

simply pushed the business into the jungles of Colombia. Now under the ruthless oversight of the "firmas," faceless drug cartels based in the main cities, and the equally brutal FARC rebels who keep the government out of the growing and processing areas, business is booming. The war on drugs is a minor inconvenience to this massive, all-cash, export business.

Colombia is also a major supplier of heroin and marijuana to the Mexican mafia. In the early '70s, Colombia started out primarily as a grower of pot, with cocaine being a small part of the then-\$500 million a year export. Pot was mostly cultivated along the Atlantic coast. Today, it is estimated that Colombia's drug industry pockets about \$3 billion a year in profits from the drug trade. All this occurs under the protection of the three rebel groups: the ELN, FARC, and the cartels. The ELN generate an estimated \$348 million in income linked to drugs through protection of growers, shippers, and labs. FARC makes \$900 million in protection money for drug growers. The Colombian cartels, in conjunction with their Mexican and Cuban distributors, have a lock on 75 percent of the world's cocaine, and about 80 percent of the toot goes to Uncle Sam. The DEA figures drug sales pump between \$3 and \$5 billion into the Colombian economy, making it the country's biggest export earner. To get an idea of what a narcogovernment is, you have to understand that the entire gross domestic product of Colombia is only \$5 billion.

Most coca is grown on small plots to escape detection. The Colombian farmers get in three to four harvests a year. Most raspachinos, or "scrapers," are taking the next step and creating coca paste, which sells for about \$600 per kilo. Most of the 135,000 acres of coca farms in Colombia are in the far south. It is estimated that there are 35,000 farmers in the business of growing coca and poppies.

Thailand

Thailand's position in the Golden Triangle is more geographic than economic. It is a net importer of hard drugs and is a major transit route to Western countries. About 50 percent of the opium that enters Thailand from Myanmar heads for the United States. The Thai opium crop is under constant threat by government eradication programs and tough border controls with its northern bad-boy neighbor, Myanmar. Still, the mule trains get through the rough terrain and insurgents keep the Thai soldiers from truly policing or sealing off the area.

Myanmar

Just under 70 percent of the world's heroin and 60 percent of heroin seized by U.S. law enforcement came from the Golden Triangle. The

NOT QUITE ON EBAY YET... BUT SOON

The San Diego Narcotic Information Network publishes local drug prices compiled from various drug enforcement agencies in the area. Cocaine in pound or kilo batches has an average purity of 87 percent. Street cocaine runs between 45 percent and 85 percent. Trends show most drugs dropping in price as much as 30 percent from last year. Cheapest prices are quoted below (Hey, this is America, right?):

Pound Prices

| | |
|-------------------------------|---------|
| Marijuana—low grade, 3% THC | \$300 |
| Marijuana—high grade, 30% THC | \$4,000 |
| Marijuana—Sinsemilla | \$2,000 |
| Hashish | \$1,000 |
| Methamphetamine | \$3,000 |

Kilo Prices

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Marijuana | \$1,000–\$4,000 |
| Cocaine | \$14,000–\$20,000 |
| Heroin (black tar) | \$40,000–\$50,000 |

Source: NIN (858) 616-4098

Golden Triangle is not really a geographic triangle but a loosely U.S.-defined area that covers eastern Myanmar, northern Laos, and scattered parts of northern Thailand. The common elements are remoteness and inaccessibility, lack of law enforcement, and the right altitude and climate to permit the cultivation of poppies. It may be more accurate to describe the Golden Triangle as just Myanmar.

Visitors to this area will find the locals decidedly reserved and openly belligerent if pressed for details on their trade. The U.S. State Department estimates that Myanmar exports about 2,300 tons of raw opium a year, primarily from the Kachin and north Shan states. Laos moves about 300 tons and Thailand about 30 tons.

Mexico

Mexico continues to be the financial and transshipment choice of South American drug cartels due to its lax banking laws, corrupt officials, and the "don't ask, don't tell" policy of its military and government. The drug business in Mexico is sliced into three cartels: the Tijuana, Juarez, and the Gulf. The Tijuana cartel under the Feliz brothers smuggles primarily heroin and marijuana. The Gulf cartel is the coca