

U.S. Eyes Poppy-Growing for Drugs

By Jack Anderson

A secret White House document recommends growing poppies, for narcotics production, in the United States for the first time since 1942.

This startling proposal is intended to keep the pharmaceutical industry happy. Yet historically, the drug firms have overproduced thrill pills.

The surplus pills have disappeared into the distribution system and have wound up in the black market. Yet the pharmaceutical houses, for the sake of the almighty dollar, have gone ahead producing more narcotic pills than possibly could be used for legitimate medical purposes.

Now these firms claim there is a shortage of medical opium. They say India, which supplies legal opium gum, has had a bad crop year. More is urgently needed, according to the industry, to produce pain-killing morphine and codeine.

Yet there seem to be plenty of opium derivatives for illegal street sale.

The White House crowd, always quick to hear the anguished cries of corporate behemoths, has responded by cutting loose 60 per cent of the opium in the nation's strategic stockpile.

President Ford's Opium Policy Task Force explains that the greatest shortage is in codeine, used mostly in prescription drugs to dull pain. But it is also widely used in cough medi-

cines, often taken by youngsters for narcotic kicks.

"My current assessment," writes Task Force Chairman Ed Johnson of the White House staff, "is that the long-term answer is likely to be 'papaver bracteatum.'"

This is a poppy, which Johnson's secret memorandum suggests could be "grown either domestically or overseas." Although "papaver bracteatum" is related to the opium poppy, it will produce codeine, but not opium or heroin, when refined.

The memo points out, therefore, that it is "a less abusable raw material." It can be grown legally in the United States as a flower. But if any step is taken to refine it into codeine, it becomes a crime.

Footnote: Johnson told us his document was "tentative" and his recommendation on growing poppies domestically is far from an approved policy. He insisted there is a real world codeine shortage. But he conceded he has done nothing to find out whether the pharmaceutical firms have been overproducing the drug, and thereby indirectly supplying addicts, to keep profits high.

Onassis Talks—Man about the world Aristotle Onassis, who normally avoids newsmen, chatted amiably with us the other day about the economic outlook, oil prices, the Central Intelligence Agency, Watergate and his wife, Jacqueline.

He has come to detest public-

ity, he said. Once a photographer with a long-range camera caught him in the bare. When he was asked how he happened to be standing around in such a vulnerable pose, chuckled Onassis, "I said I didn't know how to put on my bathing suit without taking off my pants."

The shipping tycoon has the fierce look of a Mediterranean pirate, but the harsh features are softened by a quiet, gentle charm.

He suspects that the CIA has been manipulating events in the Mediterranean, he said. Behind the ouster of Archbishop Makarios and the landing of Turkish troops in Cyprus, Onassis believes, is the invisible hand of the CIA.

He is also suspicious of the squabbling between the shah of Iran and U.S. officials. Onassis wonders whether the public differences may be intended to hide a secret partnership between the shah and the CIA.

The shah's justification for high oil prices doesn't impress Onassis. The shah has contended that he is entitled to quadruple oil prices since he is paying four times more for Western food and arms.

Reducing the shah's logic to simple terms, Onassis commented: "Because the shah must pay \$1 more for a \$10 purchase from the West, he charges the West \$10 more for a \$100 sale. This way, he comes out \$9 ahead."

Onassis said he was tempted

to write Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger a letter, suggesting that the United States offer to give the shah food and arms at no cost whatever if Iran would reduce oil prices back to their former level. This would be cheaper than paying present oil prices, said the tycoon.

Another subject: He couldn't confirm the Watergate rumor that the Greek shipowners had slipped money to President Nixon through Swiss bank accounts.

Where was Jacqueline? She had gone to horse country to ride. Onassis scoffed at the tabloid press reports of a divorce in the offing.

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