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The Drug War Helps Terrorists

By Scott McPherson

The U.S. government has become quite accustomed over the years to orchestrating world events to fit its own agenda. In our name, the government keeps American troops in over half the countries of the globe, openly supports brutal regimes, and uses its intelligence agencies to manipulate the policies of foreign governments. But no matter how hard it tries, the play never seems to unfold as scripted.

Still, it is in the name of the “War on Drugs” that the US truly excels in showing how poorly equipped it is to act as director of international affairs.

Since the 1970s, administration after administration has sought to enlist foreign nations in its jihad against arbitrarily prohibited, but nonetheless popular recreational drugs. The results have often been quite similar to the U.S. experience, with widespread corruption of police, judges, and politicians; gang wars and drive-by shootings; and a general increase in drug use.

Yet America’s “war on drugs” manages to escape the shame of one of its most horrific consequences: the destruction of thousands of lives in this and other countries. For the drug war has led to the enrichment and expansion of vicious terrorist groups around the world, even the one responsible for the horrible attacks on 9/11. Sadly, the government continues to ignore the warning signs and feeds the mouth that bites us all.

Heavily influential for over twenty years, “narco-terrorist” organizations are a conglomeration of leftist rebels, international terrorist rings, arms dealers, and the drug cartels themselves. In *Beyond the War on Drugs: Overcoming a Failed Public Policy*, author Steven Wisotsky pointed out more than a decade ago that “the War on Drugs has seriously undermined the power and stability of the central governments [of Peru and Colombia], delivering effectual control of large regions...to...alliances of drug traffickers and guerrilla armies.” In short, to terrorists.

How is this possible? Thanks to the massive profits they derive from the illegal drug trade, “narco-terrorists” are able to buy control of anything they need to sustain their business. In the “large regions” where they rule, they serve as the *de facto* government, supplying schools, sports

teams, and security to local peasants. With the support of indigenous farmers, they grow coca and opium with impunity, raising incredible sums of money to finance their terrorist activities and, worse, create the conditions for international cooperation with other terrorist groups, a fact made clear by a recent anti-terrorism report which showed Hezbollah training camps in the “tri-border region” of Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay.

The connection between drugs and terrorism is not exactly the world’s best kept secret. In March, 2002, in a statement before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Technology, Terrorism, and Government, Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona reported that “opium production in Afghanistan [under the Taliban] accounted for 72% of production worldwide” and was used to “shelter Osama Bin Laden and other Al Qaeda terrorists.” He similarly indicated that Bin Laden “provided protection to heroin processing labs, was a part owner in numerous labs, [and] part owner of one load shipped to the U.S.”

Even a casual knowledge of economics is enough to understand that, rather than hurting the drug trade, the drug war is its greatest boon. The popularity of drugs alone is sufficient to drive up price through intense demand. Any effect that interdicting or limiting the supply of a given drug may have will merely be to raise the price it brings on the market even further, meaning larger profits to those who deal in drugs. And in the Latin American and radical Islamic countries where the dealers are typically terrorists, this means more money for terrorism.

Even the Office of National Drug Control Policy inadvertently admitted the effect of its own policies by broadcasting national advertisements telling people who use drugs that they are supporting terrorism. If helping to put money in the pockets of drug dealers is akin to aiding terrorist causes, then by continuing to drive up the price of drugs the U.S. government is the biggest supporter of terrorism in the world.

The “war on drugs” might possibly go down in history as the worst domestic policy blunder in American history. After more than thirty years of fighting, the cost in lives, dollars, the erosion of our social and moral fabric, and the impact on our law enforcement and political institutions may never be fully known. Adding insult to injury, in all the years that our government has been battling to make people stop using drugs, it has been helping to enrich those who wish to fight terrorist wars against innocent people everywhere.

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This article was originally published in March of 2003