

access to the Red Sea, in response. The blockade entrapped Egypt into an act of war with Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol was reluctant to retaliate with full-scale war against Egypt and the other Arab states. But, he was overruled by a war party, led by Shimon Peres, Moshe Dayan, Ezer Weizman, and Chaim Herzog, who ran a cold coup against Eshkol, and placed their operatives in the key positions of power. Israel launched a surprise attack against Egypt on June 5.<sup>7</sup>

The actions carried out by Syrian Defense Minister Assad during the war, are inexplicable from a military point of view.

First of all, during the critical first 22 hours of the war, Assad took no action against Israel—and this was at a point when Israeli forces were overwhelmingly concentrated in the south, on the Egyptian and Jordanian borders. Assad completely ignored Egyptian pleas for military aid, and stood back while the Israeli Air Force systematically destroyed the Jordanian and Egyptian air fleets on the ground. Moreover, Assad took no action to protect Syria's own Air Force, which remained on the ground, and was later destroyed there.

Even after losing air cover, Assad could have ordered an armored land invasion of Israel. The Israeli Army was then locked in combat on its southern front, and a Syrian invasion would have preempted any Israeli move on the Golan Heights. Instead, one day prior to the June 10 Israeli attack on the Golan Heights, Assad's brother Rifaat, then a tank commander in the Golan Heights, and Jadid's brother Izzat, turned their tanks around in retreat to Damascus, in order to "protect the revolution." Their action stripped the strategic Golan Heights of most of its tanks.

The next day, the Israeli Army invaded. Radio Damascus broadcast a report that the Golan had fallen, before it had occurred, triggering a rout that ensured defeat.

In 1968, the former Syrian ambassador to France, Sami al-Jundi, supplied some insight into Assad's strange behavior. In an interview with *al-Hawadith*, al-Jundi reported that he had met with Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban in Paris, two weeks before the war, on instructions from Damascus. Eban assured him that "the Israeli forces will not go beyond Qunaytira [the Golan Heights], even though the road to Damascus will be open."<sup>8</sup>

Although both Jadid and Assad were implicated in these disastrous actions, only Jadid seemed to suffer from them politically. On Feb. 25, 1969, Assad made his first coup attempt, which was not successful, but which did not weaken his own position.

It would take Black September to clinch the deal.

7. Umar F. Abd-Allah, *The Islamic Struggle in Syria* (Berkeley, Calif.: Mizan Press, 1983), pp. 57-63. Also see Moosa, *op. cit.*, pp. 307-309, and Seale, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-141.

8. See Moosa, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

---

### III. Assad's Drug Franchise

---

## The narco-history of the Lebanese war

On Nov. 23, 1992, the House Subcommittee on Crime and Criminal Justice, under the direction of Rep. Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.), issued a preliminary staff report entitled *Syria, President Bush and Drugs—The Administration's next Iraqgate*. The report, based on an exhaustive review of classified and unclassified information, accused the Bush administration of having systematically whitewashed the role of the Syrian government in making Lebanon into a center of the international dope trade.

"The U.S. Government now possesses extensive intelligence information implicating many Syrian Government officials in the Lebanese drug trade," the report states, "although the Administration acknowledges that a few Syrian officials are involved in the Lebanese drug trade, it simply refuses to admit the extent to which drug corruption has been institutionalized in the Syrian military forces now occupying Lebanon. Without Syrian military participation, the present system of growing, producing, and transporting drugs in Lebanon today would simply collapse."

According to the report, "the level of drug corruption rises much higher than a few low-ranking Syrian soldiers. President Hafez Assad's own brother Rifaat; Syrian Defense Minister Mustafa Tlass; General Ali Dubah, Commander of Syrian Military Intelligence; and General Ghazi Kenaan, Commander of Syrian Military Intelligence in Lebanon, are all intimately connected with drug traffickers operating out of Lebanon."

The report concluded: "The present administration refuses to recognize overwhelming evidence and admit that the Syrian government benefits from the [Lebanese] Bekaa Valley drug trade. . . . It is clear from the record that this Administration's failure to prosecute the drug-running Syrian generals is consistent with, and apparently driven by, its current attempts to court the Assad regime."

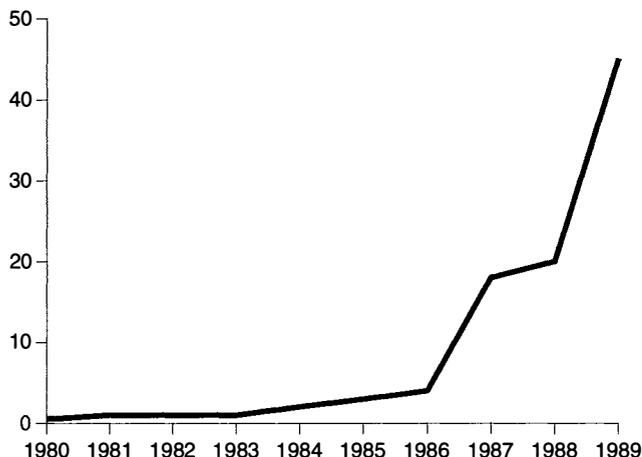
In fact, as *EIR's* investigations have determined, Lebanon emerged as one of the world's most important dope plantations during the 1980s, because Vice President and then President George Bush handed Lebanon over to Hafez al-Assad, and protected his narcotics business.

As a direct consequence of these policies, Lebanon's dope production skyrocketed. By 1989, it was producing over 900 metric tons of hashish and 4.5 metric tons of heroin annually. Syria's potential revenue from the dope trade that year was \$7.9 billion, while the official total value of all of Syria's

FIGURE 1

### Opium production in Lebanon

(metric tons)



Lebanese opium production, which zoomed from 0.5 tons in 1980, to an estimated 45 metric tons in 1989, has been overseen by the occupying Syrian Army, which introduced extensive cultivation of opium poppy into the Bekaa Valley in 1983. All of the opium is refined into heroin, with about 20% exported to the United States, and the rest to western Europe. The data are taken from U.S., Lebanese, and UN statistics. Since George Bush gave all of Lebanon to Assad in 1990, the U.S. government has fraudulently claimed that Syria has ceased all drug production in Lebanon, making estimates based on U.S. data impossible. U.S. government officials report off-the-record, however, that opium production continues there on the same level as in 1989.

exports stood at only \$1.6 billion.<sup>1</sup>

As of 1989, Lebanon was producing over half of the world's hashish, a highly concentrated form of marijuana, and had become a significant heroin producer as well. According to Schumer's committee, based on a review of U.S. government data, "at least 20% of the heroin consumed each year in the U.S. is from Southwest Asia—a good portion of which is from Lebanon."

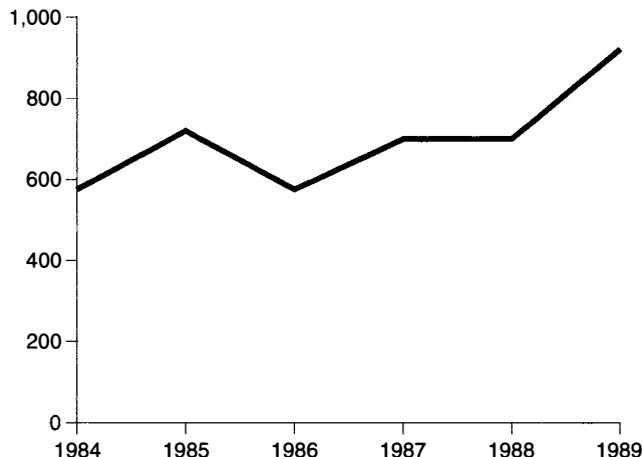
Throughout the 1980s, Lebanon became a safe haven for international terrorist organizations. According to the head of the Syrian-based Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), the Syrian government provided assistance to no fewer than 73 "libera-

1. See *EIR*, July 26, 1996, "Britain's Dope, Inc. Grows to a \$521 Billion Business," for the method and source of data used in *EIR*'s estimates of worldwide narcotics production. We are confident that we err on the conservative side. Where not otherwise indicated, information in this article is taken from interviews with sources in the region, former Lebanese Narcotics Authority records, documentation assembled by the National Alliance of Lebanese Americans (NALA), and newspaper articles, of which the most informative have been by freelance journalists Ralph Cwerman and Remi Favret.

FIGURE 2

### Hashish production in Lebanon

(metric tons)



The Syrian Army vastly increased Lebanese marijuana plant cultivation in the late 1970s, all of which was converted to hashish. The data available (beginning in 1984), show that hashish production increased by 50% by the end of the decade. Half of the drug went to western Europe, and the rest served the Mideast market.

tion" organizations during that decade.<sup>2</sup> This assistance not only meant safe-housing, training, and funding; it also meant giving them a cut in the dope trade. As a result, the PKK, for example, is now the biggest heroin distributor in Europe.

### A new dope bonanza

It is the case, however, that narcotics played an important role in the Lebanese economy even before Syrian occupation. Lebanon was traditionally a major refiner of Turkish and Iranian heroin, and the major regional producer of hashish. But it was only following Syrian occupation, that Lebanon became a dominant factor in the world's narcotics trade.

The first region which the Syrian Army occupied after its invasion in 1976, was the Bekaa Valley, a 75-mile-long strip of land, on the average 10 miles wide, in the northeast of the country. Before the occupation, the valley had been Lebanon's breadbasket. It soon became the base for 30,000 of the 40,000 Syrian troops stationed in the country, and the site of Syria's dope fields.

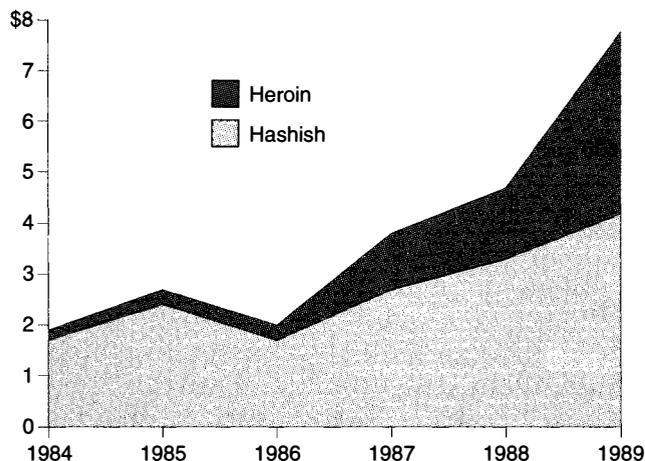
The Syrian Army immediately ordered the peasants in the Bekaa to cultivate marijuana rather than potatoes, and, in order to ensure quality dope harvests, introduced mechanized agriculture there for the first time. By 1980, marijuana fields covered nearly 90% of the agricultural land of the valley.

2. Abdullah Ocalan interview with journalist Mehmet Ali Birand, published in the Turkish daily *Milliyet* on March 23, 1991.

FIGURE 3

### Value of Lebanon's hashish and heroin production

(billions \$)



*Under Syrian occupation, Lebanon has become one of the world's biggest drug plantations. If all of the heroin and hashish produced there in 1984 were sold, Syria would have reaped \$1.9 billion; in 1989, Syria would have raked in \$7.9 billion. Syria continues the same level of production today—while the U.S. and other governments look the other way—and is making even more money, due to increased drug prices. Now, would anyone in his right mind, think that Assad would readily be willing give up this drug bonanza, in exchange for the return of the Golan Heights from Israel?*

In 1982, the Syrian Army began to introduce opium poppy to the valley for the first time, and brought in Turkish poppy growers to teach local farmers how to cultivate the unfamiliar crop. The Army also built heroin refineries there. Soon, opium poppy fields began to displace marijuana fields. By 1990, some 30% of the farmers in the valley were growing opium poppy, producing about 45 tons of opium in a normal season (in turn converted into 4.5 tons of heroin).

This narcotics business was in no way covert. Every harvest season, for example, Beirut's newspapers published the local and international price of hashish, opium, and heroin.

### Narco-terrorism

While the Bekaa Valley dope business was expanding during the 1980s, the rest of Lebanon was being systematically destroyed by warring sectarian militias. Every major city and every major factory was ruined. The aggregate destruction to the nation's infrastructure was several hundred billion dollars.

But, the civil war hardly touched the Bekaa. There, Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Sunnis, Shia, Druze, Kurds, and Palestinians, lived relatively at peace. Each group's militias were busily engaged in cultivating and refining narcotics.

It was only *outside* the production and refinement zones in the Bekaa, that these groups fought each other. And there, the fight typically took the form of a struggle over control over narcotics routes and ports. The reason that the militias fought over the routes and ports was economic. Dope sold for ten to a hundred times the price at the ports, compared to the price at its source, in the valley.

In order to ensure that the warring clans had the funds necessary to continue their civil war, Assad handed out dope franchises.

For example, Assad gave Hezbollah extensive opium plantations in Nabi Chit and Hermel. His brother Rifaat provided his own private security force to guard the plantations. According to Schumer's subcommittee, Hezbollah was taking in \$100 million a year in the heroin trade as of 1992.

Assad had the same policy toward non-Lebanese terrorist organizations that flocked into Lebanon in this period. For example, Abu Nidal's Palestinian terrorist sect was given a choice dope plantation in Bar Elias. Among others, the Kurdish PKK, the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC), were based in the valley, attached to tracts of marijuana and opium poppy fields.

The profit from this trade was enormous, and financed the Syrian Army's occupation of Lebanon, and the operations of its militias and terrorist sects as well.

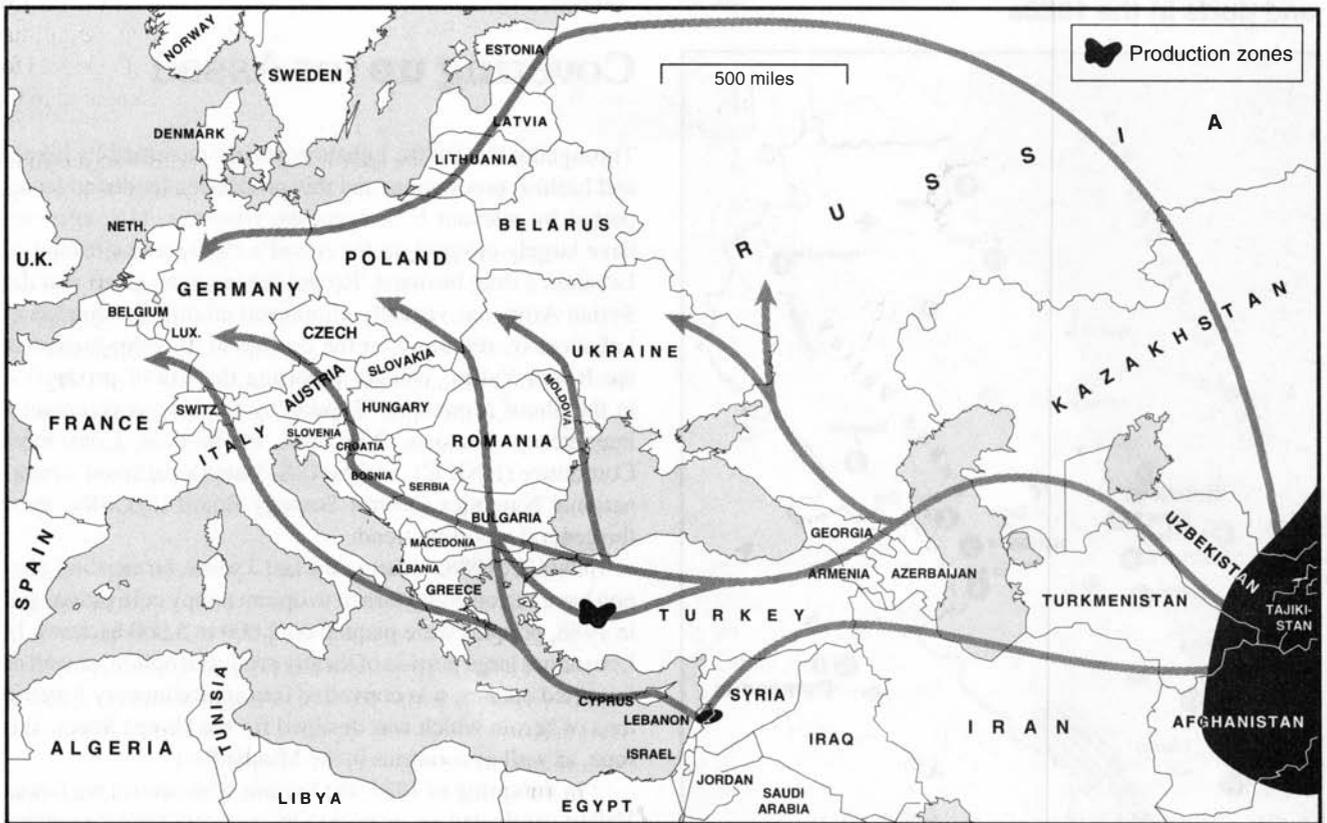
In 1990, the Lebanese Narcotics Authority, which operated in the small section of Lebanon which was then still independent, issued a report on its investigations of where the drug money went. According to their estimate, 40% of the profits went to Syrian Army intelligence, to finance the occupation. Another 45% went to finance the Syrian Army's smuggling network (which often employed terrorist sects as traffickers), local Syrian-backed militias, and terrorist training camps. The rest went to sustain local planters, and maintain infrastructure. Even according to the authority's very conservative estimate of a total income of \$1.3 billion annually, that comes to about a half-billion a year for the terrorist sects.

Assad also used the trade to extend Syrian influence into new areas.

Lebanese heroin soon became a medium of exchange for European terrorists' arms purchases. The Irish Republican Army, the Corsican National Liberation Front, and the Italian Red Brigades, among other groups, used Lebanese heroin to buy arms. All these groups developed a Syrian connection.

Second, the Bekaa emerged as a training ground and safe haven, for groups with no previous Mideast tie. For example, the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka. And, at the same time, the U.S., French, British, Greek, Bulgarian, Russian, Cuban, and East German intelligence agents and mercenaries who moved to the Bekaa to train terrorist groups there, became part of Syria's narco-terrorist nexus.

## Central Asia-Mideast narcotics routes



### Post-1990 reorganization

From 1976 through 1989, Syria emerged as the overlord of Lebanon. But a small portion of the country remained under the control of the legitimate Lebanese government, run in 1989 by Prime Minister Gen. Michel Aoun.

In the spring of 1989, the Syrian forces launched a massive assault against Aoun's forces, crushing them. Within a year, Lebanese sovereignty had been extinguished. According to knowledgeable sources, one reason for this assault, was that Aoun had begun to take over the various, competing militias' drug ports, since he saw that as the only way of stopping the civil war. No drug exports, no money to buy arms for the militias. Accordingly, the Bush administration began a major mobilization against Aoun, as did the French government of President François Mitterrand.

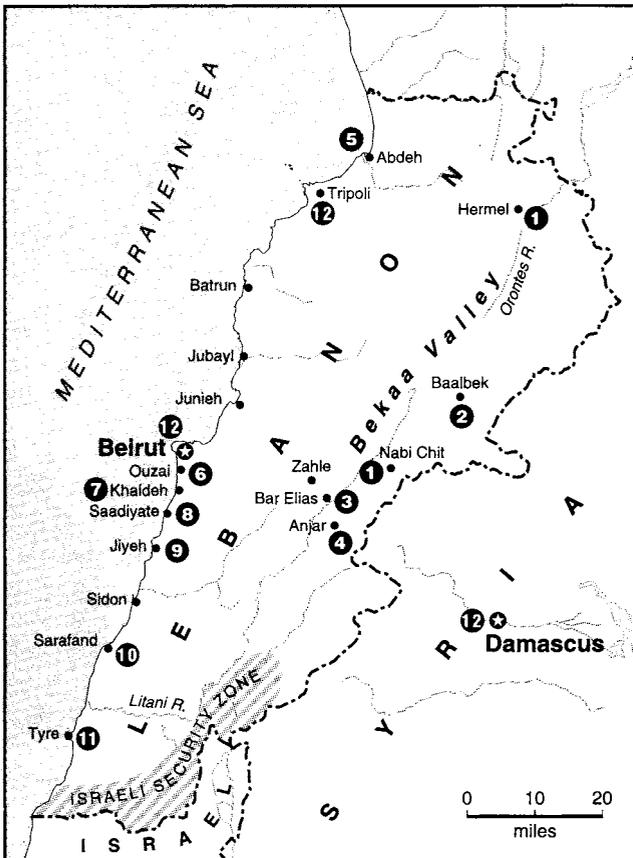
Jean-François Deniau, deputy head of the French National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee, pointed the finger at then-President George Bush: "The eruption of fighting in Beirut recently followed the decision of General Aoun to close the illegal ports, through which drugs were transiting," he told *Journal du Dimanche* in 1990. "The Americans know that Syria and the militia rake in huge profits from the poppy fields in the Bekaa Valley, where terrorist training camps are situ-

ated. The United States condemns drugs and terrorism worldwide, but makes an exception for the Syrians in Lebanon."

As a result of U.S., British, and French support, Assad soon was master of all of Lebanon. No sooner had Lebanon come firmly under Syria's control, than Assad began a reorganization of Lebanese narcotics production. Production itself was shifted from the valley to the Shouf Mountains, which flank the valley on its west. Opium production there, according to U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration sources, is at the same level that the Bekaa Valley reached in 1989. Assad also built new refineries to process opium grown in Afghanistan and Central Asia, increasing his role as a middleman.

This shift in Syria's narco-profile did not decrease its narco-revenues—far from it—but it did give the Bush State Department a pretext to whitewash Assad, and to even praise the Syrian Army for its "highly effective" efforts to eliminate Lebanese drug cultivation—pretending that dope could only be grown in the Bekaa. Continuing this Bush legacy, the State Department today fraudulently classifies Syria/Lebanese opium and marijuana production as "negligible." It admits that heroin refineries are still active, but it claims that these refineries, by being located in Hezbollah regions, are outside of Syrian Army control!

## Lebanese narco-militias' plantations and ports in the 1980s



### Key to Map 8

1. Hezbollah controlled the drug plantations in Hermel and Nabi Chit.
2. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard controlled the plantations in Baalbek.
3. Abu Nidal's organization controlled the plantations in Bar Elias.
4. ASALA controlled the Anjar plantation.
5. The port of Abdeh was used for Syrian Army drug export.
6. Ouzai was controlled by the Amal militia.
7. Khaldeh was controlled by the Druze militia.
8. Saadiyate was jointly controlled by the Druze and pro-Syrian Palestinians.
9. Jiyeh was run by the Druze.
10. Sarafand was run by Hezbollah.
11. Tyre was run by the Palestinians.
12. The major port cities of Tripoli and Beirut were used by the Syrian Army to export drugs, as were the airports in Beirut and Damascus.

## Documentation

### Covering up for Assad

Throughout the 1980s, Lebanon greatly increased its heroin and hashish production, and this production tended to be reported by relevant U.S. agencies. However, U.S. agencies have largely covered up for Assad's 1990 reorganization of Lebanon's drug business. Recent reports even assert that the Syrian Army has virtually eliminated all drug production in Lebanon, by reporting on the decline in drug production in the Shouf Mountains. Reports by the U.S. government's interagency National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee (NNICC), and the U.S. State Department's International Narcotics Control Strategy Board (INCSB), show the general reporting trend.

**NNICC, 1988:** "During the last 3 years, farmers in Lebanon have increasingly turned to opium poppy cultivation, and in 1988, poppies were planted on 2,000 to 5,000 hectares. In Lebanon, a large portion of locally produced opium, as well as imported opiates, was converted into approximately 5 metric tons of heroin which was destined for the United States, Europe, as well as countries in the Middle East. . . .

"In the spring of 1987, the Syrians who control the Bekaa Valley conducted an operation to eradicate opium poppies; however, the results were negligible."

**NNICC, 1990:** "Lebanon supplies regional demand for heroin and ships drugs to Australia, Canada, Europe, and the United States. Most of the warring factions in the country, as well as some known terrorist organizations, are involved in one or more aspects of the illicit narcotics trade. Sixty-five percent of the country is controlled by Syria. Periodic reporting suggests Syrian army control over drug production in the Bekaa Valley. Almost all opium is converted locally to heroin. Large amounts of heroin may be smuggled to the United States."

**NNICC, 1991:** "Lebanon remained a major illicit narcotics production and trafficking country in 1991. About 37 tons of opium were produced in 1991 from 8,398 acres of opium poppy. Numerous credible reports suggested that some Syrian military officers protected drug activity in the Bekaa Valley and provided transportation for the export of narcotics produced in the region. . . .

"Syrian forces assisted Lebanese government elements in limited eradication operations directed against opium poppy cultivation in Lebanon. The Syrian government cooperated in international investigations of alleged drug trafficking."

**NNICC, 1992:** "Opium poppy cultivation in Lebanon was significantly reduced due, principally, to bad weather but also due to some eradication undertaken by Lebanese and

Syrian forces. However, heroin production from opium and morphine imported through Turkish brokers from Afghanistan and Pakistan continued apace.”

**NNICC, 1995:** “In the Middle East, opium poppy cultivation in Lebanon significantly declined. As a result of eradication campaigns, less than 90 hectares were available for harvest. In 1994, an aggressive joint eradication program was conducted by Lebanon and Syria, but pre-eradication production levels were maintained by using imported drug supplies.

“To block the flow of hashish from Lebanon, Syrian and Lebanese government forces aggressively increased efforts to eradicate cannabis in 1994. During the spring and summer of 1994, Lebanese officials, in conjunction with Syrian counterparts, mounted a large and effective eradication program. As a result of this program, cannabis cultivation in Lebanon dropped 50%, from 15,700 hectares in 1993 to 8,100 hectares in 1994. Production similarly decreased from 565 metric tons in 1993 to 275 metric tons in 1994.”

**INCSB, 1996:** “Illicit opium and cannabis cultivation in Lebanon remains significantly diminished due to strict enforcement and highly effective continued eradication efforts

by joint Lebanese-Syria authorities. As a result, there was an appreciable decrease in domestic cannabis cultivation, and almost no opium cultivation in 1995. Nevertheless, Lebanon did not successfully reduce the amount of narcotics imported into the country for purposes of process conversion and re-export. The joint Lebanese-Syrian effort to eradicate cultivation of illicit crops in the Baalbek-Hermel region, which was initiated in 1992, has produced notable results . . . the almost total eradication of these crops and no re-cultivation.

“The almost 20 years of large-scale unimpeded narcotics production activity in Lebanon appears to have ended. The focus now must be set on the downstream aspects of the narcotics trade as opium and morphine base continue to enter Lebanon from Southwest Asia through Syria for conversion into heroin. The heroin labs in the Bekaa Valley are small, mobile, well hidden, and consequently difficult to detect. Further complicating the already difficult efforts at lab discovery is the fact that they are largely in Hezbollah territory.”

According to the same report, Lebanon’s production of opium was 45 metric tons in 1989, 32 in 1990, 34 in 1991, 0 in 1992, 4 in 1993, 0 in 1994, and 1.5 in 1995.

## Syria’s Monzer al-Kassar was Bush’s arms partner

Monzer al-Kassar, together with his brother Ghassan, were two of the Syrian regime’s primary arms- and drug-traffickers throughout the 1980s, according to the book *Godfather of Terror*, by a German police investigator writing under the pseudonym Manfred Morstein. The duo were low-level pushers, until Ghassan married the daughter of Gen. Ali Dubah, the head of Syrian Intelligence, who also supervised narcotics production in occupied Lebanon.

In the United States, Monzer al-Kassar was under investigation by the FBI, CIA, Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and the U.S. Customs Service, for crimes ranging from arms- and drug-trafficking to airline-hijacking and kidnapping. Nevertheless, Vice President George Bush routinely used Monzer al-Kassar to sell arms to the Contras and the Iranians. The arrangement is just one indication of the secret Bush and Assad dope and terror partnership.

As of 1984, the DEA had identified Monzer al-Kassar as the Syrian drug-lord responsible for distribution of heroin and hashish in France, Italy, and Spain. The DEA, other U.S. agencies, and other governments were investigating the al-Kassar family-owned Banco de Bilbao of

Spain. Syria’s General Dubah, Hafez al-Assad, and Rifaat Assad all maintained sizable accounts in the bank.

The DEA and other agencies were also investigating al-Kassar’s ties to Colombian cocaine barons Jorge Luis Ochoa and Gonzalo Rodríguez Gacha, who were then rapidly expanding their European operations, in partnership with Syria.

However, at the same time as al-Kassar was wanted by the DEA and other law enforcement agencies, he was a business partner with Lt. Col. Oliver North in shipping East bloc-made assault rifles to the Contras, on behalf of the Bush-directed secret support apparatus established under National Security Decision Directives 2 and 3. Al-Kassar’s other partners in the venture were Maj. Gen. Richard Secord (ret.), and former CIA official Thomas Clines—both longtime subordinates of former CIA official and Bush Presidential campaign speechwriter Theodore G. Shackley. A number of front companies of the Special Air Services (SAS), the British elite “anti-terrorist” commando force, with Mideast headquarters in Oman, were also involved.

Al-Kassar also proved helpful to Bush in selling arms to Iran. A 1987 investigation into the Italian firm Borletti, on suspicion of running arms to Iran, revealed that the operation was coordinated from Barcelona, Spain by the Bovega company, a front company of Monzer al-Kassar, on behalf of Rifaat al-Assad and his son, Firaas al-Assad.

Monzer al-Kassar later figured as the principal suspect in the 1988 downing of Pan Am Flight 103.