We also conduct urine tests in schools to test for students using drugs. We also conduct random checks on suspicious people. We have made many large drug seizures in this area as well.

9. Q: What are the characteristics of a suspicious person?

A: The first group likely to be drug traffickers are the drug addicts. The next group is people who live beyond their means, for example a person who has a lot of money, but no work. The final group are people who are abnormally nervous when dealing with the police.

10. Q: In your opinion, what needs to be done in the future to stop drug trafficking?

A: We need to increase public awareness and make people aware of how serious drug trafficking is. They need to know that if they deal drugs, they are facing life imprisonment, not just 2-3 years. If a person deals drugs, they will lose everything, their freedom, their car, their house, and their future!

## INTERVIEW

No. 13

Date: January 7, 2009

Location: Chiang Mai, Thailand

Organization: U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Chiang Mai Office

Name and Title of Interviewee: Undisclosed DEA Representative

1. Q: Can you please explain the mission of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in the Golden Triangle Region?

A: The DEA mission is to identify, disrupt, and dismantle major drug trafficking organizations, working in cooperation with host nation authorities. We cooperate with the Thai authorities; we do not do it on our own. We work with the Narcotics Suppression Bureau, Thai Army, and other Police in Northern Thailand.

2. Q: What is the impact of Golden Triangle opium and heroin on the United States? How does Golden Triangle opium and heroin affect crime, security, and society in the United States?

A: There is a steady flow of opium between this area and the central valley of California. The former poppy farmers from Laos were resettled there in the mid 1970's. The Hmong have been resettled there and are involved. Their relatives and friends send opium there to addicts in the U.S. They send both raw and cooked opium.

3. Q: Are the Hmong there linked with street gangs in California?

A: The Lao there linked with the opium are ethnic Hmong. The Hmong are members of street gangs in some areas. I am not aware of an exclusive Hmong gang. I know where they are settled. It is better to talk to authorities in California about the gangs.

4. Q: What is the impact of Golden Triangle Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) on the United States? How does Golden Triangle ATS affect crime, security, and society in the United States?

A: ATS from this area is not in large demand in the US. Ya Baa is mostly used in this region, but not yet popular in the US. We do not believe that ICE is a major threat, since Mexico produces most of the US supply. ICE is now produced in Northern Burma, instead of China. ICE in Thailand is produced by UWSA in Burma.

5. Q: Will ATS from this area be a potential threat to the U.S. in the future?

A: I think potential is a fair word to use. The ATS is a very high purity and low cost compared to what Americans pay for it in the U.S. ICE is already being exported to Australia, Korea, Philippines, Taiwan, and other areas. It is recognized as a good quality of ICE. So far, we are not aware of it being smuggled into the U.S. on a large scale. It may be just a matter of time.

6. Q: What are the differences between the opium/heroin threats as opposed to the threat of ATS?

A: Opium has been minimal compared to heroin. Some of the older resettled hill tribes are addicted. Opium is more of a health problem. Cocaine and heroin are much more serious than opium. For decades, this area was the primary source of US heroin, but in recent years, it has been replaced by Mexican and South American heroin. Canada sees more heroin from this area than the US does.

7. Q: Can you please describe the traditional Drug threat to the United States during the last thirty years?

A: Golden Triangle was a primary source of heroin to the US. The most recent threat is minor, since South America is now sending cocaine and heroin into the U.S.

8. Q: What are the conditions that cause the drug problem in the Golden Triangle? Are these factors political, socio-economic, or a combination of many factors?

A: There are a lot of things going on in Burma. The largest drug trafficking group UWSA, promised to no longer produce opium, but did not mention ATS. They are looking for international help for the farmers who gave up poppy production. Not much help is being given to them. So, the people who have stopped production do not have access to other income sources. Thailand is a great example of providing alternative incomes. Thailand improved roads and infrastructure. It worked in Thailand and is working to some extent in Laos. China has taken a heavy handed approach and has eliminated most poppy growth in China. Laos has reduced opium production. They have been more responsive to the needs of hill tribe farmers. Thailand is the best example of all. Thailand's success was due to Royal support, NGO's, and United Nations. The good roads make a big difference in decreasing opium production. The tribes have access to markets, jobs, and education.

9. Q: Who are the key players in the production and trafficking of Golden Triangle opium, heroin, and ATS to the United States?

A: The simple answer is the UWSA. They are the largest organized group that oversees planting and harvesting of the poppy. They collect opium from the farmers. They hire chemists and coordinate chemicals needed to produce the drugs. They control all drugs in the region and license other minority groups to do the same under their operation. There are lots of hill tribe groups involved, such as the Lahu, Lisu, Ahka, Karen, almost all the tribes are using the drug trade to make a profit. They do it with the support of the UWSA, who run the show. All roads lead back to the UWSA.

10. Q: Can you describe the links to that criminal organizations in the Golden Triangle have with criminal organizations in the United States?

A: UWSA is involved with human trafficking and weapons smuggling; however, drugs are their main business. There are international criminal drug



trafficking groups that deal with the UWSA. For example in Hong Kong, Chinese Triads may come to this area to purchase large amounts of heroin. They are involved to other crimes as well as drug trafficking. In the late 1970's and 1980's, many Chinese triad groups were very busy smuggling drugs into the U.S. Now, South American groups have become the major threat to the US. South America is closer. The UWSA has to rely on people coming to them. They do not have the logistics. Ethnic Chinese are the major groups in this area.

11. Q: What about West African Trafficking Groups?

A: That is a bit out of my league. We do not have them up here in the north. They are in Bangkok, around Nana area. They marry Thai girls. They blend in more in the big city. They are big time dealers. They bring in cocaine to Thailand from South America. They use couriers from other nations. Sometimes they hire American girls as mules to carry drugs into the U.S. They bring heroin from Afghanistan and Pakistan into Bangkok, when there is a shortage. They send it to the U.S.; however, we are not intercepting large amount of it in the U.S. They may send it to Bermuda or some other place first and then gradually move it into the U.S. We are not finding much SE Asia heroin in the U.S. these days.

12. Q: What are the methods used to traffic narcotics from the Golden Triangle to the United States?

A: Opium is smuggled into Thailand from the North and Northeast of Thailand, and then repackaged. It is then repackaged by hill tribes and sent to their tribal brethren in the US. They also are adding ya-baa tablets for personal use. Couriers and Cargo containers are also used. The drugs are hidden in statues, hill tribe handicrafts, or Buddha images. The hill tribe people hide opium in handicrafts. The opium is seized from this area almost everyday at the mail facility in Oakland, California. They are mailed from Thailand and Laos. The amounts are small and usually not worth the time to make a major bust by the DEA. It has overwhelmed the court system, so DEA only bothers

with stuff over 8-10 kilograms. It is very time consuming. If we take the package to a house, we might need to wait 2-3 days, and then we run in and knock down a door and find a grandma with only a small amount of opium. The value of opium is too small. That kind of bust would waste the court systems time.

13. Q: As opium poppy growing is reduced, are former opium growers finding new work in heroin or ATS refineries? To what extent are former opium farmers becoming involved in the ATS trade?

A: Yes, they become couriers to smuggle ATS tablets across the border into Thailand. That is their new occupation after they stopped growing poppy. The minority groups need to smuggle opium from Burma to support their addiction.

14. Q: With this new trade, is there a possibility that Hill Tribes will increase the amount of ATS tablets sent to the United States?

A: That is a good question. If there is a demand in the U.S., then they would probably switch to that. ATS in this area is not as good quality as can be bought in the U.S. The pills are small low dosage pills as compared to the access that Americans have. If a market were to be created in the U.S., then the Hill Tribes would probably jump in and start sending ATS to the same address as they now send their opium. It is more of a problem here in Thailand. The primary role of the Hill Tribes is to transport the drug from remote border areas through the mountains and through their villages. They make a hand off in the village to traffickers that take them on further. That is how they earn cash.

15. Q: What does the United States do here in Southeast Asia to suppress the production of trafficking Golden Triangle drugs to the United States?

A: DEA's role is in law enforcement. The United Nations, USAID, and the Narcotics Affairs Section of the U.S. Department of State takes care of alternative development projects. A lot of money has been put into Thailand to

help poppy farmers with alternative development projects. They also help with training of Thai police and Thai lawyers. DEA helps train officials through ILEA. DEA conducts joint investigations with the Thai authorities. We do not operate independently; we are here to assist our Thai counterparts. We have to be careful what we do here. We follow the Thais, not lead them. We share intelligence to help the Thai Police target drug trafficking organizations.

16. Q: What does the DEA do in the United States to suppress illicit drugs originating in the Golden Triangle?

A: Well, we have DEA Agents in all the major cities in the United States. They have full law enforcement power and have the power to arrest violators and intercept drugs. We do not have that authority here, but we can request for the Thais to get involved. In the U.S., we go after big groups. These questions can be better answered by someone in the U.S.

17. Q: How was the drug suppression effort affected after the United States imposed sanctions on Burma in 1988? How did the cut off of 12.3 million dollars of U.S. Drug Enforcement Aid affect the drug problem in Burma?

A: I am not sure how effective the aid was in those years, but of course now there is no aid at all to Burma. The Burmese government is not enthusiastic about enforcing drug laws. It is very disappointing. They do not have any control over certain regions. The UWSA has more control and power. We have people there, but they are very restricted. We share information, but we do not necessary get information back. The cooperation is limited. The same situation exists in Laos. Laos is improving, but they help themselves, their cooperation with the U.S. is limited.

## INTERVIEW

No. 14

Date: January 12, 2009

Location: Vientiane, Laos

Organization: United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Lao PDR

Name and Title of Interviewee: Mr. Leik Boonwat Representative, UNODC Lao PDR

1. Q: Can you please explain the mission of the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Laos and the Golden Triangle Region?

A: UNODC helps the Lao government build up its capacity. We look at ways to help the government address drug problems with opium. Laos has been successful by reducing opium cultivation by 94% in 2006. Laos is now classified as no longer being a significant producer of opium; it is mostly produced for domestic purposes. We also help the Lao government with crime and terrorism problems. We also help them revise legislation in order to meet international drug laws. Laos is becoming a part of the international community, before that, Laos was isolated from the world. We also deal with corruption issues.

2. Q: What sort of budget does the UNODC have to suppress drugs in Laos?

A: We do not have much of a budget. It is not sufficient enough to address the issue. Drugs in Laos account for more than 10 percent of the GDP of Laos. Our budget is not enough to address the problems. The United States and European countries help with the budget. Also countries in the region contribute to our program.

3. Q: What programs are conducted to deal with the problem?

A: We have three major programs. The first is to access drug trends. The next is to work with developing the Lao rule of Law to include anti corruption and international conventions. We work with the Lao government to help them

build up their capacity. Budget and lack of information are a challenge. A lot of tourists come here to find drugs. There have been incidents of where tourists can have been found dead in their hotel room after overdosing on drugs, these incidents are not reported in the press. The country is recently starting to deal with corruption problems. Another program we deal with is to treat addiction and help the ethnic minorities living in the mountains. There are approximately 72,000 households identified in 1998. We provide alternative development so they do not need to produce opium. The major problems are the lack of access to markets and poor infrastructure. They also need to be able to have a livelihood and access to credit. The addiction rate has been very high, that has been reduced, but we need to make sure that they do not relapse or switch to ATS. We also deal with human trafficking.

4. Q: What challenges does Laos face with drug eradication?

A: The lack of technical capacity, the need to provide operational resources, and the need to provide information analysis. Corruption is a problem. The Lao government has just been able to talk about corruption during the last few years. The major problem is that law enforcement officers are paid low salaries. The value of drugs being trafficked are worth \$400 million U.S. dollars, with that amount, there easily enough to pay off officials. We work closely with helping the Lao government reduce corruption. The first step is explaining the international concept of corruption. We send authorities here to international conventions to help them understand corruption and ways to deal with it. It will take time to solve this problem.

5. Q: Can you describe the changing drug production and trafficking pattern in Laos during the past 30 years?

A: We have observed an increase of West African gangs in this area. Of course the political situation in Burma affects matters here. With the new constitution, the drug armies are likely rearming and preparing. The drug armies use Laos as a trafficking route. The major production is in Burma. The production in Burma is to keep the drug groups armed and to pay their

soldiers. Laos has long and porous borders and the government does not have the money and technology to deal with the problem. We are seeing transnational criminal syndicates such as West African Syndicates moving into Vientiane, especially after they are getting stricter in Bangkok. We are now seeing cocaine coming into Laos, which was previously not a problem. They may be storing it in Laos and then re-trafficking it into Thailand. They use Lao people as mules. Nigerians marry Lao girls, get them pregnant, and then use them as mules. They use Laos, because of the lack of law enforcement and it is easier to smuggle drugs through Laos than other countries. There are also postal shipments of drugs to the United States.

6. Q: What are the major causes of drug production and trafficking in Laos?

A: Poverty is an issue, especially with opium production. I am not sure if the same is the case with marijuana. Most of the marijuana is cultivated in the south and traded by business men across the border. Marijuana is more profitable.

7. Q: Has the reduction of opium led to increased Amphetamine Type Stimulants (ATS) in Laos? Are former opium growers involved in ATS production?

A: I think the transnational groups take advantage of the situation and the people think it is easier to produce ATS. ATS was almost unknown before 1995, but by 2006 it was a major problem. The ATS trend almost coincides with the reduction of opium; it seems to be the same pattern as with Thailand. The traffickers target the poor groups; a lot of the problem is linked to the problems in Burma. Opium users and ATS users are different groups. The older groups use opium, young people use ATS. ATS is replacing opium as the major drug threat and health threat to society. The same routes used for opium are also being used for ATS.

8. Q: Has the reduction of opium in Laos led to increased illegal migration cases, leading to human trafficking and human smuggling? Please explain?

A: We are dealing with human trafficking. There could be a link, but it is hard

to prove. Many issues are involved and it would be hard to link it directly.

9. Q: How stable is the reduced opium production in Laos? What are the chances of farmers returning to opium production?

A: We see that over 50 percent of the farmers risk going back to growing opium. Sustainability is a major issue. We have helped the Lao government develop a new opium plan. The current plan is still a draft and will cover 2009-2013.

10. Q: To what extent are drug trafficking gangs from Laos and the Golden Triangle linked to international criminal organizations?

A: We mostly see the West African gangs. It is hard to link to gangs directly in the U.S., but we see the problem with postal shipments. The U.S. embassy could better answer your questions about the links between gangs in the U.S.

## INTERVIEW

No. 15

Date: January 13, 2009

Location: Vientiane, Laos

Organization: Law Enforcement and Narcotics Affairs Section, United States  
Department of State.

Name and Title of Interviewee: U.S. Embassy Representative, U.S. Embassy Laos

1. Q: Can you please explain the mission of the Department of State Narcotics Affairs Section in Laos?

A: The mission in Laos is based on U.S. national interests to assist the government of Laos in gradually eliminating opium and to assist in the reduction of the demand of ATS. We help prevent ATS addiction, treat addicts, and to prevent a relapse for drug addicts. We assist with law enforcement areas in 2 areas. The first area is in association with the DEA, we help with capacity building of Lao law enforcement personnel and aid with the training of Lao government authorities in key locations. The second part is to develop the criminal justice system. Prosecutors from the U.S. Department of justice help develop the criminal justice system. They help upgrade the ability of the Lao government to work cases and help bring Laos in line with regional and international standards. There are currently only about 50 lawyers in Laos. The Lao tend to traditionally prefer to deal with legal matters outside of the formal legal system.

2. Q: What sort of budget does the Department of State Narcotics Affairs Section have to suppress drugs in Laos?

A: Our budget has been 1-1.5 Million dollars per year. The budget has been drastically cut during the last several years. The Department of state can no longer afford to dedicate a Foreign service Officer to the program and now uses contract employees. This year's budget is only \$900,000. \$500,000 of the



budget is dedicated to opium crop substitution programs. \$300,000 of the budget is dedicated to law enforcement programs. \$100,000 of the budget is for demand reduction and treatment programs. We are able to carry over funds for 3-4 years, due to various delays that can occur. Next year, we expect a 1-1.5 million dollar budget. In the past, our budget peaked at 4 million dollars per year just for opium crop substitution, now we only have \$500,000 to deal with the same problem. We cannot do more with less funding.

3. Q: What sort of programs does the Department of State Narcotics Affairs Section conduct in Laos to eradicate drug production and trafficking?

A: We work with UNODC. We invest in agricultural seedlings and other items to help farmers. We do not deal with high-tech programs. We base our programs on what the farmers already know. The value of agricultural crops has dropped by 50 percent in the past year. Not all crops grow well at high altitudes. Galanga root is a good substitute crop that grows well at high altitudes. We also encourage involvement with Non Timber Forest Products (NTFP). There are various natural vines and other jungle based herbal plants that can be used as alternative income sources. We promote NTFP's with an available market. The demand for maize has dropped. When choosing an alternative crop, we have three major criteria. First, we choose a crop with a 3 year time frame. We choose a crop that the farmers are already familiar with and one that is low-tech. It may be a crop previously grown, but not for commercial use. Finally, we only choose crops with an available market. We do not support resettlement or relocation of villages. We do not eradicate crops and do not support forced eradication. Forced eradication is not productive. We support the Lao government in a civic awareness program. We provide \$60,000 per year to the program. The Lao authorities go to the provinces and make the locals aware that growing opium is illegal. In general, the Lao government uses persuasion, not forced eradication. We need to choose crops that will allow farmers to make a profit. Opium has been grown in Laos for 150 years. Opium is part of their farming system. A lot of crops will not grow well at the same altitudes, during the same time of year. The

farmers are trained in Soviet Era farming techniques to work on collective farms. The farmers do not have training in marketing techniques necessary to make a profit. There is not just one magic alternative crop solution that can replace opium. These farmers are risk takers and survivors. Their incomes come from various sources. Opium is a part of their cropping system. We are looking for alternatives that will increase food security and provide alternative income sources. Every valley and province is different. Livestock is another option to provide income sources. Cattle are their savings plan. Most sales of livestock are in the local area and they sell cattle for emergency funds. People hand carry items to the market. Roads are important, but a road itself does not automatically create a market. We also monitor drug trafficking.

4. Q: What challenges does Laos face with drug eradication?

A: There has not been sufficient alternative development assistance to farmers who have stopped growing opium. There is a chronic problem with food deficiency. There is an ongoing problem with drug addiction. The price of agricultural products has dropped by 50 percent, while the price of opium has doubled. In addition the cost of rice is more expensive. Also, there is an increased demand for drugs from countries in the region, which increases drug production. The Lao government does not have the law enforcement capabilities to control the drug flow, coming across the very long and remote borders. Laos is a major transit country for drug trafficking. The opium growing areas are very isolated; they are a 2-3 day walk through the jungle. These areas are inaccessible to law enforcement authorities.

5. Q: What are the major causes of drug production and trafficking in Laos?

A: Both regional and international demand for drugs fuel the problem here. Also, the high prices encourage production and trafficking. There is a large amount of opium being sent to the Lao community in the United States.

6. Q: How stable is the reduced opium production in Laos? What are the chances of farmers returning to opium production?

A: If the farmers do not receive alternative development assistance, then it is possible that they will return to opium growing. 50-80 percent of the drug addicts that have undergone rehabilitation have returned to using opium.

7. Q: Can you please explain the drug threat that the Golden Triangle and Laos present to the United States?

A: The shipping of drugs to the United States is a major concern. The drug problem threatens the countries in the ASEAN region as well.

8. Q: Can you please discuss future plans of action to suppress drug trafficking in Laos and the Golden Triangle?

A: We will continue to have a program here as long as the U.S. Congress continues to provide funding. We would like to have a future budget of 2-2.5 million dollars per year.



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## INTERVIEW

No. 16

Date: January 13, 2009

Location: Thai-Lao Border Checkpoint, Nong Khai, Thailand

Organization: Railway Police Officer, Thai Border Checkpoint Narcotics Team

1. Q: What sort of drug trafficking problems occur on the Thai-Lao border in this area?

A: Drugs are smuggled across the border in this area from Laos. Most of the drugs are smuggled in remote areas along the Mekong River, where few officials are present. People also smuggle through this checkpoint as well. It is a challenging task for us to enforce. Many people cross at this border checkpoint everyday and we do not have the technology to detect drugs being smuggled across the border into Thailand. We do not have cameras and x-ray machines here. All we have is our own eyes and that drug dog over there. We have a combined team of about 15 people consisting of Police, Customs, and Army.

2. Q: What kinds of drugs are smuggled across the border?

A: Mostly ya-baa and marijuana.

3. Q: Who smuggles the drugs?

A: Lao citizens, mostly men. They usually have a friend or relative on this side of the border. They work in teams. Each of them carries a small amount of drugs, together it amounts to a large amount. On this side, they deliver it to someone else who takes the shipment on further away from the border.

4. Q: Why do people smuggle drugs across the border?

A: They are poor. It is easy to carry drugs across the border and there is a very high profit in return. On average, couriers earn 50,000 Baht to carry a

shipment across the border. They cannot earn that amount of money with normal work.

5. Q: How does your team suppress drug trafficking?

A: We search suspicious people crossing the border. A suspicious person who carries drugs is usually a drug addict themselves. They display unusually nervous behavior, such as shaking and twitching. Also their eyes are strange looking.

6. Q: What kind of challenges does your team face in suppressing drugs in this area?

A: This area is very big and undeveloped along the border with Laos. We have a large area to control and very few officials. We do not have a budget to provide us the necessary technical equipment to detect drugs. We only have a small team and a dog. Also, most of us do not speak English. There are a lot of foreigners that pass through here, since we do not speak English; it is easier to let the foreigners pass.

7. Q: What needs to be done in the future to improve operations on the Lao border?

A: We need more people and better equipment. We need high-tech equipment to detect drugs being smuggled across the border.

## INTERVIEW

No. 17

Date: January 14, 2009

Location: Udon Thani, Thailand

Organization: Udon Thani Narcotics Suppression Center

Name and Title of Interviewee: Mr. Wicha Chanklom, Head Plans and Analysis  
Official for Udon Thani Narcotics Suppression Center

1. Q: Can you explain the problem with drug trafficking from Laos into Thailand in Udon Thani Province and the rest of Northeastern Thailand?

A: The problem is due to the very long border with very few border checkpoints. The border along the Mekong River is very long with various wide and narrow crossings. The drug smugglers cross the river at remote points, where the officials will not see them. The drug trafficking networks are problematic; they have large networks working on both the Lao and Thai side of the border. They conduct their own intelligence analysis as well. They monitor the operations of the Thai authorities and then adjust their operations accordingly. Sometimes they pretend to be a government official and inquire of where the drug checkpoints are set up at, they then send the intelligence to the smugglers. So to summarize, first the border is very long. Next, we do not have enough officials to patrol the border. Third, we do not have the technological equipment to effectively detect drug trafficking into Thailand. Finally, our intelligence is not up to date. The intelligence is often old and does not allow us to interdict the drugs. By the time we find out where the drugs are, it is too late, it already happened. We need to improve our intelligence analysis.

2. Q: How are drugs smuggled into Thailand?

A: There are three major ways. First, they will carry drugs across the border right in front of officials at official checkpoints. Sometimes they will use a

fancy car that looks like it belongs to a wealthy person, one that the officials will not suspect. They are always changing their patterns. Next, they will cross at remote points along the river. They will cross in areas, where there are no checkpoints and no border officials. Third, they smuggle the drugs by airplane. This method is not very common and is not used very often. The most recent trend is to send the drugs into Thailand by using the postal service. Our most recent drug case involved an African man. He received drugs in Udon Thani by mail. There are many foreigners living here in Udon Thani. They come here to live with their Thai wife or girlfriend, who is from Udon Thani.

3. Q: What kind of drugs are smuggled into this area?

A: Mostly ya-baa and also marijuana. It comes into Thailand through Mukdahan. Mukdahan is the number one place where drugs are smuggled. Seventy percent of the drugs are brought into Northeastern Thailand from Mukdahan. Nong Khai is the number two spot. Udon Thani is a consolidation point for the drugs, before they are moved to other areas. The production centers are in Laos.

4. Q: After the drugs are smuggled into Udon Thani, where is their next destination?

A: From Udon Thani, the drugs go to various areas. They go to cities with a lot of factories, Bangkok, and Southern Thailand. I do not know where the drugs go regarding foreign countries; my focus is mostly on this area.

5. Q: Who is responsible for smuggling the drugs across the border into Thailand?

A: I am not sure who the major leaders are. There are many drug trafficking networks. The drug traffickers are both Thai and Lao, mostly men. They are poor. They are usually drug addicts themselves. Both Thai and Lao will go pick up drugs for the networks. They usually have a drug use history. They are teenagers, students, and sex workers.

6. Q: Why do people smuggle drugs into Thailand?

A: Usually because they are drug addicts. They often begin as a drug user and then move up a position as a trafficker. They do this to support their drug habit. They need money to buy drugs and also want to be rich.

7. Q: What does your organization do to prevent drug smuggling?

A: We have many programs. We have four major programs. First, is law enforcement and intelligence. We use many methods. First, we will go to the villages and find out who the dealers and users are in the village. After that. We can make an arrest. The border officials search suspicious looking people at the border. A suspicious person displays strange or unusual behavior. They may appear very nervous or look like a drug addict. We also go to work places and check workers for drug use through urinalysis tests. We also work on public awareness campaigns and drug workshops. We run rehabilitation programs and find alternate work for those formerly involved with drugs. Finally, we work on developing our government officials. There are many agencies involved in drug suppression work. There are Police, Army, Customs, Border Police, and Provincial Officials. We are working on improving interagency cooperation and coordination to work together to combat drugs. Different agencies have different specialties; together they can combat drug trafficking more effectively.

8. Q: What challenges does your organization face when combating drug smuggling?

A: We need a better budget. Our budget is very small. Next, we need to improve interagency cooperation. We need to get better at suppressing drugs. We need to enforce the law to the fullest extent. Right now, many people do not think that the police will fully enforce drug trafficking, so they are willing to take the risk. We need to improve government leadership and take responsibility for solving the problem. The drug problem has to be viewed as a national priority.



9. Q: Do you work with U.S. authorities to cooperate in drug suppression in Northeastern Thailand?

A: Yes, we have U.S. government officials here in Udon Thani. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is working here.

10. Q: Is there a changing drug trafficking trend from drugs entering Northern Thailand to drugs entering Northeastern Thailand?

A: Yes, the pattern is changing. More drugs are now being trafficked through the Northeastern region of Thailand. The traffickers are changing their strategy of trafficking drugs into Thailand.

11. Q: What needs to be done in the future to improve drug suppression work in Northeastern Thailand?

A: We need to improve our intelligence. Right now our intelligence is not so good. We need to know who is doing what, when they are doing it, and how they are doing it. Also, we need a budget to support operations. We need money to pay police informants. We need to improve our reporting of information.

## INTERVIEW

No. 18

Date: January 22, 2009

Location: Mae Sot District, Tak Province, Thailand

Organization: Royal Thai Customs Mae Sot Office

Name and Title of Interviewee: Assistant Customs Director Saktiwudhi Wongmonta

1. Q: Can you please describe how Thai Customs fight against cross-border drug trafficking from Burma in Tak Province?

A: We are responsible for 5 districts in Tak Province. The problem with narcotics involves import and export of merchandise. Our duty is to inspect merchandise and people entering and leaving Thailand. There is only one official trade route between Burma and Thailand in Tak Province that is the Friendship Bridge. The reality is actually different; there are 18 unofficial trade posts along the Moei River. Merchandise and people cross into Thailand at these points. Our duty is to find drugs entering Thailand. We manually scan; we do not have x ray scanners or any special equipment. We look for abnormal looking people crossing the border. We work with the Police, Army, Immigration, Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) and other organizations to stop drugs. The ONCB office that oversees this province is in Phitsanulok. The Bangkok office also oversees activities and sets policy.

2. Q: What are the drug problems in this area?

A: The drug problem in this area is due to poor people who do not have work or a way to make a living. The problem is the cross border trade from Burma. A major problem is in the Moei River zone on the river. It is a neutral zone, where we do not have authority. People can easily cross the border. People cross the border at various remote points at night and where there are no officials or checkpoints. The offenders are usually from Burma. Burma cannot control the many areas of their country. They only control about 30 percent of their territory. The Thai government can control all groups in Thailand. The

Burmese government cannot control the Karen and other groups.

3. Q: What sort of illegal drugs are smuggled across the border?

A: Ya Baa is trafficked in this area.

4. Q: Who smuggles drugs and other illegal items from Burma into Thailand?

A: Mostly minorities living in Burma. They are Burman, Karen, Mon, and other groups.

5. Q: What methods are used to smuggle illegal items into Thailand from Burma?

A: There have been incidents where they hide ya-baa in produce such as fresh vegetables. The produce is headed to Bangkok and so are the drugs. This was recently the case in Po Pod District.

6. Q: Why do the smugglers smuggle drugs and other illegal items into Thailand?

A: Because they are poor and unemployed. They might have nothing at all in life. The Police know the exact reasons better, because they interview people after the arrest.

7. Q: What sort of profit do smugglers receive?

A: The profit is 5-10 times of what it was bought for. I am not sure how much the smugglers actually receive.

8. Q: Where is the destination of smuggled items?

A: It is destined for Bangkok. After that, I am not sure where it goes. Ask ONCB, they have statistics on where it goes internationally.

9. Q: How will anti-drug trafficking measures be improved in the future?

A: ONCB is responsible for developing future anti drug strategies. We need to continue to improve coordination between various different agencies. Drugs are a very important issue in Thailand.

## INTERVIEW

No. 19

Date: January 22, 2009

Location: Mae Sot District, Tak Province, Thailand

Organization: Royal Thai Police Mae Sot District

Name and Title of Interviewee: Royal Thai Police Officer

1. Q: What are the major problems that occur on the border?

A: Mae Sot is a border town with Burma. We have a problem with drugs coming from Burma. There are no refineries near here; the area on the Burma side is a storage area and a transit point here. Most people buy the drugs in the neutral zone on the Moei River. It is an area that we cannot enforce the law. The traffickers can do anything in that area. They know we cannot do anything in that area. This is a serious problem. Groups from Burma smuggle small amounts across the border, but there are many people. On this side of the border, the Hmong control the trade. They have a network linked with the Hmong in Northern Thailand. The Hmong have an extensive network composed of friends and relatives. We recently had a case of a female from Bangkok, she was a lesbian, and she came to pick up the drugs here. Merchants and farmers are also involved. They often put the drugs in produce heading to Bangkok. We have various authorities from different agencies patrolling the border.

2. Q: What sort of illegal items are smuggled across the border?

A: Mae Sot is a major drug city, but we only see ya-baa. It is not like other areas where you will see ecstasy and other drugs. I have only seen ya-baa in this area.

3. Q: Who controls cross border smuggling the drug trade in this area?

A: We usually arrest various networks of people carrying smaller amounts of

drugs. There are many groups. We are not sure who the leaders are, but they are in Burma. The traffickers always cross back and forth.

4. Q: Who smuggles drugs and other illegal items from Burma into Thailand?

A: Many groups from Burma, both Burman and Karen groups. The Hmong run the network in Thailand. They coordinate for the drugs to be smuggled into Thailand.

5. Q: What methods are used to smuggle illegal items into Thailand from Burma?

A: The drugs are smuggled in agricultural products, in the orifices of people's body, and smuggled through remote areas along the border.

6. Q: Where is the destination of smuggled items?

A: It goes to Bangkok. The stuff that comes from here is not enough for other countries.

7. Q: What does the Thai government do to prevent smuggling into Thailand?

A: We have Border Police, Soldiers, Police, and various authorities working together to stop drugs. We have undercover police that collect information and make arrests.

## INTERVIEW

No. 20

Date: January 23, 2009

Location: Mae Sot District, Tak Province, Thailand

Organization: Royal Thai Border Patrol Police Unit 346

Name and Title of Interviewee: Police Captain Bantid Sihadod, Assistant Director of Border Patrol Police Unit 346

1 Q: What are the major problems that occur on the border?

A: Tak Province is located on the border of Burma. We have a major drug problem. As far as drug use, the problem is among the teenagers and migrant workers. The drugs are smuggled into Tak Province from Burma. Tak Province is a transit point for the drugs and also a storage point. Low income groups are used to traffic the drugs. The drugs are destined for Bangkok. We run three operational units here in Mae Sot. We have officials working on the border. The drugs are smuggled across the Moei River; it is very narrow and easy to cross. The traffickers meet in the Moei Neutral Zone along the river and buy and sell drugs. No officials can go into the zone. It is like 7-Eleven, as it is open 24 hours a day and 7 days per week. The smugglers will stand on the edge of the border and not actually cross into Thailand. They have weapons, to include guns and bombs. They will use their weapons if the police try to stop their operations or arrest anyone in their group. The teenagers all have the phone numbers of the drug dealers, they can call anytime and someone will meet them in the neutral zone to make the deal.

2. Q: What sort of illegal items are smuggled across the border?

A: Ya Baa is the major drug trafficked through this area.

3. Q: Who controls cross border smuggling the drug trade in this area?

A: Karen soldiers in the DKBA control the drug trafficking entering this part

of Thailand.

4. Q: Who smuggles drugs and other illegal items from Burma into Thailand?

A: Minority groups from Burma.

5. Q: What methods are used to smuggle illegal items into Thailand from Burma?

A: The drugs are carried in small numbers by multiple carriers. We do not usually seize large shipments; the most we have seized at one time in this area was 100,000 tablets. The drug dealers in Burma call their contact in Thailand and then they go pick it up at the border. After crossing the border, the drugs will be sent to Bangkok by car. Also, they are often carried through the forest to areas such as Kampaengphet . This is done to avoid road blocks on the highway going to Bangkok. From there, they will then send the drugs to Bangkok. The Hmong run the drug trafficking networks in Thailand. We arrest a lot of Hmong, they have good connections with the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). They operate out of Po Pod District. They know the routes and how to traffic the drugs quite well. This area is also an alternate route for drugs headed from Northern Thailand, they are often stored here, before moving them into Bangkok.

6. Q: How will anti-drug trafficking measures be improved in the future?

A: Well, I have been working here for 3 years now and I constantly deal with drugs. I think what we really need to do is to educate the children of this generation to stay away from drug use and trafficking. Educating the children is the best hope. The older people may not change, but they will eventually die and the new generation can be drug free.

## INTERVIEW

No. 21

Date: January 23, 2009

Location: Tak Province, Thailand

Organization: Royal Thai Border Patrol Police Unit 34

Name and Title of Interviewee: Royal Thai Border Patrol Police Official

1. Q: What are the major problems that occur on the border?

A: The problem is economic, involving the very poor people living in this area. The problem involves the political situation in Burma. Minority groups in Burma need money to support their Armies to fight against the central government in Burma. They sell drugs to buy weapons and to support their insurgency. The world market demand is another problem. People all over the world still have a large demand for drugs. The area in Asia is a very suitable environment to grow opium. A society of drug users is another problem. Many citizens still believe that opium is medicine, not a drug. For them, opium is a way of life that has been passed on from generation to generation for a very long time

2. Q: What sort of illegal items are smuggled across the border?

A: There are four major types of drugs smuggled into Thailand, they are:

Type 1- Yaa baa and heroin

Type 2- Opium

Type 3- Precursor Chemicals needed to produce ya-baa in Burma

Type 4- Marijuana

3. Q: Who controls cross border smuggling the drug trade in this area?

A: Minority groups in Burma such as UWSA, Tai Yai, and Kunsadeam

4. Q: Who smuggles drugs and other illegal items from Burma into Thailand?



A: In this area, Border Patrol Police Unit 34 is responsible for the Thai-Burma border, which is approximately 534 kilometers long. The DKBA operates along this border. The DKBA controls the drugs entering Thailand from this area. They send the drugs in through Tak Province and then on to other locations.

5. Q: What methods are used to smuggle illegal items into Thailand from Burma?

A: The DKBA run the drug trade in this area. They produce ya-baa in Burma and then store it until a carrier from Thailand comes to pick it up. After the carrier on the Thai side picks up the product, it is then sent to other areas.

6. Q: How often do Thai officials detect drug smuggling along the border?

A: Border Patrol Police Unit 34 has four subordinate units that operate in the area. Every one of those units has an intelligence section that operates to detect drugs. We have inspection units located along the border. We also inspect at points along highways headed away from the border.

7. Q: Why do people smuggle drugs in this area?

A: Tak Province is a major transit route for drugs heading to other locations in Thailand.

8. Q: Where is the final destination for drugs passing through Tak Province?

A: The drugs are sent to areas along the Gulf of Thailand. From there, they are sent to customers in international markets.

9. Q: What actions does the Thai government take in this area to suppress cross border drug trafficking?

A: We have public campaigns to discourage drug use, such as “The War on Drugs”. This operation lasted 90 days and dismantled a large amount of the drug problem.

10. Q: How are poverty and drug trafficking related?

A: Merchants along the Thai-Burma border will hire people in the poor areas to smuggle traffic drugs. They will deliver the drugs to the customer on the Thai side of the border at various points along the border.

11. Q: How does illegal cross border trade affect crime and society in Thailand?

A: We have had an increase in drug use by teenagers and laborers. These people are involved with robberies and larceny. This endangers the lives and property of citizens. These incidents are increasing in this area.

12. Q: Where is the final destination of drugs smuggled into Thailand from Burma?

A: The final destinations for drugs transiting through Tak are Bangkok and the Gulf of Thailand. From the Gulf of Thailand, the drugs are put in boats and sent to foreign countries.

13. Q: How will anti-drug trafficking measures be improved in the future?

A: Currently the Thai drug laws are being reviewed. There have been cases of convicted drug dealers being sent back to Burma and then they just re-traffic drugs back into Thailand right away. The law needs to be made stronger to instill fear in drug traffickers, so they will not be brave enough to traffic drugs into Thailand.

## Biography

Jesse Earle Odum was born in Oakland, California on December 19, 1976. He holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Asian Studies from American Military University. He attended Thai language training at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California from 2003-2004. He served in the United States Army from February 1996 until May 2008. After being honorably discharged from the United States Army, he enrolled in the Master of Arts program in Southeast Asian Studies at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand in 2008.



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