

**How to Improve the National Drug Control Strategy to Win the War on Drugs**

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STS.062J: Drugs, Politics and Culture

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May 18, 2006

The three major components of the United States' national drug control strategy are *Stopping Drug Use Before It Starts*, *Healing America's Drug Users*, and *Disrupting Drug Markets*.<sup>1</sup> By educating American citizens about the consequences of drug use, by implementing drug testing in the workplace, and by providing treatment options for drug users, the *Stopping Drug Use Before It Starts* and the *Healing America's Drug Users* policies have resulted in a decreased rate of illicit substance use in the United States during the past twenty years. However, the current methods used by the US government to disrupt the drug market have resulted in increased quantities of illicit substances available on American streets. Only when the government changes its focus, from eradicating international drug trafficking to securing the nation's borders and implementing more treatment facilities, will the United States win the war on drugs.

One of the major problems with the current drug market disruption strategy is that it does not prevent newcomers from becoming drug traffickers. Bertram et al. describe this problem as two flaws of the drug control policy: the profit paradox and the hydra effect.<sup>2</sup> Every time the United States intercepts illegal substances at home or abroad, the black market price of that drug increases. While the government believes that interdiction decreases the number of drug users by raising the price of the desired substances, drug interception also causes more people to become traffickers due to the higher profit margin.<sup>3</sup> This profit paradox explains one of the reasons why drug interdiction does not disrupt the drug industry: it results in "a guaranteed market, with profits kept artificially high by the US government."<sup>4</sup> The drug market also succeeds because it has the ability to spread like water. Bertram et al. describe this hydra effect as the drug trade's

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<sup>1</sup> National Drug Control Strategy. The White House. Feb 2006. Pp 3.

<sup>2</sup> Bertram, E.; Blachman, M.; Sharpe, K.; Andreas, P. *Three Fatal Flaws in the War on Drugs*. Drug War Politics. UC Press. Pp 13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Pp 12.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Pp 15.

ability to self-reproduce: every time a government attempts to eliminate drug production or smuggling, the traffickers will “tap alternative sources of supply.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore, even when the US government is successful against one cartel, new smuggling routes will open up and a different group of traffickers will gain more of the market share.<sup>6</sup> While the profit paradox and the hydra effect severely hinder the US drug control policy, the United States must also overcome the economic necessity of the drug trade to many foreign nations as it attempts to disrupt the market for illegal substances.

Another significant problem with the US drug market disruption strategy is that American desires for reduced drug trafficking cannot compete with the needs of foreign countries. Many foreign governments rely on the drug trade to increase their revenues, causing their government officials to disregard any pressure from the United States to prosecute drug traffickers. For example, approximately 20% of the Bolivian workforce is involved with drug producing and trafficking, resulting in 70% of the country’s gross national product (GNP).<sup>7</sup> If this market was eliminated from the country, there would be widespread unemployment and violence; therefore, the Bolivian government will not assist the United States in capturing any drug dealers.<sup>8</sup> The connection between the drug trade and a country’s overall economy is not present only in South American nations. Vanda Felbab-Brown believes that at least 50% of Afghanistan’s GNP comes from the trade of opium and heroin.<sup>9</sup> The Afghani government attempted to eradicate the farming of poppy plants, but this strategy was unsuccessful because the peasants could not feed themselves or pay off their debts without profits from opiate

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. Pp 15, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. Pp 19, 21.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Pp 16.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Pp 16.

<sup>9</sup> Felbab-Brown, Vanda. Lecture in STS.062J: Drugs, Politics, and Culture. 27 Apr 2006.

production.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, to keep its economy afloat, the Afghani government must ignore US interdiction requests. Even when nations agree to help the United States in eradicating the traffic of illicit substances, difficulties arise when foreign government officials are involved with the drug trade. While they endorse eradication efforts, these corrupt government officials attempt to make personal profits by cutting deals with drug traffickers. For example, government officials in Peru will ignore trafficking, even to the extent of allowing smugglers to use army airstrips to transport their illicit substances, as long as the traffickers pay them a significant amount of money.<sup>11</sup> In the 1980s, the entire Panamanian government, including President Manuel Noriega, was involved in the drug trade.<sup>12</sup> Internal corruption in countries that agree to collaborate with the United States in the prevention of drug trafficking, in addition to the formation of national economies that are completely dependent on the trade of illicit substances, eliminate the possibility that the United States can make any significant change to the global drug market in the near future.

While efforts to eradicate drugs in foreign countries have not decreased the influx of drugs to the United States, the American government continues to spend a large portion of its budget on the drug market disruption strategy. Two organizations funded entirely by the United States, the US Agency for International Development (AID) and the US Bureau of International Narcotics Matters (INM), work with the Peruvian government to reduce the production and distribution of cocaine in Peru.<sup>13</sup> The AID program promotes “the cultivation of food and cash crops other than the coca leaf.”<sup>14</sup> Although the United States pledged \$18 million between 1981

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Betram, E.; Blachman, M.; Sharpe, K.; Andreas, P. *Three Fatal Flaws in the War on Drugs*. Drug War Politics. UC Press. Pp 17.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Pp 17.

<sup>13</sup> Morales, Edmundo. Cocaine: White Gold Rush in Peru. Pp 121.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Pp 150.

and 1985 to implement this strategy, most of the money was used by farmers to plant more coca, since they can make a larger profit from it than from other cash crops.<sup>15</sup> An INM project, Eradication and Control of Coca Leaf Planting in the Upper Huallaga (CORAH) attempted to reduce the number of coca plants by removing them from the ground, resulting in unusable soil for eight to ten years.<sup>16</sup> After the INM spent \$11.7 million in Peru (of which \$4 million went to eradication), only 8% of the total estimated coca plantations had been eliminated.<sup>17</sup> The main difficulty in removing coca plants arose because “the equivalent of \$300 per hectare given as compensation to the legal coca planter can barely pay for clearing a new hectare of land or compensate for the loss of productive land.”<sup>18</sup> Because farmers did not feel a great incentive to remove their coca plants, they did not participate in CORAH, and continued to supply coca leaves to drug producers. During the 1980s, the AID and the INM programs cost the United States approximately \$30 million, and resulted in an increased number of coca plants in Peru. Nevertheless, the portion of the US budget spent on eradicating the drug supply abroad continued to increase. In 1989, President George Bush approved more than \$300 million of the US budget for combating drug cartels in the Andean region.<sup>19</sup> By 1991, the United States spent more than \$700 million internationally on drug traffic disruption, and throughout the 1990s, the amount dedicated to the war on drugs steadily increased.<sup>20</sup> During this time period, it was believed that the high cost of eliminating drug production in foreign countries was worth it, especially if the drug traffic threatened the nation’s security.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. Pp 150.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. Pp 155, 157.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. Pp 156.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. Pp 157-158.

<sup>19</sup> Bowden, Mark. Killing Pablo Escobar: The Hunt For The World’s Greatest Outlaw. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2001. Pp 65.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Pp 65.

The steady increase in US anti-drug funding began in 1986 when President Ronald Reagan signed a new National Security Decision Directive that declared the trafficking of illicit substances to be a threat to national security and allowed the US military to become involved in drug eradication.<sup>21</sup> With the help of the CIA and the Colombian government, the US military assisted in the manhunt for the wealthiest drug smuggler of all time, Pablo Escobar. However, during the hunt for Escobar and the slow disintegration of the Medellín cartel, US consumption of cocaine did not decrease. As Mark Bowden explains, at this time “regardless of the billions spent in the war on drugs, there was more than enough cocaine for everybody in America who wanted to buy it.”<sup>22</sup> Like the administrations of the past, the current US government spends millions of dollars abroad on the *Disrupting Drug Markets* strategy and continues to believe that this policy reduces the presence of drugs on American streets. While the US government contributed an increase in aerial eradication of coca plants and a decrease in seizures of Ecstasy since 2001 to this disruption strategy, it did not consider that drug producers may have planted more coca than was eliminated or found better methods to be undetected as they brought Ecstasy into the United States.<sup>23</sup> The Bush administration also contributes a 77% decrease in methamphetamine “super-lab” seizures to a decrease in the number of these labs in the United States.<sup>24</sup> However, methamphetamine chemists may have learned to hide their labs carefully so that they are overlooked by US officials. In addition, while the number of methamphetamine seizures at the US-Mexico border has increased since 2001, it does not necessarily mean that a smaller fraction of this drug is making its way to American streets; there may just be a greater

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Pp 54.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. Pp 271.

<sup>23</sup> National Drug Control Strategy. The White House. Feb 2006. Pp 2.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Pp 24.

number of smugglers due to an increased profit margin.<sup>25</sup> As the United States continues to spend large amounts of money on trying to disrupt the drug market, it tells American citizens that the expense is one of the necessary costs of fighting the war on terrorism.

The United States government uses the ongoing war on terrorism as one of the major reasons for spending millions of dollars abroad on drug eradication. According to the Bush administration's National Drug Control Policy, market disruption "contributes to the Global War on Terrorism, severing the links between drug traffickers and terrorist organizations in countries such as Afghanistan and Colombia."<sup>26</sup> Terrorist groups in Colombia, such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the United Self-Defense Forces/Group of Colombia (AUC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) rely heavily on drug trafficking in order to support their organizations.<sup>27</sup> To decrease the drug trade's ability to fund these Colombian groups, the United States spent more than \$30 million in 2005 on "spray aircraft for Colombia under the Critical Flight Safety program" and on implementing aerial eradication.<sup>28</sup> Terrorist organizations in Afghanistan also maintain economic stability by supplying opiates to the United States and other western nations. To reduce opiate production that would support these terrorists, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) paid Afghani farmers a total of approximately \$2.5 million in 2005 to plant crops other than opiates.<sup>29</sup> Overall, greater than \$1 *billion* of the US 2007 fiscal year budget will be spent on fighting the war on terrorism in foreign countries by the eradication of drug trafficking.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, only \$396 million will be spent in the United States on the *Stopping Drug Use Before It Starts* and *Healing America's Drug Users* strategies.<sup>31</sup> While

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. Pp 26.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. Pp 19.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Pp 21-22.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. Pp 20.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Pp 39.

<sup>30</sup> National Drug Control Strategy: FY 2007 National Budget Summary. The White House. Feb 2006. Pp 3-5.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Pp 2-3.

a much greater amount of the US budget is spent on disrupting the drug market abroad, this strategy has not reduced the availability of illegal drugs to American citizens. In order to make a true impact on domestic drug use, the United States should change its drug policy to focus on preventing the use and the traffic of illicit substances at home.

The United States needs to change its drug market disruption policy from a focus on foreign states to a commitment toward reducing the transport of drugs into the United States and to decreasing the availability of these illicit substances to America citizens. The government should not be focused on eradicating drugs at the source because it does not have control over how foreign officials, or even US troops abroad, act toward drug trafficking. Regardless of how much money the United States spends on reducing the drug traffic in certain foreign nations, it cannot change the way that police in these nations “go after any person who ‘smells’ of money,” in order to steal the smuggler’s loot.<sup>32</sup> In countries like Peru, there are long waiting lists for policemen to be transferred into the jungle regions, simply because the officers know that they can make extra income there by capturing drug smugglers and taking their money.<sup>33</sup> Trying to prevent drug trafficking in these countries by capturing smugglers is not effective because there will always be more poor peasants who will become traffickers and more policemen who want extra income. In some countries, the US drug market disruption strategy cannot even be implemented by American troops. In 2003, American troops in Afghanistan ignored most heroin and opium that was discovered during random searches.<sup>34</sup> At this time, as James Risen explains, “drug trafficking was taking place virtually right in front of the American military.”<sup>35</sup> In addition, the US government was aware of the locations of numerous heroin warehouses and

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<sup>32</sup> Morales, Edmundo. Cocaine: White Gold Rush in Peru. Pp 123.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Pp 126.

<sup>34</sup> Risen, James. State of War: The Secret History of the CIA and the Bush Administration. New York: Free Press, 2006. Pp 157.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Pp 158.

laboratories in Afghanistan, but did not attempt to intercept these buildings because the Department of Defense did not understand the connection between counter-narcotics and the war on terrorism.<sup>36</sup> This connection was recognized in 2005, resulting in the destruction of some drug-related targets by US troops, but this anti-drug effort came too late.<sup>37</sup> At that time, the Bush administration began to focus on the war in Iraq instead of the drug trade and terrorism problems in Afghanistan.<sup>38</sup> Because they rely on profits from these substances to live, Afghani farmers began to produce and to sell opiates again, erasing all drug eradication efforts previously made by the United States. Instead of wasting money on efforts that will not decrease the traffic of illicit substances to the United States from foreign nations, all US funds currently dedicated to drug eradication abroad should be spent on generating some real change in the domestic drug market.

The two drug control strategies that operate within the United States, *Stopping Drug Use Before It Starts* and *Healing America's Drug Users*, have been more successful than the drug market disruption policy in reducing the number of American citizens who use illicit substances. Because of programs like the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign and the Partnership for a Drug Free America, drug use by American teenagers has decreased.<sup>39</sup> Since 2001, the number of 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> graders who have tried marijuana decreased by 13%, while steroid and methamphetamine use have also decreased by 38% and 34%, respectively.<sup>40</sup> Overall, approximately 700,000 fewer teenagers are using illicit drugs now than in 2001, a statistic that cannot be linked directly to increased eradication efforts abroad, but to a change in American

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. Pp 158.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Pp 162.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. Pp 164.

<sup>39</sup> National Drug Control Strategy. The White House. Feb 2006. Pp 8.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. Pp 2.

culture that currently views drug use as unacceptable.<sup>41</sup> This cultural change arose not only from education but also from the government's efforts to provide disincentives for using illicit substances. Studies have shown that drug use increases the number of absences from work or school and makes it more likely that a substance user will be involved in a dangerous accident while under the influence.<sup>42</sup> Drug screening in schools and in the workplace "deters young people from initiating drug use, identifies those who have initiated drug use...and helps identify those who have a dependency on drugs so that they can be referred for treatment."<sup>43</sup> While employers use drug testing to make sure that all employees work effectively for their companies, schools implement drug screening to qualify students for participating in extra-curricular activities and to prepare students for working in the real world.<sup>44</sup> Because the rate of drug use among young people has decreased with the expansion of prevention programs and drug screening, as the amount of illicit substances in America has increased, the government should continue to focus on the *Stopping Drug Use Before It Starts* strategy in the future.

In addition to preventing people from using drugs, the US government has also helped drug addicts through a variety of treatment programs. The intervention strategy called *Healing America's Drug Users* attempts to treat "users who are on the verge of developing serious problems."<sup>45</sup> The Screening, Brief Intervention, Referral, and Treatment (SBIRT) program trains health care providers in detecting and treating substance use and abuse.<sup>46</sup> In addition, the Access to Recovery program offers vouchers to drug users who are willing to join a treatment program, but who could not participate otherwise due to financial hardship.<sup>47</sup> The government also gives

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. Pp 1.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. Pp 9.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. Pp 8.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Pp 10.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Pp 12.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Pp 13.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. Pp 13.

Substance Abuse Block Grants to individual states for building and maintaining drug treatment and recovery facilities.<sup>48</sup> However, treatment programs and facilities alone are not effective in eliminating drug use. As Bertram et al. explain, drug abusers desire a normal, conventional life, and support from family and friends provide these users with the ability to return to healthy lifestyles.<sup>49</sup> The US government attempts to provide this environment through the use of drug courts. Drug courts “use the power of the courts and the support of family, friends, and counselors to bring people to the path of recovery and to help them achieve drug-free lives.”<sup>50</sup> The implementation of this system nationwide has decreased the rate of recidivism from 43.5% (untreated drug offenders) to 16.4% (drug court graduates).<sup>51</sup> Because of the success of these treatment programs in reducing drug use among current users and addicts, the government should continue to support current facilities while it begins to implement new ways of reducing the number of drug users within the United States.

Instead of spending millions of dollars on preventing the manufacture and the traffic of illicit substances in foreign countries, the United States should use this money to patrol its borders and to prevent and treat drug use of American citizens. Although attacking traffickers at the source is believed to be effective in eradicating drug use within the United States, the failure of this strategy during the past twenty years has proven this theory invalid. When the US government spent millions of dollars on the campaign to capture Pablo Escobar in Colombia, cocaine from this region continued to pass through American borders at an alarming rate. In 1993, the last year of Escobar’s life, 70-80% of the 243-340 tons of cocaine that entered the United States came from Colombia, proving that the money spent on killing Escobar did not

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. Pp 14.

<sup>49</sup> Bertram, E.; Blachman, M.; Sharpe, K.; Andreas, P. *Three Fatal Flaws in the War on Drugs*. Drug War Politics. UC Press. Pp 30.

<sup>50</sup> National Drug Control Strategy. The White House. Feb 2006. Pp 14.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. Pp 14.

prevent his cartel from transporting cocaine to America streets.<sup>52</sup> While intercepting cocaine may only affect those involved in the Medellín cartel, eradicating drug production in some countries may actually hurt the countries' entire economies. Some nations, such as Afghanistan and Bolivia, rely heavily on the drug trade to keep their economies stable. If Afghani citizens could not grow poppy, a war for food and other basic necessities could begin. The USAID program in Afghanistan, which pays farmers for removing their poppy plants, is doomed to fail unless the United States decides to pay these farmers and their families for the rest of their lives. Countries like Afghanistan "cannot afford to give up [their] most important foreign export[s] to join an isolated campaign against illicit drug trafficking."<sup>53</sup> If the United States wants to stop the flow of drugs from these countries onto American streets, it should use the money from eradication abroad to patrol its borders and to verify that fewer people and packages are smuggling or containing drugs as they enter the country. While it is unreasonable to believe that every person and package can be screened, security at the borders must be expanded. Currently, "customs and the DEA interdict no more than a small percentage of the drugs smuggled in every year."<sup>54</sup> If more money was spent on preventing drugs from entering the country, not only would the US drug problem decrease dramatically, but terrorist groups that rely on the drug trade would lose economic stability. Only when the United States increases security at its borders in order to prevent drug smuggling will the war on terrorism and the war on drugs be successful.

In addition to using funds from current eradication efforts abroad to secure US borders, a significant amount of money should be spent on preventing and treating drug use. The United States should view Switzerland's *Therapy* strategy as a model, by providing similar treatment

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<sup>52</sup> Bowden, Mark. Killing Pablo: The Hunt For The World's Greatest Outlaw. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2001. Pp 271.

<sup>53</sup> Morales, Edmundo. Cocaine: White Gold Rush in Peru. Pp 149.

<sup>54</sup> Betram, E.; Blachman, M.; Sharpe, K.; Andreas, P. Three Fatal Flaws in the War on Drugs. Drug War Politics. UC Press. Pp 20.

options that “reintegrate dependent drug users into society and permit them to lead a largely independent life.”<sup>55</sup> In addition, the use of drug courts as treatment for drug addicts should increase. Instead of infiltrating the nation’s jails with drug users, people caught using illicit substances should be sent to drug treatment facilities and taught how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. By treating drug users, the United States saves money since every dollar spent on treatment prevents \$7.50 from being lost due to crime and lost productivity.<sup>56</sup> However, no matter how hard the US government tries to decrease and to treat drug use in America, it cannot prevent everyone from using illicit substances. Nevertheless, by attempting to treat drug users and by preventing drugs from entering the country, the United States stops an ever-growing drug problem from within and makes it less likely for drug traffickers to attempt to make profits from selling illicit substances on American streets.

The necessity of the drug trade to some foreign economies and corruption within some foreign governments causes the current United States strategy for eradicating drugs by disrupting the drug market to be ineffective. However, the United States continues to spend millions of dollars annually to try to eliminate drugs at the source. Although the battles may be long and difficult, only by fighting drug use at home will the United States observe a significant decrease in the number of Americans using illicit substances. By spending the money from current eradication efforts abroad on patrolling and increasing security at US borders while developing a wider variety of treatment options for current drug users, the United States can win the war on drugs.

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<sup>55</sup> Swiss Drugs Policy. Swiss Federal Office of Public Health. (undated) Pp 16.

<sup>56</sup> National Drug Control Strategy. The White House. Feb 2006. Pp 14.