



## **The Political History of Turkey's Opium Licensing System for the Production of Medicines: Lessons for Afghanistan**

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## Controlled Poppy Cultivation

### Executive Summary

## **The Political History of Turkey's Opium Licensing System for the Production of Medicines**

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Analogous to the current situation in Afghanistan, in the 1960s Turkey was one of the world's main opium producing countries. During this period the United States faced significant drug consumption problems, associated with the increasingly unpopular Vietnam War, through heroin-consuming American soldiers. Increasingly, the US Government perceived Turkey to be the source of much of its heroin, and by the late 1960s Turkish opium production became a significant issue in the two countries' political relationship.

After several years of tense negotiations, political pragmatism prevailed, resulting in Turkey switching from unregulated crop growing to licensed poppy cultivation for the production of medicines. The Turkish political dynamic was such that poppy farmers' interests were key to the stability of the country. When Turkey deemed total eradication both technically and socially impracticable, the US and the Turkish Governments worked together to implement a poppy licensing system for the production of opium-based medicines, as an alternative means of bringing poppy cultivation under control. Turkey was then able to resume poppy cultivation, under a strict licensing system supported by the United Nations and a preferential trade agreement with the US.

*The Turkish experience shows that the United States has actively supported a switch from un-regulated to licensed, legal poppy cultivation for the production of medicines as a drug supply reduction strategy. The implementation of poppy licensing in Turkey*

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*has several parallels to the present situation in Afghanistan: given the extent of Afghanistan's opium crisis, total eradication is impossible. Poppy represents 34 percent of the combined legal and illegal economies; more than two million depend on the crop; and social protests could further destabilise the country. Poppy licensing, together with bilateral agreements similar to the 1970s Turkish-US agreement, represents a pragmatic, feasible solution to the current crisis situation.*

## **The Political History of Turkey's Opium Licensing System for the Production of Medicines: Lessons for Afghanistan**

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### **Introduction**

This paper investigates the transition of Turkey's poppy industry from an unregulated, uncontrolled opium-producing sector to a government supervised, licensed, medicine producing system. The events leading to the implementation of Turkey's licensing system are analysed, and the ways in which the Turkish government and the United States' President Nixon's administration worked together to find a solution to Turkey's opium situation are examined.

### **Poppy cultivation in Turkey: then and now**

Turkey has an extensive culture of poppy cultivation. Poppy has been cultivated in Turkey for thousands of years, and poppy products are used as both medicine and food. Poppy cultivation is a peasant tradition, and despite low incomes, it is likely that many farmers would never renounce the practice, as it is an important part of their lives. In the late 1960s and early 1970s Turkey's poppy industry was steadily brought under central government supervision and since the implementation of a strict licensing system, poppy cultivation is now highly regulated and controlled.

Turkey cultivates poppy for the production of essential medicines such as morphine and codeine. The Turkish Grain Marketing Board (TMO) is the National Agency responsible for the country's poppy licensing for medicines system, and has local offices in poppy

cultivating districts. The TMO is part of the Ministry of Agriculture, which owns the National poppy processing factory.

Approximately 100,000 farmers are licensed every year, cultivating an average of 0.4 hectares (equal to two *jeribs* – similar to the average area cultivated in Afghanistan), and an estimated 600,000 people earn their living from poppy cultivation in Turkey.<sup>1</sup> Over 350 TMO officials (excluding local administrators) are involved in the control of poppy cultivation, which costs Turkey approximately US\$6 million per year.<sup>2</sup>

The national poppy processing factory produces 75 tons of morphine each year. Approximately 95% of the total Turkish opium production is exported, and it is estimated that Turkey earns US\$60 million each year from the export of poppy seeds and opium-based medicines.<sup>3</sup>

### **The political history of opium licensing in Turkey**

In 1961, the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs was passed, requiring that medicinal opium-producing countries establish comprehensive control systems for the licensed cultivation of poppy. The Single Convention aimed to regulate the production of opium by limiting poppy cultivation to licensed farmers only. Although Turkey signed the Convention in 1961, it did not actually ratify this convention until 1967.<sup>4</sup> As a 'traditional opium producing country' Turkey was not obliged to ask the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (which has ultimate oversight of the international opium

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<sup>1</sup> Questionnaire answered by the Turkish Grain Marketing Board, August 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Gecin, G., Hakbilen, S. 'Opium Poppy's income to Turkey \$60 million', Zaman Online, 29 May 2005, [online] Available at: <http://www.zaman.com/?bl=economy&alt=&hn=20096>

<sup>4</sup> The 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs was ratified by Turkey and published in the Official Gazette (number 12596), on 12 May 1967.

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control system) for permission to export opium, and so had no incentive to implement the licensing provisions.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Turkey's political situation was relatively volatile, characterised by frequent elections, populist policies and shifting political dynamics. Between 1960 and the end of 1974 Turkey had nine different Prime Ministers (see appendix I), and faced the constant threat of further military coups d'État. The State-directed economy was consistently unstable, with serious balance of payments deficits ever-increasing external debt, and chronic inflation.<sup>6</sup>

In the United States, as in many parts of the world, drug use increased in the 1960s. Heroin addiction grew, becoming increasingly widespread amongst the US armed forces in Southeast Asia.<sup>7</sup> In 1968 President Richard Nixon was voted to power having promised to wage 'war on drugs' and having identified Turkey as the main source of American heroin.<sup>8</sup> President Nixon's administration believed that around 80 percent of the heroin entering the United States had originated as opium in Turkey.<sup>9</sup> It is clear that the Nixon administration believed heroin to be a threat to the national stability of America, and that this threat could be at least partly resolved through the elimination of the Turkish poppy cultivation industry.<sup>10</sup> Drug policy research was carried out to justify

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<sup>5</sup> Article 24(3) of the 1961 Single Convention provides that "(...) a Party that during ten years immediately prior to 1 January 1961 exported opium which such country produced may continue to export opium which it produces." Countries that fall within this category are commonly known as 'traditional opium-producing countries.' Turkey, prior to 1961, produced and exported opium, and so was able to continue to produce opium for export without implementing various control measures. Interestingly, The Official Commentary to the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs suggests that Afghanistan, having exported its domestically produced opium would also have been one of these 'traditional opium producing countries.'

<sup>6</sup> Rural, peasant communities constituted 80 percent of the population of Turkey in the 1960s, and Turkey's populist economic policies eventually necessitated national austerity programs, which contributed further to the volatile political dynamic.

<sup>7</sup> 'Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Helms to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs' (Kissinger), Washington, (May 28, 1971); in: *Foreign Relations, 1969-1976*, Volume E-1, Chapter 3, 'US Policy Towards International Production and Trafficking in Illegal Drugs', US office of the Historian. [online] Available at: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/frus/nixon/e1/c15659.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Sterling, E., 'US Drug Policy' in: *Foreign Policy in Focus*, vol. 4, no. 31, November 1999. [online] Available at: <http://www.fpif.org/pdf/vol4/31ifdrug.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Moynihan, Daniel P., (Assistant to the President) 'Memorandum for Honorable John N. Mitchell, Attorney General' (18 September 1969) in: *Foreign Relations*.

<sup>10</sup> "The President is convinced that the problem of narcotics addiction in the U.S. has reached proportions constituting a threat to our national stability." Henry A. Kissinger, 'Memo: Study of Means to Stop International Traffic in Heroin,' (Sept 29, 1969); in *Foreign Relations*. It must be noted here that the United States brought significant diplomatic

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the war on drugs, and the Nixon Administration was urged to act decisively. “If the United States moves with energy and determination we could cripple the heroin traffic in the course of twelve to twenty-four months. [...] If we do not disrupt the heroin traffic now, it is likely shortly to drift into the hands of middle-class Americans, and may become unstoppable.”<sup>11</sup> Consequently, in 1969 the cessation of Turkish opium production became a top priority for the United States diplomatic corps, which adopted a number of tactics in its attempts to achieve this goal: “What is needed is a major diplomatic initiative, accompanied by economic inducements, and if need be, sanctions designed to get Turkey [...] out of the business.”<sup>12</sup>

Some of the tactics the US employed were positive in nature, and included various bilateral aid schemes and offers to buy up the entire Turkish poppy crop (so as to destroy it) and then compensate Turkish poppy farmers for the loss of their livelihoods. The White House also promised to use its influence in international fora to help Turkey gain access to loans and other assistance.<sup>13</sup>

However, in 1969 the Turkish Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel announced that the complete eradication of poppy would not be possible, because poppy oil was too important to Turkey and a cultivation ban would be impossible to implement. “How can we tell several hundred farmers just to forget their poppy plantings? In many places poppies are grown for their oil which is an important part of farmers' diet. [...] It is impossible to go to the farmers and ask them to plough under their crops, we cannot control it. The poppies will just appear illegally. Where we have prohibited production, we do have facilities for enforcing the order.”<sup>14</sup> It must be noted here that Demirel relied on the poppy cultivating regions for electoral support.

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pressure on France as well as Turkey. Documents show that the Nixon administration believed that much of the heroin reaching US shores was smuggled from Turkey, through France. See Joel Beinin, ‘The Working Class and Peasantry in the Middle East: From Economic Nationalism to Neoliberalism’ in: *Middle East Report* (Spring 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Moynihan, Daniel P. (Assistant to the President) ‘Memorandum for Honorable John N. Mitchell, Attorney General’ (18 September 1969); in: *Foreign Relations*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Rogers, W.P., (Secretary of State) ‘Telegram 110121 From the Department of State to the Embassy in Turkey’, (June 19, 1971) in: *Foreign Relations*.

<sup>14</sup> Ambassador Handley, (US Ambassador), ‘Telegram 7775 From the Embassy in Turkey to the Department of State’, (17 November 1969), in: *Foreign Relations*.

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It is clear that Turkey considered US demands for complete eradication to be poorly substantiated and insensitive to Turkey's domestic politics. Yet, developments in the American domestic environment meant the White House could not settle for anything less than the total banning of opium production.<sup>15</sup> 'Negotiations' had reached a deadlock.

Judging that its aid and compensation offers were not having the desired effect, the Nixon Administration threatened to halt American bilateral aid to Turkey and to implement economic and military sanctions, unless Turkey agreed to completely eradicate its opium industry.<sup>16</sup> In the 1960s the United States' military grant program was worth US\$100 million annually to Turkey, and the US Aid program a further \$40 million. Turkey was also receiving almost \$20 million in food aid each year, through the US 'Food for Peace' program.<sup>17</sup>

In 1970 the US again offered financial compensation in return for the eradication of poppy in Turkey. The Turkish Government emphasised the political weight of the 70,000 poppy farming families, with Prime Minister Demirel saying "eradication would create a clash between the government forces and the people, and would make the problem worse, since it would create public support for plantings."<sup>18</sup> Turkey insisted that eradication would "bring down the government," and postponed the phasing out of opium cultivation until 1972.<sup>19</sup> In 1970 the Demirel Government decided to pursue the implementation of a poppy licensing system for the production of medicines.<sup>20</sup> US memos from this period indicate that the Nixon administration was fully aware that "further pressure (to

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<sup>15</sup> President Nixon had promised Congress that his Administration would actively address America's heroin problem. See 'Telegram 108468 From the Department of State to All Diplomatic Posts', (June 17, 1971) in: *Foreign Relations*; and Ilter Turan, "The United States and Turkey: Limiting Unilateralism", Istanbul Bilgi University, Department of International Relations (November 2005).

<sup>16</sup> 'Memorandum From Secretary of State Rogers to President Nixon', Washington, (July 28, 1970), in: *Foreign Relations*.

<sup>17</sup> The 'Food for Peace' Program, under Public Law 480 was created to help solve the problem posed by significant US farm surpluses. Food was exported to alleviate hunger in developing countries, and either sold at discounted prices or donated for use in local development programmes to address malnourishment.

<sup>18</sup> 'Telegram 1957 From the Embassy in Turkey to the Department of State', (April 2, 1970), in: *Foreign Relations*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> 'Memorandum From Secretary of State Rogers to President Nixon', Washington, (July 28, 1970), in: *Foreign Relations*.

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eradicate) could 'topple' the Demirel Government".<sup>21</sup> Also during this time, the US explored the possibility of amending the 1961 Single Convention to bring further pressure on Turkey (and other countries) to cease the cultivation of poppy.<sup>22</sup>

In 1971 a new (military) Turkish Government was installed. Although the United States continued to emphasize eradication, it considered the passage of the poppy licensing (for the production of medicines) bill to be its top priority for Turkey – as a way of ultimately eliminating opium cultivation.<sup>23</sup> This poppy licensing law was eventually passed in August 1971.

In return for eradicating poppy, the new Turkish Government unsuccessfully attempted to negotiate a preferential trade agreement (for its textiles and leather goods). The Turkish Government eventually accepted a US offer of \$35 million (over 3 years) together with a promise that the US would use its influence on the World Bank and other United Nations institutions to make loans (and other assistance) available to Turkey. On its part, the Turkish Government agreed to immediately meet three conditions: (a) to prohibit all planting, cultivation or production of opium poppy after June 30, 1972; (b) to purchase the entire crop that would be planted in the of autumn of 1971; (c) to pass legislation prohibiting all future poppy farming in Turkey after June 1972.<sup>24</sup>

Although the eradication agreement effectively strengthened US-Turkey relations, the Turkish Prime Minister noted that the political fallout from criminalising opium cultivation "might bring about the fall of my government."<sup>25</sup> The US Government was optimistic that it had solved its Turkish opium problem, but commented in 1972 that "the

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<sup>21</sup> Bureau of Intelligence and Research, 'Intelligence Note; Turkey: Waiting for the New Government's Opium Program', April 30, 1971 in: *Foreign Relations*.

<sup>22</sup> Salans, C., 'Briefing Memorandum from the Deputy Legal Adviser to the Acting Secretary of State', Washington, (July 7, 1970 ), in: *Foreign Relations*.

<sup>23</sup> 'Memorandum From the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Haig) to President Nixon', Washington, (May 8, 1971), in: *Foreign Relations*.

<sup>24</sup> 'Telegram 4441 From the US Embassy in Turkey to the Department of State', (June 27, 1971), in: *Foreign Relations*.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

permanency of the opium ban depends in large measure on the success of the agricultural program to provide alternative incomes to affected farmers.”<sup>26</sup>

The Turkish poppy cultivation ban proved to be short lived. In the lead up to the 1973 elections, many of Turkey's political parties campaigned to remove the deeply unpopular ban. During the same period, the US conceded that the Turkish poppy cultivation ban had caused a worldwide shortage of opium for medical purposes.<sup>27</sup> On 16 September 1974 the Turkish government informed the United Nations that it would permit the licensed cultivation of poppies for medical purposes.<sup>28</sup> Upon request, the United Nations granted the Turkish Government technical assistance for the construction of a poppy processing factory, as well as resources for the control of licensed poppy cultivation.<sup>29</sup>

In addition, in 1979 the United Nations asked those countries manufacturing opium-based medicines to purchase their narcotic raw materials from traditional producer countries such as India and Turkey.<sup>30</sup> In 1981 the US gave legislative effect to this request, extending ‘special protected market status’ to Turkey (and India) under a Drug Enforcement Agency Regulation, commonly known as the ‘80-20’ Rule.<sup>31</sup> Under this rule the United States must purchase at least 80% of its narcotic raw materials from Turkey and India. To this day, the US continues to support the Turkish opium industry through its Department of Agriculture and Drug Enforcement Agency.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Letter From Secretary of State Rogers to Secretary of the Treasury Schultz’, Washington, (June 20, 1972), in: *Foreign Relations*.

<sup>27</sup> Ilter Turan, *"The United States and Turkey: Limiting Unilateralism"*, pp.11-12; see also UNODC, Bulletin on Narcotics (1975) ‘Poppy cultivation under properly controlled conditions so as to meet the world's requirements of opium for medical and scientific purposes’, Issue 3.

<sup>28</sup> UNODC, Bulletin on Narcotics (1975) ‘Poppy cultivation under properly controlled conditions so as to meet the world's requirements of opium for medical and scientific purposes’, Issue 3.

<sup>29</sup> Bulletin on Narcotics (1983), ‘Elimination of Opium Production’, Issue 4,.

<sup>30</sup> EcoSoc Resolution, E/RES/1979/8.

<sup>31</sup> Drug Enforcement Agency Regulation Law 1312.13.

<sup>32</sup> US Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2001 Requests Programme Accomplishments.

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## **Conclusion**

Turkey's successful transition from a culture of widespread, unregulated poppy cultivation to a licensed, controlled system of poppy cultivation for the production of medicines provides an interesting model for Afghanistan. Like Afghanistan, a significant sector of Turkey's rural population made, and continues to make its living from the cultivation of poppy. In both countries, large rural communities play important roles, both politically and socially.

Turkey's transition to a system of licensed poppy cultivation was possible because all parties understood that total eradication was impracticable and only pragmatic solutions would resolve Turkey's opium crisis. Ultimately, the solution came about with the help of the international community, and through a specific bilateral trade agreement with the United States. In a similar fashion, Afghanistan could be helped solve its opium problem through targeted development aid, technical support and the implementation of a system of licensed poppy cultivation in some of its rural areas.

## **Appendix I: Turkish Prime Ministers 1960-1977**

May 1960 - Nov 1961	General Cemal Gürsel
Nov 1961 - Feb 1965	Mr. İsmet İnönü
Feb 1965 - Oct 1965	Mr. Ali Suat Hayri Ürgüplü
Oct 1965 - March 1971	Mr. Süleyman Demirel
March 1971 – May 1972	Mr. Nihat Erim
May 1972 - April 1973	Mr. Ferit Melen
April 1973 - Jan 1974	Mr. Naim Talu
Jan 1974 - Nov 1974	Mr. Bülent Ecevit
Nov 1974 - March 1975	Mr Sadi İrmak
March 1975 - June 1977	Mr. Süleyman Demirel