



**STRATEGY
RESEARCH
PROJECT**

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**UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL COUNTERDRUG INITIATIVES
ARE THEY WORKING?**

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL COUNTERDRUG INITIATIVES

ARE THEY WORKING?

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ABSTRACT

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Despite protracted drug control efforts and expenditures of billions of dollars, illegal drugs still flow unabated into the United States. The nation has invested substantial resources to curtail the production and distribution of illegal drugs. Although there has been some success, overall the efforts have failed to stem the flow of illegal drugs into this country. The 1997 Drug Control Policy statement, in addition to continuing efforts to eradicate and intercept in producing and trafficking zone countries, places additional emphasis on countering the demand for illegal drugs. The purpose of this study is to examine the US international drug control initiatives and evaluate their effectiveness in stemming the flow of illegal drugs.

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THE THREAT

Perhaps more than any other post-Cold War issue, the narcotics trade has the potential to inflict staggering economic and social costs on the United States, while undermining the political and economic stability of many of our foreign allies and other countries. Thus drugs pose as great a threat to our national security as terrorism, environmental degradation, or nuclear proliferation.¹

The production, trafficking, and sale of illicit drugs constitutes a global phenomenon that has had a significant adverse global impact socially, politically, and economically. Despite long-standing U.S. drug control efforts and expenditures of resources in the billions of dollars, there has been little evidence of success in stemming the flow of illegal drugs. The United States and the international community remain uncertain about how to respond to this global threat, despite U.S. efforts to stem the flow of illegal drugs.

The annual federal drug budget for law enforcement has grown from roughly \$53 million in 1970 to about \$10 billion for FY 1997. Since 1970, the US has invested roughly \$77 billion in domestic and foreign drug enforcement--\$74 billion of this since 1981. America now spends some \$3 billion a year on its overseas drug wars alone.²

This paper will examine current U.S. international counterdrug initiatives and objectives, evaluating why they have been largely unsuccessful in achieving their intended goal of curbing the flow of illegal drugs into the U.S.

US INTERNATIONAL COUNTERDRUG INITIATIVES

The Controlled Substances Act, Title II of the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970, establishes the legal foundation for the US fight against drugs and substance abuse.³ Three key events helped to frame global and U.S. counterdrug efforts. First, the United Nations (UN) sponsored the Conference on Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (ICDAIT). ICDAIT was convened as a result of the almost universal concern over the expansion of the international drug trade. This UN sponsored the international conference brought together representatives from 138 nations. The participants drew up a set of guidelines in the form of the Comprehensive Multidisciplinary Outline of Future Activities in Drug Abuse Control (CMO) which represented a serious effort to depict drug abuse as a complex and multifaceted problem that required national and international attention. The CMO focused not only on attacking production and trafficking but also on decreasing consumption and expanding rehabilitation. This initiative provided the basis for international cooperation to pursue a strategy to fight the war

on illicit drugs. The CMO represented the most comprehensive international drug control effort of the time.

Second, the U.S. Congress passed the U.S. Drug Abuse Act of 1988. The Act established the policy goal of a drug-free America and established the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP). The ONDCP's mission is to set priorities and objectives for national drug control, promulgate the National Drug Control Strategy on an annual basis, and oversee the strategy's implementation. Since passage of this Act, seven annual strategies have been drafted; all have recognized that no single approach can rescue the nation from the cycle of abuse.⁴

Third, one of the cornerstones of the U.S. international counterdrug initiatives established the certification process. This process provides a means to periodically, on the world stage, scrutinize producer and transit zone countries and their counterdrug efforts. Each year, the President of the U.S. is required by the Foreign Assistance Act to identify countries that produce and export illicit drugs. The President must then certify whether each major drug producing, exporting or transit zone country has fully cooperated in the counterdrug effort or has taken appropriate measures to meet the objectives of the 1988 U.N. convention (the CMO). The U.S. is firmly committed to helping all nations achieve compliance with the provisions of the U.N. convention and has demonstrated its support through foreign assistance, support to law enforcement, and a host of other

assistance programs. Loss of certification results in cuts to U.S. foreign aid, trade sanctions and U.S. opposition to loans from international banking institutions, i.e., World Bank, International Monetary Fund.

Additionally, issuance of Presidential Decision Directive Number 14 in November 1993, refocused U.S. efforts from interdicting illicit drugs in the transit zones to eradicating illicit drugs in the source countries.. It recognized that the availability of drugs in America had not been significantly reduced despite all of the money that had been spent on the supply side of this drug war.⁵

Effective countering of the drug scourge requires a long-term multilateral, multi-level, and multi-phased approach. Not only must the international community be enlisted to join this battle, it must also be fought at the individual, local, state, and national levels as well. This complex approach requires that the problem be attacked from all angles -- demand reduction, supply reduction, law enforcement, interdiction, eradication, education, and treatment. The U.S. response to the global scourge of drug abuse and drug trafficking thus calls for integration of domestic and international efforts to reduce both the demand and supply of drugs.⁶

U.S. DRUG CONTROL STRATEGY

The U.S. has developed a multifaceted drug control strategy intended to reduce the supply and demand for illegal drugs. However, the policy, as articulated, has not met that intent.

The U.S. strategy, as articulated in the National Drug Control Strategy 1997, specifies seven working principles to guide implementing: The strategy must be democratic, domestically reducing drug use while protecting individual liberties. The strategy must be balanced, since reducing the drug problem requires a multifaceted and balanced approach. The strategy must be long-term, for there are no short term solutions to this problem, so only a long-term continuous effort will succeed. The strategy must be wide-ranging, taking advantage of advanced technology in communication and transportation, in internationalizing the effort. The strategy must be realistic, acknowledging that drug abuse and trafficking are so pervasive that it may never be significantly reduced. The strategy must avoid extremes, reducing drug use without compromising American ideals. The strategy must be introspective, and always open to self-assessment and appropriate refinement.⁷

The policy thus acknowledges that drug abuse has plagued the U.S. for many years and that reversing this destructive trend will require a long-term commitment. Based on the seven principles, the strategy further sets five goals:

1. Educate and enable America's youth to reject illegal drugs, as well as alcohol and tobacco.
2. Increase the safety of US citizens by substantially reducing drug related crime and violence.
3. Reduce health and social costs to the public of illegal drug use.
4. Shield America's air, land, and sea frontiers from the drug threat.
5. Break foreign and domestic drug sources of supply.⁸

These five goals thus establish the framework for an overall national drug control strategy. The last two goals deal primarily with U.S. intentions to support international drug control and interdiction efforts. These two goals are aimed at helping both transit zone countries and source countries in their efforts to: (1) destroy major drug organizations; (2) reduce the flow of drugs through such efforts as: eradication at the source, interdiction in transit, destruction of processing facilities; (3) bolster and support the political will and capabilities of other nations' institutions to withstand the influence of major drug trafficking organizations; (4) use regional and multilateral organizations like the UN and the Organization of American States (OAS) to share the burden and costs of drug control efforts.⁹

POLICY GOALS

The fourth and fifth policy goals focus directly on addressing international issues: The fourth goal calls for shielding America's air, land, and sea frontiers from the drug threat. The fifth goal targets the elimination of foreign and domestic drug sources of supply.

FOURTH GOAL

The objectives and courses of action to achieve the fourth goal of shielding U.S. air, land, and sea frontiers from drug traffic are:

Objective 1

Conduct flexible operations to detect, disrupt, deter, and seize illegal drugs in transit to the US and at US borders.¹⁰ US efforts to do this have been largely unsuccessful. Revolutionary advances in communications, transportation, and information technology have made it possible for goods, services, people, information, and ideas to travel across international borders with unprecedented speed and efficiency.¹¹ In order to stay competitive and sustain their economic growth in their economies, many states have opened their borders to commerce. This freedom of movement across international borders promotes opportunities for drug trafficking organizations to expand their markets. Thus it has become extremely difficult to maintain adequate interdiction efforts along borders. This is especially difficult

for the U.S., with its over 88,000 miles of coastline, 7500 miles of borders with Mexico and Canada, and over 300 ports of entry.¹² The US lacks the resources to patrol every open border. Additionally, agreements and accords, like the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), open borders to trade and commerce and bolster the economy. However, these same economic incentives allow for the free flow of illicit drugs more easily across international borders. Thus U.S. efforts to promote economic prosperity can result in the unintended consequence of promoting the illicit drug trade. Despite some short-term gains in interdicting and disrupting the flow of illegal drugs across US borders, the drug trade continues mostly unabated. Drug trafficking organizations continue to ply their trade and satisfy Americans' the demand for illegal drugs.

Objective 2

Improve the coordination and effectiveness of US drug law enforcement programs with particular emphasis on the southwest border, Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands.¹³ The drug cartels are big businesses, they run their operations like Fortune 500 companies. They have begun moving illicit drugs aboard legitimate commercial carriers, through transportation centers and port facilities. Thus we have an increasing need for regulatory guidance and some means of enforcement to prevent drug traffickers from using legitimate means (i.e., SEALAND, UPS,

Federal Express and commercial airlines) to transport drugs. More sophisticated detection technology, continued vigilance, and improvements in intelligence will enhance opportunities for interdiction before the drugs enter the US.

Objective 3

Improve bilateral and regional cooperation with Mexico and with other cocaine and heroin transit zone countries in order to reduce the flow of illegal drugs.¹⁴ Successful multilateral cooperation in counterdrug efforts requires some degree of common interest. Although there may be some conflict of interest, states will overcome this if they perceive a mutual benefit. Often the perception of a common threat is necessary in order to find a common interest in confronting that threat.¹⁵ Given the global nature of the counterdrug effort, the UN can play a critical role in promoting multilateral cooperation.

The U.S. depends considerable on source and transit countries to reduce the flow of drugs from and through their countries. The US provides assistance and support to these countries. But the success of these counterdrug efforts are dependent upon the level of support and effort these countries are willing to bring to the fight. Like the U.S., these countries face many of the same difficulties that sometimes limit their effectiveness and capability. They have other priorities that compete for their limited resources. They are subject to their own political or cultural demands, civil unrest, terrorist activities, corruption,

and a host of other problems. According to the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), corruption is a major factor within the police, the military, and the judiciary in many of the transit and source countries. Twenty-eight percent of Mexico's federal law enforcement has been fired for corruption in the past three years. Many in law enforcement are susceptible to corruption because they earn very low wages, their salaries do not provide for the basic necessities for their families. The lure of the large amounts of money they can make by looking the other way can be a powerful incentive.

Corruption is most insidious, indeed lethal, when national leaders use their power to further their personal gain in the drug trade. In February 1997, General Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo, Mexico's top official in the war on drugs and the Director of the National Institute to Combat Drugs (the equivalent of the US DEA) was arrested for ties to the Carillo Cartel that went back for over seven years.¹⁶

The governments of many of the drug producing nations face threats to their democratic institutions from drug violence and corruption. Numerous cases illustrate the power of drug traffickers to infiltrate the legislative and executive arms of the government. In one case a noted drug trafficker, Pablo Escobar, was elected to the Columbian legislature¹⁷ Through international cooperation, the world community must help these

countries prevent criminal organizations from gaining a foothold in any nation.

Objective 4

Support and highlight research and technology -including the development of scientific information and data -- to detect, disrupt, deter, and seize illegal drugs in transit to the U.S. and at U.S. borders.¹⁸ This effort requires accurate data, a means for collection, and solid analysis to identify trends in production capabilities, supply, demand, etc. One of the greatest obstacles to understanding the nature of the drug problem is the lack of information. Because of the illicit nature of the drug trade, much of the normal information concerning supply and demand, consumption, cultivation statistics, production and refining estimates, trafficking data, etc., are remain a mystery. When seizures are made without this kind of information, it is impossible to assess the impact those seizures make on the trade. Efforts must be directed toward identifying state-of-the-art hardware and technology to combat the spread of the illicit drug trade. The Counterdrug Technology Center (CTAC) established by the Counter Narcotics Technology Act of 1990 is the agency responsible for research and development technology to aid in the counterdrug effort. In addition to research and development of standard law enforcement capabilities like surveillance, inspection, and tracking illicit drugs and traffickers, CTAC conducts research and development in the areas

of addiction, rehabilitation, and drug treatment. Drug traffickers use their vast wealth to purchase expensive modern technology to communicate and coordinate their activities. Drug warriors must have the resources to counter these threats.

FIFTH GOAL

The objectives to meet the fifth goal of eliminating both foreign and domestic sources of drugs are:

Objective 1

Produce a net reduction in the worldwide cultivation of coca, opium, and marijuana, as well as the production of other illegal drugs, especially methamphetamine.¹⁹ Reduce worldwide cultivation of illegal drugs. Gaining control over the cultivation and production of illegal drugs is key to supply reduction efforts. U.S. efforts at eradicating coca crops have met with limited success. The current U.S. strategy relies on the unsuccessful carrot-and-stick approach to peasant farmer production. The U.S. seeks to provide carrots through incentives to substitute other crops for coca, despite its enormous profitability.²⁰ From the peasant farmers' perspective coca brings many times the price of alternate crops; it grows easily in poor soil, and it is inexpensive to process.²¹

Critics of this objective argue that source country programs—whether crop eradication, crop substitution or destruction of

refineries, offer negligible prospects for reducing American cocaine consumption in the long run.²² Pressure on farmers to eradicate crops would only prompt farmers to seed other locations. Crop substitution has much the same result, because planting traditional crops would not provide the level of income guaranteed from cocoa crops. Destroying refineries results only in rebuilding such facilities at another location and continuing operations. Thus this effort really only redistributes production from one location to another.

A second criticism of this strategy that the supply-side approach is unrealistic: "If there are no drugs coming in, then there would be no drug problem."²³ This approach has been tried by both Republican and Democratic administrations. It has had very limited effect in stemming the flow of drugs. Further, it overlooks the reality that addicts will find available substitutes.

The drug warriors point to the growing numbers of shipments seized, acres eradicated, and traffickers arrested as evidence of success. They do not address the larger political objective-reducing drug abuse, addiction and crime. They even overlook the mission's failure to meet its own stated goals of reducing supply and significantly raising prices. Despite extended costly efforts to eradicate drugs at the source and to interdict them in transit, there is no evidence of a reduction in the supply of drugs entering the US.²⁴

Objective 2

Disrupt and dismantle major international drug trafficking organizations and arrest, prosecute, and incarcerate their leaders.²⁵ Target the leadership of the major drug organizations. Both the Cali and Medellin cartels were targeted; many of the key leaders of those organizations have been arrested. The Administration boasts of its success in clamping down on the Medellin cartel, but the Cali cartel was waiting in the wings. The truth about street dealers in the U.S. holds as well for those abroad: putting a murderer in jail means one less murderer on the street, putting a drug dealer in jail creates a job opening.²⁶

The drug trade is no longer a small business enterprise run by low level criminal elements. These organizations have grown into very large, sophisticated, multi billion dollar enterprises. There are few businesses-licit or illicit-that are more lucrative than the drug trade. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development calculates that as much as \$122 billion is spent each year in the US and Europe on heroin, cocaine, and cannabis--the most popular illicit drugs. Of this sum, 50 to 70 percent, or as much as \$85 billion, is estimated to be laundered and reinvested. If these figures are even close to being accurate, the rewards of the drug trade are larger than the Gross National Products of three-fourths of the 207 economies of the world.²⁷

Despite the best efforts of US counterdrug forces, the margin of profit for the traffickers is so high and production costs so low that these efforts will not significantly cut their profits. According to the US DEA estimates, Columbian traffickers can at any time store between 70 and 100 tons of cocaine in Mexico--roughly the equivalent of what US agencies seize in the course of an entire year.²⁸

Although the U.S. objective to arrest, prosecute, and incarcerate the leaders has enjoyed limited success, the U.S. still must deal with what Bertram and Sharpe call the "Hydra Effect." Like the mythical sea serpent that Hercules battled, each time you eliminate one, another takes its place. This is true not only for drug traffickers but also for producers, processors, smugglers, etc. All too often, each time the hydra's head is cut off, two more grow in its place.²⁹ As the international community continues its efforts to disrupt the cartels by arresting, prosecuting and incarcerating the leadership, there are others standing by in the wings awaiting their opportunity to step in.

Objective 3

Support and complement source country drug control efforts and strengthen political will and drug control capabilities.³⁰ The longer drug traffickers are allowed to operate freely in society, the more likely democratic institutions will fall prey

to corruption. To counter this nefarious trend, the U.S. provides international assistance to improve law enforcement and judicial systems.

Objective 4

Develop and support bilateral, regional, and multilateral initiatives and mobilize international organizational efforts against all aspects of illegal drug production, trafficking, and abuse.³¹ Illegal drug trafficking affects the global community. Despite U.S. efforts to build coalitions to fight the drug war, many U.S. allies have undertaken costly drug-war campaigns under the threat of US sanctions. The fact remains that U.S. allies simply have not accepted the cause of the U.S. drug war as their own. The U.S. has been unable to enlist the support of her allies who don't have the same magnitude of problem as the US has and who have other interests or more pressing priorities.

Objective 5

Promote international policies and laws that deter money laundering and facilitate anti-money laundering investigations as well as seizure of associated assets.³² Money laundering is a central concern for drug traffickers. They depend upon the legitimate financial system to launder illegal drug profits. The challenge for the drug trade is to find a safe place to store it. To interdict illegal drug profits, we must relax banking secrecy laws and require financial institutions to cooperate with

international financial investigations. There is strong support from both producing nations and consuming nations for efforts to establish agreements that will facilitate transfer of banking information across international borders.

Objective 6

Support and highlight research and technology including the development of scientific data to reduce the worldwide supply of illegal drugs.³³ As an alternative to manual eradication, herbicidal eradication techniques are more efficient, effective and quick. These efforts should focus on environmentally safe and sound methods to eliminate crops.

CONCLUSION

In the 10 years from 1986 to 1996, the US spent about \$130 billion on domestic and international efforts to reduce the use and availability of illegal drugs in the US. Despite this massive commitment of resources and labor-intensive effort, there is overwhelming evidence that the counterdrug efforts have not been significantly effective. The US free market economy, which depends so heavily on cross-border trading, has left the U.S. vulnerable to drug trafficking. Because of the expanse of U.S. borders efforts to interdict drugs have met with very limited success.

The cartels continue to smuggle drugs into the US via illegal means. However, more and more, they are using legitimate

carriers and transportation centers to move their illegal contraband.

Success in this effort requires international cooperation. U.S. efforts to coerce cooperation by imposing sanctions on those countries who have not signed on for America's war on drugs has, in some cases, alienated our friends and allies. Corruption in many of the source and transit countries limits our capability to reduce drug flow. The governments of many of the drug-producing nations face threats to their democratic institutions which often results in a less aggressive approach to counterdrug operations.

U.S. efforts to eradicate the coca crop has met with very limited success because it is a very profitable crop for the farmers. When law enforcement eliminates a crop, farmers reseed elsewhere. Efforts to prosecute and incarcerate the leadership of the major cartels have met with only limited success, because there is always another leader standing by in the wings.

It is time to recognize that the source of America's drug problem is right here at home and we must redirect some of our efforts closer to home. It has been amply demonstrated in many State Department, Office of the National Drug Policy Coordinator, Congressional and Government Accounting Office documents that reducing supply has been ineffectual. U.S. international strategy has historically focused on a supply-side strategy. That strategy has provided limited or temporary gains; but in the

long run it just doesn't work. Unlimited supplies of illicit drugs continue to enter the U.S.

A more positive, effective, long-term approach to countering the impact of illicit drugs on America is to reduce demand. A 1995 RAND study, *Controlling Cocaine: Supply Versus Demand Programs*, found that treatment is far more effective than either interdiction or source country eradication programs in reducing cocaine consumption and it costs less. Specifically, \$34 million invested in treatment reduces annual cocaine use by the same amount as \$366 million invested in interdiction or \$783 in source-country programs.³⁴

There is also ample evidence to justify a change in policy away from supply efforts to demand efforts. The current Administration has recognized that demand reduction programs (including drug treatment, prevention, and education) cannot succeed if drugs are readily available and drug enforcement programs cannot ultimately succeed if the Nation's appetite for illegal drugs is not curbed.³⁵

Current U.S. policy is moving in the right direction. The current Administration's policy incorporates a multifaceted approach to combating drugs. The policy focus is shifting toward addressing more the demand for drugs with specific policy goals and objectives directed toward educating America's youth to reject drugs. It also expands the safe and drug-free schools and communities programs, expands treatment for substance abuse and

other prevention and treatment programs, and increases the demand-side budget by 8.7%, from \$4.6 billion in FY 96 to \$5 billion in FY 97.

The nation's drug problem is insidious. While we have no immediate solution, we can at least acknowledge what has not been successful in the past. We should redirect our efforts in a more positive direction in the future. In the final analysis, we must find more effective ways to counter drug abuse at home, rather than abroad.

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ENDNOTES

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⁵ Leif Roderick Rosenberger. America's War Debacle, (Suffolk, Great Britain: Ipswich Book Company, 1996), 55.

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²⁶ Joshua Shenk. "The Phony Drug War," Nation, 23 September 1996, 12.

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³⁵ Rosenberger, 50.

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