

## Middle East Report by Selim al Khodr

### Drug routes being reorganized

*Pakistan and Syria are major transshipment points for drugs, now including cocaine, which is not grown in Asia.*

In the weeks before the Aug. 17 assassination of Pakistani President Zia ul-Haq, Capitol Hill in Washington was abuzz with rumors that he was the "Noriega of Asia." This meant that he had become a cumbersome ally. Congressional aides were given the green light to work overtime on a dossier to expose Pakistan's role in international drug smuggling, or as one source put it, "Pakistan's contribution to the corruption of the American youth."

For years, and despite the local efforts of the Pakistani Criminal Investigative Agency and of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, large-scale drug smuggling was condoned by Washington to help finance arms deals on the same scale. But when Zia got restive about the Geneva Afghanistan accords, Washington found it useful to pillory him with exposés tying him to drugs.

Drug-linked corruption has been a problem for decades. While many of Zia's associates, including family members, got richer in the process, that was apparently not the case for him personally. Zia was killed before the "moral crusaders" of Washington had time to complete their exposés, which have been shelved as quickly they were prepared. Ironically, their publication now could become useful to shed light on how Zia was actually killed. Doubtless, drug-smuggling networks did play a role in a killing sponsored by the Soviet Union, and perpetrated by some of its agents.

Days before Zia's death, the Pakistani Parliament had released the names of 20 leading businessmen whom Parliament denounced as drug

smugglers. But a follow-up inquiry by the pro-government newspaper *The Muslim* on Aug. 20, showed that none were in jail. As the newspaper stressed, most are wanted in Europe or the United States for hashish or heroin smuggling; many in the list were indicted or briefly arrested between 1983 and 1986; all have gone free.

The newspaper described as the "most active drug trafficker" in the country, Abdul Razzah Awan, who was arrested in 1986 for dealing one ton of hashish. He spent two days in jail. Mohammed Ashraf Rana was arrested by Pakistan's Coast Guard in 1986, while transporting some 8.6 tons of hashish. He was released and lives in a Defense Society Bungalow of the Ministry of Defense. Each of the 20 smugglers has a similar history, whether caught with hashish or heroin.

Pakistani police officials were quoted telling *The Muslim* that the "Pakistan National Shipping Corporation" is a major vehicle. Last month, the corporation was fined \$300,000 by U.S. Customs as its registered carrier *M.V. Multan* was caught in Baltimore with 7 kilos of heroin. On its way to the United States, some 8 kilos of heroin had been seized on the same carrier in the Suez Canal! Yet none of the employees charged with carrying the drugs has ever been fired from the corporation.

As a result, Pakistan remains one of the main transshipment points for hashish, heroin, and cocaine as well. Besides shipping directly to Europe or to the United States, which is more and more difficult, Pakistani smugglers often send their goods to either

East Africa, (e.g., Tanzania), or West Africa (especially Nigeria). From there, expendable couriers are sent to Europe: London is the favored destination from Nigeria or Tanzania, while Paris is the target for nationals of Senegal, Mali, or Burkina Faso.

There is no cocaine grown in Pakistan. Yet, drug enforcement agencies have noticed a growing trade between Pakistan and Latin America, and generally speaking between Latin America and the Middle East. From Pakistan, the cocaine, which has a market now in the Gulf states, can be smuggled through the African routes.

Damascus has also become a transshipment hub. This was underlined last May, when a several-kilogram consignment of cocaine arrived aboard an Air France flight. Ultimately the consignment was seized in Lebanon. Why?

Syrian officials were perfectly aware of the goods, and to whom they were destined, when they landed in Damascus. They could have scored a publicity coup by seizing it there. Instead they followed the couriers, and it was only after the Lebanese border was crossed, and the drugs had changed hands, that the Syrian troops moved in discreetly, with no publicity.

Investigations showed that the Syrian army was not out to win publicity as a major anti-drug force, but after money. Clearly the deal was organized by someone within Syria's security services, who ensured that the drugs landed safely and got his payment for the job. They then simply ensured that the drugs never reached the final client.

Whatever happened next was "God's will." The Lebanese client had probably not paid enough protection money to receive his consignment of cocaine.