

Cato Institute Policy Analysis No. 63: The U.S. Campaign Against International Narcotics Trafficking: A Cure Worse than the Disease

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Executive Summary

President Reagan launched a new and decidedly militant phase in the U.S. campaign to halt global narcotics trafficking when he addressed the annual meeting of the International Association of Chiefs of Police in September 1981. The president placed illicit-drug use and the narcotics trade in the context of a larger "crime epidemic" afflicting the United States. Mapping a comprehensive assault on the drug problem, he not only expressed a desire to strengthen domestic law-enforcement and educational efforts to stem consumer demand but also stressed the need to discourage international production and distribution. His proposed "narcotics enforcement strategy" included "a foreign policy that vigorously seeks to interdict and eradicate illicit drugs, wherever cultivated, processed, or transported." [1] The president also announced the formation of the Special Council on Narcotics Control--consisting of the attorney general and the secretaries of state, defense, and the treasury, as well as other officials--to coordinate efforts to stop the flow of narcotics into the United States. The task of reducing illicit drug imports is monumental in scope. At present, approximately 15,000 tons of marijuana, 50-70 tons of cocaine, and 4 tons of heroin pour into the United States annually from abroad. More than a score of nations--principally Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Mexico, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Thailand, and Burma--are major suppliers. Foreign sources account for at least 80 percent, and perhaps as much as 90 percent, of the total U.S. supply of illicit drugs. [2]

In the four years since Reagan's speech, various federal agencies, including the State Department, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and the Central Intelligence Agency, have waged a vigorous war to eliminate narcotics production and distribution around the globe. The U.S. government has enticed or coerced numerous foreign governments into adopting programs to eradicate drug crops and to intercept narcotics shipments passing through their jurisdictions. U.S. officials urge growers to substitute other crops for the production of illicit varieties and offer them compensation during the transition. Congress and the administration channel millions of dollars into training and equipping foreign anti-narcotics law-enforcement agencies.

Despite much rhetorical bravado and a few highly publicized successes, the U.S. effort has been a bitter disappointment. There has been virtually no reduction in the aggregate amount of cocaine, heroin, and marijuana coming into the United States since President Reagan's September 1981 speech. [3] This failure has created an impetus to search for scapegoats. Anti-drug militants in Congress, such as Sens. Paula Hawkins, Jeremiah Denton, and Strom Thurmond, charge that some foreign governments exhibit insufficient zeal in ferreting out narcotics traffickers. They threaten to propose legislation imposing trade sanctions and other penalties against recalcitrant regimes. Congressional conservatives and their ideological brethren in the administration also increasingly identify the narcotics issue with the larger cold war. They assert that Cuba, Bulgaria, Nicaragua, and other Marxist states are trafficking in drugs as part of a conspiracy to "destabilize" American society.

Even more disturbing than the heightened temper of domestic rhetoric is the evidence of adverse foreign policy ramifications. Regimes normally friendly to the United States are annoyed at America's anti-drug obsession, especially the insensitive (on occasion, even boorish) behavior of the Reagan administration toward foreign governments not sharing the same attitude. Drug-crop eradication and substitution programs antagonize peasants and other growers, creating a reservoir of ill will toward the United States and toward governments that seem subservient to U.S. dictates. Throughout Asia and Latin America, the U.S. drug agent is rapidly becoming the new "ugly American." Washington's international anti-narcotics crusade is an operational failure that threatens to become a diplomatic catastrophe.

Narcotics and Public Morality

The federal government was actively involved in efforts to stem narcotics trafficking long before Ronald Reagan became president. Every chief executive since Lyndon Johnson has announced his own version of a "war on drugs" to curtail domestic production and consumption and to undercut the international narcotics trade. In the mid-1960s, the United States and Turkey established bilateral arrangements for the suppression of opium poppy cultivation. The Nixon and Ford administrations adopted similar, but even more aggressive, programs with respect to marijuana growing in Mexico. On the multilateral level, the United States enhanced its longstanding adherence to the terms of the 1912 Hague Convention and later agreements by vigorously supporting the activities of the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control, the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs, and other agencies.[4]

Reagan's contribution to these efforts has been to increase the intensity of the U.S. commitment to them, particularly in the arena of foreign policy. Secretary of State George Shultz articulated the administration's view of drug trafficking in a September 1984 address before the Miami Chamber of Commerce. He stressed that "drug abuse is not only a top priority for this Administration's domestic policy, it is a top priority in our foreign policy as well." [5]

The Reagan administration's militancy is in part a reaction to the tremendous upsurge in domestic drug use that occurred during the 1970s. By the early 1980s, there were more than 20 million marijuana smokers and 3-5 million cocaine users in the United States. In 1981, the DEA estimated that illicit-drug sales in the United States exceeded \$80 billion.[6] For conservatives of Reagan's stamp, widespread drug use does not merely represent a public-health problem, it offends a wide range of deeply held social values. The president expresses a pervasive view when he portrays drug use as one manifestation of a larger crime problem.

Moreover, Reagan and many other Americans believe that narcotics are an important cause of the upsurge of criminal behavior. They note that compulsive drug users commit a high percentage of burglaries, robberies, and other offenses to support their expensive habits, while organized crime has found narcotics trafficking to be a lucrative source of revenue.[7] Perceptive scholars argue, however, that these problems are the result of draconian drug laws rather than drug use itself. Criminal sanctions inflate prices, driving habitual users into a sleazy underworld and creating irresistible opportunities for crime syndicates. Despite considerable evidence supporting this interpretation, most drug-law advocates reject it with a peculiarly intense emotionalism.[8]

In addition to assuming links between drug use and crime, some conservatives see drugs as promoting undesirable behavior among American youth. Drug use, in their view, both reflects and contributes to the decline of "traditional morality" and "family values." Secretary Shultz typifies this assumption when he states, "Drug abuse is one of the lingering symptoms of a deeper social and cultural phenomenon: the weakening of the traditional values of family and community and religious faith that we have suffered for some time in Western Society." [9] Republican senator Paula Hawkins makes the point even more strongly, asserting that narcotics constitute "the single most threatening menace to civilization today." [10]

Mounting drug use in the United States threatens core conservative doctrine concerning the nature of a moral society, and the spectacular failure of previous campaigns to dampen the demand for illicit substances has created feelings of desperation. The battle of President Reagan and his ideological allies against foreign sources of supply reflects this desperation. An increasingly visible component of U.S. diplomacy, the U.S. crusade against narcotics has now become a prominent export industry.

Elements of the Crusade

According to Secretary of State Shultz, four basic principles govern the Reagan administration's international narcotics policy:

First, countries where narcotics are produced or through which drugs are shipped must accept their responsibilities . . . to reduce crops and interdict drug smuggling. Second, the international community must assist those nations that lack the resources to take the necessary steps. Third, worldwide emphasis must be placed on crop control and eradication. . . . Fourth, in producer nations that need our help, our narcotics-related economic assistance must be linked to agreements on reducing crop levels.[11]

Administration actions have closely adhered to the principles outlined by Shultz.

Essentially, Washington's narcotics diplomacy has pursued five objectives: (1) drug-crop eradication projects; (2) crop-substitution programs; (3) the interdiction of drug-trafficking routes; (4) the training, equipping, and advising of indigenous anti-narcotics units; and (5) the use of financial subsidies when local resources are insufficient. The overall goal is to encourage, persuade, bribe, or coerce foreign governments into joining the U.S. anti-drug crusade.

U.S. officials place a particularly high priority on the detection and eradication of drug crops. When the Reagan administration took office, the United States had obtained commitments from Turkey and Burma to reduce opium poppy cultivation and from Mexico to reduce marijuana production. In the intervening years, Washington has negotiated similar agreements with Pakistan and Belize; it has also persuaded Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia to impose some restrictions on cocaine trafficking. Less rigorous but still significant programs are in effect in at least ten other nations. Crop-eradication measures include extensive aerial reconnaissance to identify illicit fields and the use of various methods, including chemical spraying, to eliminate them.[12]

A vital complement to crop eradication is crop substitution. Officials of the DEA, the State Department, the Department of Agriculture, and the Agency for International Development work with local leaders to persuade growers to abandon drug crops for more acceptable alternatives. A prolific number of substitutes have been suggested. U.S. operatives urge Colombian, Bolivian, and Peruvian peasants to grow bananas, coffee, and citrus fruit instead of coca (the source of cocaine) and marijuana. Similarly, they endeavor to persuade Thai and Burmese growers to substitute rice, potatoes, beans, and strawberries for opium poppies.[13]

The interdiction of drug transportation routes has acquired a priority nearly as great as crop eradication and substitution. President Reagan's establishment of special task forces to undercut narcotics imports in specified geographic areas has served as a model he would like other countries to follow. The first such task force, under the direction of Vice President George Bush, was directed at drug trafficking in southern Florida--the most notorious entrepot for marijuana and cocaine. U.S. officials also encourage and assist such nations as Turkey, Italy, Jamaica, and the Bahamas--known to be vital transfer points for narcotics commerce--to strengthen their search procedures at shipping centers, airports, and other critical locations.[14]

Another essential element of U.S. international narcotics policy is the training and equipping of indigenous law-enforcement agencies, often from the ground up. The U.S. government has devoted considerable time, money, and effort during the past four years to "teaching the basics": surveillance and infiltration techniques, raid and arrest procedures, and the use of chemical defoliants. Moreover, since foreign agencies often lack the equipment needed to pursue drug wars, especially vehicles and light aircraft, the United States has frequently supplied it.[15]

Implementing the Reagan administration's international narcotics program has been expensive. The State Department's Bureau of International Narcotics Matters spent more than \$41 million in fiscal year 1984 and requested more than \$50 million for FY 1985.[16] The U.S. government is providing bilateral assistance to some 18 countries whose resources or expertise have been deemed "insufficient." According to Secretary Shultz, the annual cost of America's global narcotics-control programs now exceeds \$100 million--a figure that is likely to rise substantially in the coming years.[17]

An Array of Difficulties

America's international anti-narcotics campaign has confronted numerous problems. Despite considerable propaganda to the contrary, U.S. officials encounter indifference and sometimes outright opposition from foreign leaders. Even worse, evidence demonstrates that high-level foreign officials are themselves often involved in narcotics trafficking or at least countenance it. This official corruption, combined with an increasing willingness on the part of narcotics czars to employ violence to defend their operations, has thrown Washington's anti-drug offensive into disarray.

U.S. leaders concede that they have struggled to overcome a pervasive assumption on the part of Third World governments that narcotics trafficking is an "American problem." Foreign officials have responded to U.S. anti-drug programs with apathy and resentment. Bolivian undersecretary of the interior Gustavo Sanchez epitomized the latter attitude when he asserted that he and his countrymen were putting their lives in danger "to prevent drugs from entering the U.S." A Panamanian official was even more caustic. "The U.S. is to blame for most of this mess," he fumed. "If there weren't the frightening demand in the States, we wouldn't even have to worry about trying to eliminate the supply." [18]

Several reasons account for this dissatisfaction. Until recently, most drug-producing nations did not have serious internal drug-abuse problems; consequently, they saw the U.S. sense of urgency as either overwrought or self-serving. Third World leaders concluded that they were being asked to assume an onerous law-enforcement burden merely to alleviate an American problem. To overcome this attitude, Washington resorted to a combination of economic inducements and threatened sanctions.

Strengthening the perception of narcotics abuse as merely an American problem is a significant cultural difference: many, although assuredly not all, Asian and Latin American societies exhibit a more permissive attitude toward moderate drug use. Opium has long enjoyed a quasi-legitimate status in Southeast Asia, for example. Similarly, the Andean societies of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia employ raw coca and the coca plant itself for a variety of accepted uses. Rural Jamaicans often drink tea brewed from marijuana for medicinal purposes. [19] This cultural difference accounts for much of the apathy of other governments toward U.S. drug-eradication and interdiction programs.

Narcotics traffickers, however, are anything but apathetic. In nation after nation, they have responded with violence when U.S. and indigenous anti-drug forces have attempted to disrupt their lucrative enterprises. The February 1985 abduction and murder of DEA agent Enrique Camarena in Mexico is only the most recent in a series of bloody episodes. Since the spring of 1984, drug czars or their allies have assassinated Colombian justice minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, bombed the U.S. embassy in Bogota, plotted the assassination of the U.S. ambassador to Bolivia, and killed 19 members of a U.S.-sponsored coca-eradication project in Peru. [20] Narcotics czars have used a portion of their vast revenues to create and equip private armies, particularly in Colombia and Burma. Washington's crusade against drug trafficking is fast taking on the characteristics of full-scale combat, and the opposition is efficient and well armed.

Equally disconcerting to the U.S. government is the mounting evidence of official collusion in the drug trade. Recently, the general secretary of the Panamanian National Defense Forces was arrested and charged with allowing South American traffickers to transport drug-processing chemicals through Panamanian territory in exchange for a \$2 million bribe. The chief minister and two aides of the tiny Caribbean nation of Turks and Caicos were convicted of attempting to arrange a major drug deal in the United States. A Royal Commission report portrayed the government of the Bahamas as riddled with drug-related corruption; three ministers in the cabinet of Prime Minister Lynden O. Pindling resigned and two others were dismissed. Some critics contended that Pindling should have resigned as well, given the amount of circumstantial evidence implicating him in the affair. Mexico arrested or discharged dozens of police officials in the aftermath of the Camarena murder. [21]

During the years 1980-82 an even more blatant state of official corruption existed in Bolivia. In what became known as the Cocaine Coup, General Luis Garza Meza seized power and proceeded to release imprisoned drug dealers, destroy incriminating police records, and terminate all cooperation with the United States on the narcotics front. Known drug traffickers played influential roles in his government throughout the period he held power. Nor was this episode merely an aberration in Bolivian politics. Narcotics elements apparently featured prominently also in an abortive 1984 coup against President Hernan Siles Zauzo. [22]

Such episodes seriously impede the U.S.-directed war against international narcotics. American officials worry about the effect of leaked information on the safety of field agents, and they wonder whether supposed administrative allies are not in fact members of a narcotics fifth column. This apprehension scarcely promotes trust between Washington and the governments of drug-producing nations.

Narcotics and the Cold War

Although U.S. spokesmen acknowledge that mid-level and occasionally even high-level government corruption exists in several friendly countries, the Reagan administration reserves its most serious accusations for Marxist governments. State Department officials claim that extensive financial and logistical ties exist between an international terrorist network and drug traffickers. Bulgaria, Cuba, and, most recently, Nicaragua are cited as nations that engage in the narcotics trade as an instrument of foreign policy. For example, James Michel, deputy assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, testified before a Senate subcommittee that narcotics trafficking "has apparently been sanctioned by Cuba as a means to finance subversion in Latin America." Secretary of State Shultz reiterated this accusation, adding Nicaragua to the indictment.[23]

Evidence of a link between terrorists and narcotics is fairly extensive for the past several years.[24] As in the case of domestic organized crime, terrorist groups have found narcotics trafficking to be a lucrative source of revenue. The governments of Bulgaria and other countries that routinely act as clearinghouses for terrorist enterprises apparently also facilitate international drug commerce. What is less certain is whether they are merely exploiting a profitable product or are involved in drug trafficking for more ominous political reasons. Reagan administration spokesmen and congressional conservatives insist upon the latter, claiming that communist governments are using narcotics as a weapon to destabilize the democratic West.[25] Evidence against the governments of Cuba and Nicaragua, the most prominent targets of Washington's suspicions, is circumstantial, but, in the opinion of U.S. officials, persuasive.

Intelligence reports suggest that the Castro regime gives South American drug traffickers safe passage through Cuban waters and air space in exchange for substantial financial levies. At least one defector from Cuba's intelligence service has verified the substance of that accusation.[26] Supposedly, Havana uses the money derived from this "transit tax" to fund guerrilla activities in Central America and elsewhere throughout the Western Hemisphere.

At the center of the Reagan administration's thesis is the 1982 case of alleged Colombian drug czar Jaime Guillot Lara. In the course of the investigation, evidence emerged that Cuba's ambassador to Colombia offered his government's assistance in smuggling drugs into the United States. Subsequently, Cuban waters were provided as a safe haven for the transfer of narcotics to boats bound for Florida. Cuban military authorities did not interfere with this activity; in fact, they protected it and extracted hundreds of thousands of dollars in hard currency for their trouble. In exchange for his cooperation, Guillot Lara supposedly channeled weapons to Marxist M-19 guerrillas operating in Colombia. A federal grand jury in Miami found the evidence sufficiently convincing to indict four high-level members of the Cuban Communist party, as well as Guillot Lara.[27]

The case against the government of Nicaragua is more sketchy. Although one defector, former diplomat Antonio Farach, told a Senate committee that several members of the Sandinista regime were involved in the international drug trade as a means of undermining American youth, his testimony was entirely hearsay. More damaging, but still hardly definitive, evidence was a June 1984 photograph obtained from U.S. intelligence sources purporting to show Frederico Vaughn, an aide to Nicaragua's interior minister Tomas Borge, and a group of Nicaraguan soldiers helping an alleged Colombian drug trafficker load cocaine onto a plane at a military airport outside Managua.[28]

Congressional skeptics downplay the significance of such proof," contending that it demonstrates at most only the same drug-related corruption found in many noncommunist Third World states. When in testimony before a House subcommittee, Secretary of State Shultz cited only Cuba and Nicaragua as "problem countries" with regard to narcotics trafficking, he provoked an angry response from New York Democratic congressman Ted Weiss. "You gratuitously drag in by the heel Cuba and Nicaragua to a situation where you know that whatever role they are playing . . . is minuscule compared to the role played in the field of narcotics by countries who are allies of the United States," Weiss fumed. He went on to accuse Shultz of engaging in "McCarthyism"--a barb that brought an equally heated response from the secretary.[29]

Weiss's aspersion may have been unfair, but his point-- that the administration has exhibited a double standard--is valid. The president and his supporters castigate Cuba and Nicaragua for using narcotics as an instrument of policy. Yet the evidence cited does not demonstrate government involvement at any level higher than that in the Bahamas, Mexico, Bolivia, and other noncommunist countries. It is one thing to show that Cuban and Nicaraguan officials participate in the drug trade; it is quite another to assert, as does Sen. Paula Hawkins, that "the proof is undeniable: the Castro government is financing terrorism by crippling America's children through narcotics trafficking." [30]

The Reagan administration's attempt to equate international narcotics trafficking with the cold war is either simplistic or disingenuous. The epithet of "McCarthyism" may have been unjust when applied to Secretary Shultz, but it is indeed an appropriate characterization of the views of less restrained administration spokesmen. Consider, for example, the suggestion Attorney General Edwin Meese reportedly made to enlist the press in publicizing the names of Americans apprehended for even casual drug use: "Connect the occasional user," Meese urged, to "hostile governments who support this trade." [31] This odious form of McCarthyism has no legitimate place in a policy debate.

The Failure of U.S. Narcotics Policy

Resorting to cold war rhetoric to justify the U.S. campaign against international narcotics apparently reflects a degree of desperation. Administration officials sense they are losing the struggle against drugs on both the domestic and the foreign battlefields. Mounting evidence supports this pessimistic conclusion.

Like their counterparts involved in the domestic war on drugs, U.S. officials dedicated to halting the international drug flow refuse to acknowledge adverse data. Instead, they emphasize and seek to generate maximum publicity for successes, even when they are isolated or insignificant. For example, Jon R. Thomas, assistant secretary of state for international narcotics matters, boasted that Colombia had used the herbicide glyphosate to destroy more than 5,000 acres of marijuana crops and had destroyed more than 50 cocaine laboratories, while Peru had eradicated some 4,900 acres of coca bushes. These statistics are fairly impressive viewed in isolation, but Thomas conveniently failed to mention that they affect no more than a minute percentage of global marijuana and cocaine supplies. [32]

The DEA and local vice squads use this same tactic with unfortunate frequency. For example, following major marijuana busts, agents routinely contact every news reporter in the region. At well-arranged press conferences, proud officials announce the arrest of several traffickers and display the confiscated contraband--three or four tons of the illicit weed, for example--with solemn assurances that this achievement will have a "significant impact" on the supply of drugs in the community. Rarely does an astute reporter point out that the amount confiscated represents far less than 1 percent of the nation's estimated annual marijuana consumption, or that even the most optimistic officials project only a few raids of that magnitude throughout the United States in a given year. America's international drug fighters use the same superficial strategy-- stressing occasional achievements while ignoring the underlying reality that the global narcotics supply remains essentially unaffected.

Drug/Geographic Area	1984 (metric tons)	1983 (metric tons)
Opium		
Afghanistan	140-180	400-575
Iran	400-600	400-600
Pakistan	40-50	45-60
Burma	550-650	500-600
Laos	30	35
Thailand	42	35
Mexico	21	17

Total	1,388-1,568	1,532-1,922
Coca leaf (illicit)		
Bolivia	49,200	25,000-40,000
Peru	60,000	30,000-60,000
Ecuador	895	--
Colombia	11,680	11,215
Total	121,775	66,215-111,215
Hashish		
Afghanistan	200-400	250
Lebanon	720	700
Morocco	60-225	60
Pakistan	200	220
Total	1,180-1,545	1,230
Marijuana		
Colombia	7,500-9,000	11,200-13,500
Mexico	5,850	4,975
Jamaica	1,627-2,977	2,460
Belize	1,053	590
Total	16,030-18,880	19,225-21,525

Source: Department of State, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report Summary, February 1, 1985.

Washington's zealous international campaign has accomplished little except to disperse narcotics trafficking across a larger geographic area. One observer has compared the exercise to an attempt to control a bubble of mercury: "Press it, and it squirts off in all directions."^[33] It is an apt description. Intense U.S. pressure on Colombia to stamp out cocaine production has produced an upsurge in drug-related activities in neighboring Ecuador, Venezuela, and Brazil. Similarly, Pakistan's willingness to crack down on heroin trafficking has suddenly made India--previously an insignificant factor in the trade--a major transfer point.^[34] The State Department's own data confirm that such geographic dispersal has had little impact on the overall availability of narcotics. The department's most recent International Narcotics Control Strategy Report Summary, as reflected in the production estimates presented here in Table 1, underscores this point.

Taking the mean average figures for each year, opium production declined by 14 percent from 1983 to 1984, owing almost exclusively to a decline in poppy cultivation in war-ravaged Afghanistan. Marijuana production was down by a similarly modest amount. Conversely, the supply of hashish increased nearly 11 percent and coca leaf production soared some 37 percent. These figures are depressing, even if one adopts the charitable view that the State Department resisted the usual bureaucratic temptation to manipulate estimates so as to place its efforts in the most favorable light--a naive assumption. Only an incurable optimist could find comfort here. The war on international drug trafficking is being lost, not won.

At times the failure of the U.S. campaign takes on a tragicomic aspect, characterized as it has been by petty bureaucratic squabbling involving the State Department, the DEA, and the CIA. In various Latin American countries, for example, friction exists between DEA agents, who favor placing maximum pressure on indigenous governments, and representatives of the State Department, who see narcotics trafficking as only one piece in a larger foreign policy mosaic. The most notorious example of interagency squabbling has occurred between the CIA and DEA in the so-called Golden Triangle, which is the center of opium cultivation in Thailand and Burma. Since 1981 the CIA has worked closely with the Thai military in directing clandestine anti-narcotics operations along the Burmese border. Communication between the two U.S. agencies is so poor that on one occasion CIA and DEA operatives reportedly

pursued competing schemes to trap the same drug trafficker. In another incident, a DEA undercover agent nearly became the victim of a CIA-orchestrated ambush of a drug transaction in a Thai border village.[35]

The State Department's performance in persuading peasants in various drug-producing societies to cultivate other, "legitimate" crops has been scarcely more impressive. Again, Thailand became the scene of the most spectacular fiasco. A State Department visionary apparently concluded (on what basis is unknown) that strawberry cultivation would constitute an excellent replacement for the growing of opium poppies. That dream died the following year amid fields of rotting berries for which no market existed. Not to be discouraged, the State Department is now attempting to convince Thai peasants to grow potatoes.[36] As there is little evidence of a global potato shortage, the results of that experiment would also seem less than promising. One can readily envision how peasants who have been twice deceived will regard the United States.

Another tactic that undermines long-term U.S. foreign policy interests is the crude application of pressure on recalcitrant governments. A recent example occurred over the kidnapping and murder of DEA agent Enrique Camarena in Guadalajara. Infuriated by the Mexican police's perfunctory and dilatory reaction to Camarena's abduction, the U.S. government decided to pressure the government of President Miguel de la Madrid into taking stronger action. In addition to issuing public accusations (not entirely unfounded) that the Mexican federal police were guilty of widespread corruption and even collusion-with drug traffickers, DEA officials were instrumental in the Reagan administration's decision to have U.S. Customs agents conduct thorough searches of all vehicles entering the United States from Mexico.

Technically, both nations may exercise this power of search, but normally inspections are brief or even nonexistent. Given the amount of traffic crossing the U.S.-Mexican border each day, comprehensive inspections would create monumental traffic snarls--precisely the outcome in February 1985 when the U.S. government adopted a detailed search policy following the Camarena kidnapping.[37] American tourists were less than thrilled at the prospect of hours-long traffic jams upon returning from sojourns in Mexico, and not surprisingly the volume of tourism dropped precipitously. Moreover, even routine commerce between cities on opposite sides of the border was disrupted, to the annoyance of businessmen in both countries. Even under the best of conditions, Mexico was ill-equipped to endure this coercion. Following nearly three years of economic stagnation, declining oil exports, a mounting foreign debt, and a plummeting peso, the de la Madrid government had no choice but to capitulate immediately. The hard currency brought in by tourist trade and border commerce was too vital.

In the short run, U.S. intimidation appeared to achieve the desired result. Mexican officials implemented a highly visible crackdown on drug-related police corruption, apprehended reputed drug czar Rafael Caro Quintero--the principal suspect in Camarena's abduction and murder--and opened high-level talks with the U.S. government on expanding joint anti-narcotics efforts. Declarations from these talks stressed the sharing of intelligence and manpower, the strengthening of programs for drug-crop eradication, and even possible joint prosecutions. One must question, however, the price at which this short-term success was achieved. The Mexicans are renowned for resenting "Yankee arrogance" and imperialist pretensions on the part of their powerful northern neighbor. Washington will likely pay the price for its bullying during the coming years in a variety of international arenas on issues in which Mexican support may be desired but will not be forthcoming.

Such pessimism is not theoretical. Once before, the United States coerced Mexico into adopting U.S.-sponsored narcoticseradication programs, during the first year of the Nixon administration. The episode is recounted candidly by Watergate conspirator G. Gordon Liddy, then serving as a special assistant to the secretary of the treasury. The Presidential Task Force Relating to Narcotics, Marijuana and Dangerous Drugs, on which Liddy served, wanted to obtain Mexico's consent for U.S.- directed aerial reconnaissance of Mexican drug fields and for "chemical crop destruction" efforts. At a bilateral meeting in June 1969, the "request" was presented to Mexican officials. Liddy describes Mexico's resistance in his own inimitable style: "When the United States and Mexico met . . . the Mexicans, using diplomatic language of course, told us to go piss up a rope. The Nixon Administration didn't believe in the United States' taking crap from any foreign government. Its reply was Operation Intercept." [39] Operation Intercept was merely an earlier version of the "maximum application of the right to search" tactic employed by the U.S. government following the Camarena abduction. The results, according to Liddy, were "as intended: chaos.

Liddy is also quite candid about the motives for Operation Intercept, although he stresses that because of "diplomatic reasons" its "true purpose" was not revealed at the time. According to Liddy, "Operation Intercept, with its massive economic and social disruption, could be sustained far longer by the United States than by Mexico. It was an exercise in international extortion, pure and simple and effective, designed to bend Mexico to our will. We figured Mexico could hold out for a month; in fact they caved in after about two weeks and we got what we wanted." [40] Liddy's description is considerably more honest than the transparent fabrications employed by the Reagan administration to explain its own application of the extended-search tactic.

In the short run, Operation Intercept did attain the desired concessions. Mexican leaders swallowed their pride and acquiesced in the notorious Paraquat marijuana-eradication program. But again, one must speculate about the long-term repercussions of such intimidation. Mexican leaders complained heatedly about Operation Intercept at the time, and throughout the 1970s relations between Mexico and the United States remained cool at best. [41] It would be too much to suggest that Operation Intercept was entirely responsible for that situation, but it would be naive to assume that residual anger was not a contributing factor. We should not be surprised to discover a similar deterioration in relations following the Camarena episode.

Mexico has been the most frequent victim of Washington's coercive tactics in its war against narcotics, but it has not been the only one. Beginning with Lyndon Johnson's administration, the United States has exerted tremendous pressure on a succession of Turkish governments to eradicate opium poppy cultivation. Further, under the provisions of the 1974 Trade Act, Congress prohibited making any nation the beneficiary of U.S. trade preferences if that country did not take "adequate" steps to cooperate with the United States in anti-drug programs. In recent years, congressional militants have threatened to terminate aid and invoke trade sanctions against several intransigent nations, especially Bolivia. The Reagan administration has brought a wide range of diplomatic and economic pressures to bear on Bolivia, Colombia, the Bahamas, Jamaica, Burma, and other nations whose dedication to the crusade against narcotics has been deemed insufficient. Widespread resentment against such coercion is reported among the affected governments and populations, with ominous implications for other U.S. foreign policy objectives. [42]

Even when Third World governments do cooperate with the United States, the consequences may prove hardly less disastrous for broader U.S. objectives. It is a supreme irony of America's international narcotics policy that its implementation erodes popular support for "friendly" regimes that Washington otherwise seeks to protect from leftist insurgencies. It is no exaggeration to say that the U.S. international anti-drug crusade is creating a more favorable environment for radical leftist revolutions in several Asian and Latin American nations.

Recent events in Peru are a case in point. Peasants in isolated rural regions have grown the coca plant for generations--long before cocaine use became a major problem in the United States. Peruvian and other Andean peoples brew the leaves for tea and use the plant in a variety of other ways, all of which are considered perfectly legitimate by those peoples. In recent years, the normally impoverished peasants have made the happy discovery that their crop enjoys great demand in the faraway markets of North America and Europe. Moreover, the price that enterprising middlemen are willing to pay them greatly exceeds the possible income from competing crops. Naturally, the peasants wish to exploit the situation.

The fledgling democratic government of Peru, under intense pressure from the United States, has embarked on a course to disrupt the growing of coca. Peruvian agents and their U.S. counterparts have implemented an \$18 million, five-year project under which Peruvian peasants are urged to refrain from cultivating coca and to use their land instead for growing bananas, coffee, and citrus fruit. Since none of these substitutes commands a price even remotely comparable to the price coca currently enjoys, few growers are accepting the invitation. Where persuasion fails, U.S.-trained and -equipped paramilitary forces sweep through rural areas burning coca crops. This tactic is a superb recipe for fomenting hostility toward the Peruvian government, a realization not lost on the Maoist Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) guerrillas, who are active in the most prominent coca-growing regions.

Clyde D. Taylor, deputy assistant secretary for international narcotics matters, outlined some of the adverse consequences of the U.S.-backed Peruvian anti-coca policy in testimony before a Senate subcommittee. Taylor conceded that there was "substantial reason" to believe that coca growers had become "prime targets" for guerrilla recruitment. Furthermore,

Many see coca eradication efforts as a threat to their survival. When [Shining Path] recruiters announce that they have come to protect the livelihood of growers against government interference, they find some ready listeners. Paradoxically, the growing success of U.S.-funded eradication efforts may be making the remaining growers more desperate and more susceptible to the blandishments of terrorist recruiters.[43]

The Shining Path already poses a worrisome danger to the fragile democracy in Peru. U.S.-sponsored anti-drug sweeps may soon help transform the guerrillas into a lethal threat.

A less urgent but essentially similar situation exists in neighboring Bolivia. Many Bolivians rely on coca to achieve bare subsistence in a chaotic economy that in 1984 suffered an inflation rate approaching 3,000 percent. Indeed, the evidence suggests that the estimated \$2 billion in annual (albeit unofficial) foreign-exchange earnings brought in from coca production and sales may be the principal resource keeping the Bolivian economy afloat. Yet Washington pressured the democratic government of President Hernan Siles Zauzo to court economic and political suicide by eliminating his nation's most profitable export crop and has done the same with his successor.[44]

The same ill-advised policy governs our diplomacy toward other drug-producing nations. In Colombia, the drug-crop issue has helped resurrect once-moribund Marxist insurgencies. Half a world away, in Burma, the U.S. anti-drug crusade is achieving an equally dubious result. One of the more prominent repercussions of Washington's campaign to eradicate the cultivation of opium poppies in Burma has been to expand the territory controlled by the Burmese Communist party. As in Peru, besieged growers are flocking to the one force that seems to offer them protection.[45] If a Soviet agent in the U.S. government were directing America's international anti-narcotics program, the results would be scarcely less distressing.

Some Painful but Necessary Lessons

Washington's assault on the international drug supply replicates virtually all the failures of the domestic anti-narcotics crusade while creating several additional problems. Domestic programs designed to suppress drug commerce channel much of it into the hands of criminal elements rather than honest business entrepreneurs. So, too, the overseas effort has enriched those narcotics czars who are willing to use violence to protect their enterprises. Intensive domestic crackdowns in specific areas, such as the much-touted federal effort in southern Florida, merely divert drug imports to neighboring states.[46] In the same way, on the international front narcotics traffickers relocate their operations to nearby nations. For all the self-serving publicity, the series of expensive "wars" on drugs has failed to make a serious impact on illicit drug consumption in the United States. The global crusade is an equally apparent failure, despite the Reagan administration's expenditure of several hundred million dollars.

In addition, the international campaign of the U.S. government to eliminate illicit drugs is rapidly draining any reservoir of goodwill that may exist for the United States in the Third World. By encouraging friendly regimes to destroy profitable crops grown by heretofore impoverished peasants, Washington inadvertently undermines popular support for those often-fragile governments, and leftist guerrillas are quick to seize the opportunity. The Reagan administration antagonizes other foreign governments by using a crude carrot-and-stick approach to secure their cooperation in the global war on drugs, even though they might not share the same sense of urgency. Just as Third World peoples resist being drawn into cold war struggles between the Soviet Union and the United States, they bitterly resent being dragooned into campaigns designed to solve what they see as essentially an American domestic problem. Their resentment is justified.

U.S. policymakers must face the reality that American drug abuse is primarily an internal matter and that the solution (if any) can be found only within the borders of the United States. It is a basic economic principle that as long as demand for a product exists, suppliers will attempt to satisfy that demand; only the price will vary. Because the domestic demand for marijuana, cocaine, and other illicit drugs remains high, it is inevitable that both domestic and foreign producers will continue to operate. This is particularly true in view of the fact that anti-drug laws create a risk factor that artificially inflates the retail price of narcotics. One may well argue that the most effective way to decrease drug imports would be to legalize consumption. The resulting lower prices would squeeze profit margins, thereby discouraging foreign traffickers. This alternative at least merits consideration, given that the existing approach is clearly not working.

The Reagan administration's campaign to interdict the supply of drugs is little more than a collective emotional catharsis, a desperate attempt to compensate for previous and current failures to stem domestic demand. It is an inherently futile gesture. Even in the unlikely event that Washington does succeed in significantly reducing the global narcotics supply, the domestic drug problem would not thereby be alleviated. U.S. officials acknowledge that crops of marijuana, opium poppies, and coca leaves exceed current demand by a considerable margin.[47] Thus, even successful eradication efforts would merely reduce an existing surplus. At most, such a "victory" might temporarily increase the price of drugs to the consumer, but it would achieve no lasting impact on consumption.

Intelligent and concerned Americans differ on how to deal with the matter of drug use in the United States. Some individuals insist that the solution lies in passing more stringent laws and vigorously enforcing existing statutes. Their opponents note that the historical record lends scant support to that thesis. Efforts to eradicate alcohol through prohibition failed, and similar campaigns against marijuana, cocaine, and other drugs have been equally unsuccessful. Indeed, advocates of legalization contend it is a curious logic that assumes that proclaiming drugs illegal--thereby converting millions of users into "criminals"--somehow improves the situation. Certain problems cannot be solved through the criminal justice system, and drug use appears to be one of them.

One need not make a dogmatic assertion that the American people can or should do nothing about drug consumption. Voluntary programs to educate existing or potential users on the hazards of chemical dependency are desirable and should be increased. Equally beneficial would be efforts to alleviate the boredom of, and lack of productive opportunities available to, teenagers and certain other groups--factors that promote drug experimentation. At the same time, Americans need to overcome the simplistic and panicky assumption that all drug use, no matter how moderate, represents a lethal threat to the "moral fabric" of society. It is precisely this kind of overreaction that has led to our current domestic and international crusades against narcotics.

Above all, both the people and the government of the United States must recognize that drug use in this country is a domestic concern. Attempting to find in other nations the solution to our problem is futile and counterproductive: it merely provokes resentment on the part of foreign populations, antagonizes or undermines otherwise friendly governments, and seriously complicates--and compromises--U.S. foreign policy. Washington's international anti-drug campaign is an ill-conceived, irredeemable failure that should be abolished as soon as possible.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States Ronald Reagan, 1981 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 382), p. 842.

[2] "International Narcotics Control," Department of State Bulletin (October 1984): 39; Suzanna McBee, "Flood of Drugs--A Losing Battle," U.S. News & World Report, March 25, 1985, pp. 56-57; Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism, Impact of the South Florida Task Force on Drug Interdiction in the Gulf Coast Area, Hearing, 98th Cong., 1st sess., October 28, 1983, p. 6.

[3] Department of State, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report Summary, February 1, 1985, pp. 2-3.

[4] Useful discussions of the earlier phases of multilateral efforts to control narcotics and the U.S. role in those efforts include the following three papers in Luiz R. S. Simmons and Abdul A. Said, eds., *Drugs, Politics and Diplomacy: The International Connection* (London: Sage Publications, 1974): Harvey R. Wellman, "American Diplomacy and the International Narcotics Traffic"; Allan S. Nanes, "United Nations Activities in International Drug Control"; and Robert W. Gregg, "The International System for Narcotic Drugs."

[5] George Shultz, "The Campaign Against Drugs: The International Dimension," Department of State Bulletin (November 1984): 29.

[6] Joseph H. Linnemann, "International Narcotics Control Strategy," Department of State Bulletin (February 1982): 46. More recent estimates place the number of cocaine users in the United States at 5-10 million; see "The Evil Empire," Newsweek, February 25, 1985, p. 23.

[7] See, for example, the comments of Sen. Jeremiah Denton in Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism, DEA Oversight and Budget Authorization, Hearing, 98th Cong., 2d sess., March 9, 1984, p. 6.

[8] Scathing critiques of harsh drug laws include Rufus King, *The Drug Hang-up: America's Fifty Year Folly* (Springfield, Ill.: Thomas, 1972); and Thomas Szasz, *Ceremonial Chemistry: The Ritual Persecution of Drugs, Addicts and Pushers* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Learning Publications, 1985.) William F. Buckley, Jr., represents one refreshing exception to conservative rigidity on the drug issue; see his syndicated article "Legalize Dope," *Washington Post*, April 1, 1985.

[9] Shultz, p. 29.

[10] Quoted in McBee, p. 57.

[11] Shultz, p. 32.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 32; International Narcotics Control Strategy Report Summary, p. 16.

[13] "Fighting the Cocaine Wars," *Time*, February 25, 1985, p. 31; Elaine Shannon, "The Asian Connection," *Newsweek*, June 25, 1984, pp. 62-63; and Dominick L. Di Carlo, "U.S. International Narcotics Policy in Southeast Asia," *Department of State Bulletin* (February 1983): 49.

[14] International Narcotics Control Strategy Report Summary, pp. 15-16; "International Narcotics Control," p. 39; and "Jamaica's Thankless War on Marijuana," *Newsweek*, May 20, 1985, p. 21.

[15] Shannon, p. 63; International Narcotics Control Strategy Report Summary, p. 9.

[16] "International Narcotics Control," p. 39; "FY 1986 Assistance Requests for Narcotics Control," *Department of State Bulletin* (June 1985): 62-65.

[17] Shultz, p. 30. The State Department requested a 15 percent funding increase for its anti-narcotics efforts in the FY 1986 budget. See International Narcotics Control Strategy Report Summary, p. 24; and "FY 1986 Assistance Requests for Narcotics Control," p. 63.

[18] Quoted in "Fighting the Cocaine Wars," p. 35.

[19] *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31; "Jamaica's Thankless War on Marijuana," p. 21. Indicative of this permissive attitude prior to the Reagan administration's global crusade was the fact that several Third World countries imposed no legal penalties for possession and/or cultivation of various drugs. For example, marijuana cultivation was legal in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and other nations. Bolivia, Peru, Uruguay, and Paraguay permitted the possession of coca leaf and its derivatives, and Bolivia and seven other countries tolerated cultivation as well. Opium poppy cultivation was legal in several nations, most notably Morocco and Pakistan. See Department of State, *The Global Legal Framework for Narcotics and Prohibitive Substances*, June 29, 1979, pp. 7-8, 10-13.

[20] "The Evil Empire," pp. 14, 21; "Fighting the Cocaine Wars," pp. 27-28.

[21] "Fighting the Cocaine Wars," pp. 30, 33; McBee, pp. 54-55; "The Bahamas--Pot Shots," *Time*, February 13, 1984, p. 33; and Susanne Bilello, "Mexico Cracks Down on Police Graft," *Dallas -Morning News*, April 21, 1985.

[22] Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, Subcommittee on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, *Drugs and Terrorism*, 1984, Hearing, 98th Cong., 2d sess., August 2, 1984, p. 10; "Fighting the Cocaine Wars," p. 31; and David Kline, "Cocaine Creates Complex Problem in Bolivia," *Dallas Morning News*, July 2, 1984.

[23] James H. Michel, "Cuban Involvement in International Narcotics Trafficking," *Department of State Bulletin* (August 1983): 86.

[24] See, for example, Michael Ledeen, "Drugs, Guns, and Terrorists: K.G.B. Connections," *New Republic*, February

28, 1983, pp. 9-10; Judith Harris, "Fraud International: The New Heroin-and-Guns Industry," *New Republic*, December 10, 1984, pp. 16-18; and *Drugs and Terrorism*, 1984, Hearing, *passim*.

[25] Michel, p. 86; Shultz, pp. 31-32; Joel Brinkley, "Official Ties Cuba to Drug Traffic in U.S., Calling Evidence Clear," *New York Times*, May 2, 1983; "Bush Assails Cuba Role in Drug Traffic," *Washington Post*, May 10, 1983; "Reagan Officials Link Cubans, Sandinistas to Drug Trade," *Miami Herald*, August 3, 1984; and *Drugs and Terrorism*, 1984, Hearing, especially the testimony of Acting Assistant Secretary of State Clyde Taylor and U.S. Customs Service Commissioner William Von Raab, pp. 8-12, 24-25, 41-45.

[26] Cuban American National Foundation, *Castro and the Narcotics Connection* (1983), pp. 33-37.

[27] *Drugs and Terrorism*, 1984, Hearing, pp. 9, 11, 17-18, 42-43; Michel, p. 96.

[28] *Drugs and Terrorism*, 1984 Hearing, pp. 77-85; "Hawkins Displays Evidence," *Miami Herald*, August 8, 1984. For a critique of the administration's case against the Sandinista government, see Joel Millman, "False Connection," *Nation*, September 22, 1984, pp. 228-29.

[29] "Shultz' Tactics on Nicaragua Draw Comparisons to McCarthy," *Dallas Morning News*, February 28, 1985. Sen. Christopher Dodd made less inflammatory but essentially similar accusations regarding the tendency of the administration and its congressional allies to single out Cuba and Nicaragua on narcotics matters; see Joel Brinkley, "Panel Hears Details Linking Managua and Drugs," *New York Times*, April 20, 1985. [30] *Castro and the Narcotics Connection*, p. 3.

[31] William J. Choyke, "Media Not Taking to Plan to Embarrass Drug Users," *Dallas Morning News*, May 5, 1985.

[32] Jon R. Thomas, "International Campaign Against Drug Trafficking," *Department of State Bulletin* (January 1985): 50-53. The same tactic can be found in the State Department's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report Summary*; see especially pp. 6, 8, 10. Sen. Paula Hawkins boasted that the South Florida Task Force confiscated nearly 3 million pounds of marijuana during a 16-month time span; see *Impact of the South Florida Task Force*, Hearing, p. 5. She failed to mention that this superficially impressive figure represented barely 5 percent of the nation's imported and domestic supply for that same period.

[33] McBee, p. 56.

[34] *Ibid.*; "Now It's India Pushing Drugs into the U.S.," *U.S. News and World Report*, March 11, 1985, p. 47.

[35] Shannon, p. 62.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[37] Ostensibly, the U.S. action was taken to ensure that the abductors did not attempt to smuggle Camarena into the United States--an extremely remote possibility--and to apprehend major drug traffickers. Acting DEA administrator John Lawn even boasted that the dragnet had snared one fugitive his agency had been seeking. "U.S. Antidrug Forces Will Not be Intimidated," *U.S. News & World Report*, March 18, 1985, p. 56.

[38] Peter Katel, "Mexico's War on Drugs Targets Plants Instead of Growers," *Dallas Morning News*, March 3, 1985; "U.S., Mexico Agree to Step Up Anti-Drug Efforts," *Dallas Morning News*, March 23, 1985; and "Mexico: Who Will Police the Police?" *Newsweek*, April 1, 1985, p. 42.

[39] G. Gordon Liddy, *Will: The Autobiography of G. Gordon Lidd* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), p. 134.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 135.

[41] For an account of the Mexican government's complaints, see the chapter on Operation Intercept in Edward J. Epstein, *Agency of Fear: Opiates and Political Power in America* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1977), especially

pp. 83-84.

[42] "Jamaica's Thankless War on Marijuana," p. 21. A top Bolivian general even resigned rather than conduct crop-eradication raids, saying that he was not about to kill campesinos just to please North Americans; see "Fighting the Cocaine Wars," p. 31.

[43] *Drugs and Terrorism*, 1984, Hearing, pp. 47-48. A good, concise account of the Shining Path guerrillas and their activities may be found in Cynthia McClintock, "Why Peasants Rebel: The Case of Peru's Sendero Luminoso," *World Politics* 37, no. 1 (October 1984): 48-84.

[44] "Fighting the Cocaine Wars", pp. 30-31

. [45] Shannon, pp. 62-63.

[46] "The Evil Empire," p. 15; *Impact of the South Florida Task Force*, Hearing, pp. 4, 6, 9. [47] Thomas, p. 51.