

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.

**STICKING WITH THE "DRUG WAR"**  
**A VIABLE AND FEASIBLE COURSE OF ACTION**

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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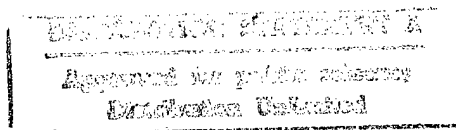


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## Abstract

The National Drug Control Strategy has evolved over the past two decades to the point where a viable and feasible course of action has developed. The resulting strategy is focused primarily on demand reduction within the United States, combined with a secondary international effort to reduce the drug supply by concentrating on interdiction within the drug producing source countries. Recent counterdrug operations within the source countries have shown that interdiction efforts can have an impact on drug trafficking operations and that interruptions in the production and distribution systems in the source countries can lead to significant reductions in future coca leaf supply. Coordinated diplomatic and host country military efforts can further improve supply reduction operations in the source countries. Despite these actions, interdiction operations in the transit zones between the source countries and the United States are still required to hold the drug traffickers at risk throughout their production and distribution system. Continued interdiction operations will serve to assist in establishing an atmosphere within the United States that will support the focus of the overall demand reduction strategy. The drug "war" will be won primarily through demand reduction but "victory" will require a degree of perseverance significantly greater than that demonstrated to date.

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*The expanding scope of global narcotics trafficking has created a situation which today adds another significant dimension to the law enforcement and public health aspects of this international problem and threatens the national security of the United States.*

President Reagan, NSDD 221  
8 April 1986

### ***Introduction***

The United States has been confronting illicit drug use in one form or another for over a hundred years.<sup>1</sup> Drug abuse was declared a threat to National Security during the Reagan Administration and the President announced a "war" on drugs.<sup>2</sup> Since this declaration the national counterdrug strategy has shifted both focus and direction on numerous occasions with one seemingly common result; none of the policies had any decisive impact on the long term level of substance abuse in the United States.<sup>3</sup> This certainly is a discouraging observation. Yet during this period an instrumental transition took place in the overall balance of the counterdrug effort and the approach in which it was waged. Unlike the experience in Vietnam, where the reaction to failure was a continued escalation based on the same inherently flawed strategy, senior leadership in all sectors of government, with considerable domestic pressure, continually reevaluated both strategy and methods used to combat the drug war. This process produced a balanced national strategy, coupled with an operationally feasible plan of action which, given time, can have a decisive impact on the level of substance abuse in the U.S.

*Drug abuse and crime directly affects the lives of millions, not just inner-city residents or particular ethnic minority groups. These issues are at the forefront of the minds of all Americans. We fear the crime and violence that surrounds drug markets. We abhor the effect it has on our lives and on the lives of our children, and we are especially concerned about the increase of drug use by our nation's young people.*

Barry R. McCaffrey  
Capitol Hill Testimony  
14 June 1996

### ***Magnitude of the Problem***

The domestic impact of drug abuse in the U.S. is immense. There are 12.6 million people who use illicit drugs on a monthly basis along with an estimated 2.7 million chronic hardcore abusers. It is estimated that Americans spent \$49 billion on illegal drugs in 1993, purchasing 300 metric tons of cocaine. In 1994 alone there were over 500,000 emergency case in the nation's hospitals which were directly related to drug abuse. In the five year period ending in 1995 there were over 100,000 drug-related deaths in the U.S. Drug abuse leads to crime, with over 1 million arrests each year evaluated as drug related. The estimated annual social cost of drug abuse is \$67 billion.<sup>4</sup>

On the international front, in 1994 over 840 metric tons of cocaine were produced in South America, primarily in Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru.<sup>5</sup> It has been calculated that the drug producers and traffickers in Colombia have accumulated 30 percent of the total national wealth and that drug related profits vary between \$2 and \$5 billion annually.<sup>6</sup> The violence and corruption that the drug industry has brought upon countries immersed in drug production and trafficking has had a destabilizing affect throughout Latin America. The

Sendero Luminoso ("Shining Path") in Peru has allied itself with drug traffickers for financial support, contributing to over \$20 billion in damages and thousands of deaths in that country.<sup>7</sup> The prevalence of drugs in the region is encouraging drug consumption and all Latin American nations are experiencing the social and economic consequences of illicit drugs.<sup>8</sup> Finally, counterdrug efforts have frequently resulted in strained relations between the U.S. and her neighbors to the south.<sup>9</sup> With these domestic and international forces at work it is hard to deny that drug abuse in the U.S. does not present a threat to National Security.

*International narcotics control is a major foreign policy objective, and the international commitment to narcotic control must be expanded. The United States must work with other nations that demonstrate the political will to attack illegal drug productions and trafficking.*

1995 National Drug Control Strategy

### ***National Drug Control Strategy***

The primary goal of the National Drug Control Strategy has remained virtually unchanged since the 1970's, that being to "reduce drug use and its consequences in America."<sup>10</sup> Yet the method of carrying out the nation's counterdrug effort has been the subject of great debate since its early inception during the Reagan Administration. The first formal National Drug Control Strategy, finalized in 1989, placed a strong emphasis on attacking the supply of drugs in the transit zones between the source nations and the U.S. This continued the interdiction focus of counterdrug efforts that had served as the major thrust throughout the 1980's, at the expense of a greater attempt to reduce the American population's demand for drugs. After the supply side strategy was pursued for five years it



became apparent that despite an overall increase in the amount of drugs seized, that illegal drugs were still widely available and that the price of illicit drugs had not been appreciably affected by the interdiction efforts.<sup>11</sup> This assessment, concurrently with the election of a new administration, resulted in a strategy shift from interdiction in the transit zone to increasing enforcement and interdiction programs in the source countries while expanding domestic law enforcement and demand reduction programs in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

The factors that led to the shift in the interdiction effort are important to the understanding of the new national strategy and are evaluated in conjunction with the review of the Department of Defense's (DoD) role in counterdrug operations.<sup>a</sup> Although there are several illicit drug producing and trafficking sources, this review will focus primarily on the Western Hemisphere and the cocaine threat in particular. Counterdrug strategies commonly apply to all illegal drugs and the associated production sources.

### ***The Military Role in Drug Interdiction***

The military's role in the war on drugs became less restrictive in 1981 when the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 was amended by a change to Title 10 of the U. S. Code.<sup>b</sup> The change permitted the U.S. military to provide greater support to law enforcement agencies in

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<sup>a</sup> The whole "supply verse demand" debate is of great value in understanding the lessons learned to date in the drug war but a thorough evaluation is beyond the scope of this report. Smith's {ed.} "Drug Policy in the Americas" and Marshall's "Drug Wars" (see bibliography) provide some tremendous insight into the alternatives. Both were written prior to the Clinton's administrations policy shift and their thoughts and conclusions prove to be foreboding.

<sup>b</sup> The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878 prohibited the military from becoming involved with enforcing civil law. As written it only affected the U.S. Army, however DoD policy and custom applied the legislation to all of the U.S. Military Forces. The Posse Comitatus Act did not apply to the state controlled National Guard, which are covered under Title 32 of the U. S. Code. Warlaw's " Intelligence and the International Narcotics Problem" pp 42-50 (see bibliography) presents a concise description of the Act as amended.

a drug interdiction role overseas.<sup>13</sup> Throughout the 1980's the military flew thousands of aircraft sorties, operated aerostat radars, conducted ground surveillance, and loaned over \$138 million worth of equipment to drug law enforcement agencies.<sup>14</sup> In 1986 the DoD responded to over 95 percent of all assistance requests made by law enforcement agencies.<sup>15</sup> The U.S. military was gaining a significant level of experience in the field of drug interdiction.

Further acts of Congress, specifically the 1988 Comprehensive Anti-Drug Bill and the 1988 and 89 Defense Authorization Acts, required greater military participation in support of drug interdiction. Prior to these legislative acts the military had been involved but not committed, citing that the DoD would "... support the law enforcement agencies as long as it does not have a negative impact on our primary mission."<sup>16</sup> Defense Secretary Carlucci was quoted as saying in June of 1988 that "Our military doesn't want to do it. If they had wanted to be law enforcement people, they would have gone into police work."<sup>17</sup> Despite some apprehension, the U.S. military was committed to its new mission and in September of 1988 Congress authorized \$210 million to the DoD in support of its formal interdiction role.<sup>18</sup>

The DoD became the lead agency for the Detection and Monitoring of maritime and air movement of illegal drugs into the United States. Additionally, the military was charged with integrating counterdrug Command, Control, and Communications (C<sup>3</sup>) as well as the coordination of technical intelligence.<sup>19</sup> Legislation still prohibited active military participation in the actual apprehension of drug traffickers but in its support role the military directly assisted in the interdiction effort of a multitude of law enforcement agencies. DoD assisted drug seizures rose steadily through the late 1980's and early 90's but peaked in 1992,

fell off dramatically in 1993, and by 1994, had fallen to well below 50 percent of the 1992 levels.<sup>20</sup> An Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) supported transit zone study (conducted in 1995) concluded that in fiscal year 1994 smugglers "were not disrupted in 69 percent of the attempts to bring drugs into the United States."<sup>21</sup> The transit zone interdiction strategy seemed to be encountering a significant setback.

What was occurring was a shift in operational patterns utilized by the drug traffickers. The most successful interdiction efforts were against airborne smugglers. As U.S. efforts continued to improve, the traffickers started shifting their smuggling to a maritime based operation. This presented a more difficult challenge since the smuggling took place over a much broader area, covering millions of square miles in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and throughout the Caribbean. Furthermore, the drug traffickers increased their use of Mexico as a smuggling route to the point that it was estimated that as much as 70 percent of all cocaine was entering the U.S. across the southwest border.<sup>22</sup> Detection and monitoring as well as interdiction assets were spread thin and, when coupled with a significant force reduction in 1994 (as a result of general DoD budget cuts), the rate of drug seizures dropped off precipitously.<sup>23</sup>

The evaluation of the decreasing rate of drug interdiction after 1992 fueled the supply versus demand debate. The price and quantity of illegal drugs within the U.S. remained virtually unchanged despite an increase of \$5.5 billion in total federal drug control spending between 1989 and 1993.<sup>24</sup> These factors carried a considerable amount of weight and directly contributed to the shift in the National Drug Strategy.<sup>25</sup> Presidential Decision Directive 14 was also issued. This required the Director of ONDCP to review the

multiplicity of command and control within the international counterdrug organizations. This review resulted in the development of the National Interdiction Command and Control Plan which was approved in April of 1994.<sup>26</sup> Among other initiatives designed to streamline operations, the report directed the formation of three geographically oriented counterdrug Joint Inter-Agency Task Forces (JIATF East, Key West; JIATF West, Alameda; and the U.S. Customs Domestic Air Interdiction Coordination Center (DAICC), March Air Force Base, California).

The military also sought means to improve its effectiveness in counterdrug operations. In August of 1994, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff promulgated formal doctrine to be used as guidance in the conduct of counterdrug operations, JOINT PUB 3-07.4. Additionally, the military continued to evaluate and refine its role and functions in Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW). These efforts, combined with a revised international Drug Control Strategy based on an increased emphasis on interdicting narcotic trafficking in the source countries, laid the foundation for a new counterdrug program.

### ***Counterdrug Campaign Organization***

The drug war is currently being waged in two theaters. The domestic theater is in the U.S., where the focus is on demand reduction through education and government programs in conjunction with supply reduction through the efforts of a multitude of law enforcement agencies. The international theater recognizes the global nature of counterdrug operations and focuses on breaking down foreign drug sources and improving the effectiveness of law

enforcement agencies in stopping the flow of drugs into the U.S.<sup>27</sup> It presents a more "... balanced effort with source countries to build institutions [and] destroy trafficking organizations."<sup>28</sup> The two theaters are linked by the common goal of reducing illicit drug use and its consequences in the U.S.

The strategic level of the counterdrug war rests in the hands of the Executive Branch, primarily through the National Security Council, with broad policy being formulated by the ONDCP. A large number of federal agencies play major and minor roles in the development of strategic objectives, defining national priorities, and determining the allocation of resources.<sup>c</sup> In the international theater, the operational level is coordinated primarily through the JIATFs and the respective Country Teams within the source and trafficking nations. These agencies translate the strategic mission into plans and operations, synchronizing efforts while matching operations with an effective use of resources. The tactical missions are executed by various supporting military units and training teams along with federal agency task forces.

### ***Counterdrug Operations***

To be effective in defeating the drug cartels counterdrug operations must create an environment in which the manufacture and distribution of illegal drugs is no longer profitable. This is best achieved by attacking the cartel's centers of gravity. At the strategic

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<sup>c</sup> These departments and agencies include DoD, Department of State, Department of Justice, Department of Transportation (including major Coast Guard assets), Drug Enforcement Agency, U.S. Border Patrol, U.S. Customs Service, Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation along with many others. JOINT PUB 3-07.4, chapter III provides a concise 54 page breakdown on the major agencies involved and their associated roles.

level the cartel's power comes from the incredible demand for illegal drugs and the huge profits that can be made throughout the production and distributions system. At the operational level the industry's power is generated through its organization and leadership.<sup>29</sup> These centers of gravity are targeted in both the domestic and international theaters. The DoD has a more pronounced role in support of efforts in the international theater.

Drug profits can be attacked on several fronts in the source countries. By conducting an interdiction campaign along the routes used to transport coca leaf and paste between the growers and processing locations, the cartels are confronted by higher costs due to the loss of source materials. Higher prices are also associated with the development of alternative transportation, whether these are a result of the fees demanded by the smugglers fostered by the greater risk involved, or costs incurred due to longer and more arduous routes. Successful interdiction also creates an over abundance of raw materials in the growing regions. This increase in supply drives down the price which makes growing coca less profitable. An atmosphere is created in which farmers are more likely to shift their efforts to growing legitimate agriculture products. "Operation Green Clover", conducted in the fall of 1995 and "Operation Laser Strike" which commenced in the spring of 1996 offer support to this source nation interdiction effort.<sup>30</sup>

These operations attacked the air bridge between the growers in Peru and the cartels in Colombia. The U.S. military supported Peruvian forces with ground and air based radar surveillance assets to locate and intercept suspected airborne drug smugglers. Source nation aviation assets conducted the intercept and directed suspicious aircraft to a secure landing strip. Suspected smugglers that failed to respond were shot down by Peruvian forces with a

total of 12 planes being downed during Green Clover.<sup>31</sup> This operation was conceived by the State Department and conducted with Presidential Authorization.<sup>32</sup> The results of this operation proved to be extremely effective in driving down the price of coca in Peru as the supply backed up. An estimated 18 percent of the coca farmers in Peru, the primary source in Latin America, abandoned drug related farming.<sup>33</sup> Some fields were replanted with legitimate crops and other areas were overtaken by jungle growth.

It can be expected that these successes will drive the smugglers to use routes that are more difficult to interdict. In fact, there is evidence to support that the drug traffickers have started using the vast Amazon River basin to move coca based products as a result of Green Clover and Laser Strike.<sup>34</sup> Interdiction in the river basin is assuredly more difficult than intercepting aircraft, but it is also a more expensive transportation alternative for the drug smugglers. This increases the cost to the cartels and reduces the profitability of cocaine trafficking. However, the real success is in the reduction in the incentive of the farmers to grow coca, which places the greatest resource strain on the drug supply.

Actions in the source country focus greater efforts on increasing the price of doing business while straining the organizational leadership of the cartels. The restrained support role played by the U.S. provides increased security for U.S. military forces. Additionally, the close coordination between supporting U.S. agencies and host nations fosters a unity of effort across the broad spectrum of operations.

### *Future Source Country Initiatives*

Counterdrug actions in the source countries must further the overall U.S. National Security Strategy of "Engagement and Enlargement" while at the same time recognizing the uniqueness of the region.<sup>35</sup> The Latin American countries all have democratic governments, albeit of varying stability, with strong national identities. They are not formless regimes such as those confronted in Somalia and Haiti. While DoD counterdrug efforts are placed under the umbrella of MOOTW, the method in which assistance and resources are provided is more politically sensitive than that experienced in other recent operations. Accordingly, the U.S. footprint needs to be small, with initiative checked by an appropriate level of restraint. Diplomatic efforts need to ensure that U.S. assistance is requested in manners which support the legitimacy of the source nations while exerting continual pressure to continue the drug war unabated.

Efforts in the source countries must not prove to be overly disruptive to the populations most dependent on the drug trade, primarily the farmers. The lessons of Vietnam are relevant here. Destroying their fields, and therefore their livelihood, will not generate any more support for the drug war than the spraying of herbicides did in Vietnam.<sup>36</sup> Assisting farmers with crop diversification resources will. Current U.S. policy identifies crop eradication as a "central component of our source country counternarcotics strategy."<sup>37</sup> This needs to be thought through. While "crops are detectable, defenseless and destroyable," the farmers who are dependent upon the land for survival are not.<sup>38</sup> Establishing Civil-Military Operations Centers (CMOCs), manned by host country personnel, in regional coca producing areas and staffing them with agricultural experts and resources would provide a quick response capability to assist with crop diversification efforts during those periods when



coca prices become depressed due to successful interdiction efforts. Timely action would reduce the likelihood that farmers would just wait out the interruption in the smuggling operations.

Coordinating the actions between host country agencies, including both the military forces and the local police in association with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), would serve to reduce the rivalries that currently exist between the army and law enforcement agencies.<sup>39</sup> A supportive military presence would also assist the source countries in combating regional insurgencies currently linked with the drug traffickers. Although the level of insurgency in the Latin American countries have not yet approached the magnitude of that experienced in South East Asia, the military components of the CMOCs could function in a role similar to that served by the USMC Combined Action Platoons in Vietnam. These small units linked civic actions with military presence to protect hamlets rather than disrupt them.<sup>40</sup> Although some of the Latin American national police and military units suffer from a degree of corruption, all of the countries' democratic governments have shown some level of initiative in combating the drug war internally. Linking military and civic actions, with the requisite U.S. assistance, would openly demonstrate the proper role of military forces in a democracy. Efforts such as these would contribute to the social stability and economic development of the source countries, furthering the populations' support of democracy.

Further involvement with the civilian population would also increase the likelihood of developing more robust intelligence networks, primarily HUMINT in nature. This would significantly improve the success rate of interdiction operations. Additionally, direct

observation of trafficking patterns better defines the smuggler's capabilities, allowing for a broader selection of acceptable courses of action for counterdrug operations. These actions strike directly at the leadership and organization of the drug cartels.

### ***Continued Interdiction Effort in the Transit Zone***

The transit zone provides the link between the domestic and international theaters and undoubtedly stands as the most difficult area of operations due to the large regions involved and limited resources. Politically, a continued effort is critical to demonstrate and maintain national resolve, both domestically and internationally. Diplomatic pressure on the source countries lacks credibility if the U.S. fails to attack the drug supply on all fronts. Likewise, it is equally important to maintain an interdiction effort in the transit zone in order to continuously threaten the cartels throughout the distribution system. The various bombing restraints and halts during the Vietnam War, especially near the end of the Johnson Presidency, vividly demonstrates the possible repercussions due to a lack of continuous effort on all fronts.<sup>41</sup>

Counterdrug operations in the transit zone which are synchronized with actions in the source countries and along the U.S. border can eventually cause the drug traffickers to take greater risks (such as larger shipments conducted with less preparation, increased communications in an attempt to circumvent interdiction, enlisting the involvement of more third party organizations, etc...), raising the cost of doing business while increasing their vulnerability to interdiction. The creation of the interagency task forces have greatly

improved the coordination of interdiction operations. Continued measures should be taken to further develop intelligence sources. Intelligence breakthroughs could result in the location of large stockpiles of drugs resulting in a significant impact on the supply of cocaine in the U.S. Aggressive interdiction efforts should be pursued when intelligence predicts that operations are likely to prove successful. For these reasons it is important that the JIATFs are organizationally ready when, and if, the transit zone becomes a critical weakness for the drug cartels.

Previous "failures" do not preclude future successes. The number of seizures or metric tons of cocaine interdicted are not accurate measures of effectiveness (MOE) in the transit zone; there are just too many variables in the equation.<sup>42</sup> Neither measure has any bearing on the strategic and operational centers of gravity of the drug cartels. What interdiction does target is the entire distribution system, thereby stressing the leadership and organization of the cartels. Oversight agencies as well as the DoD continue to look for means to measure the effectiveness of military assistance with respect to interdiction. There are none.<sup>d</sup> The only truly assessable MOE is the price and availability of illegal drugs within the U.S. which is currently a function of demand vice supply. Standard economic supply and demand models also do not apply due to the addictive nature of drug abuse. The fact that the drug traffickers are in continuous search of alternate smuggling routes indicates that the interdiction effort is having an impact on trafficking organizations. The lack of a standard and timely MOE is not a justifiable reason to reward the drug traffickers with an additional

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<sup>d</sup> Stockpiles of drugs, cocaine in particular, are currently so high that even large seizures have had no effect on the price and availability of drugs in the U.S. Several extensive research efforts have been conducted in search of viable measures of effectiveness for the military role in support of interdiction operations. Builder's "Measuring the Leverage" (see bibliography) provides a historical perspective.

degree of freedom to conduct criminal activity. Transit zone initiatives are necessary and will continue to provide incremental dividends in the drug war, leading to increased success in both the domestic and international theaters.

*Drug interdiction alone, however, will not win the war on drugs. Victory requires the eradication of the source; punitive action against traffickers and habitual users; appropriate treatment centers for the addicted; and a "tough love" education program at home, in our schools and in the workplace. The drug lords will be put out of business only if we and our children decide we will not be their customers and that we will not pay for our own destruction.*

*Lt Gen Stephen Olmstead, USMC  
Dep Asst SecDef for Drug Policy and Enforcement  
Testimony before Congress 23 July 1987*

## ***Conclusions***

The current National Drug Control Policy represents a new approach to the drug war based on detailed review of past efforts. The harsh criticism of previous strategies, warranted due to their failure, do not apply as of yet to the present plan and a rush to judgment must be avoided. Drug abuse within the U.S. poses the greater risk to the citizens of this country and it follows that the domestic theater, relative to the international theater, should remain the "theater of focus." The current allocation of financial resources distributes 88 percent of the \$15.1 billion FY 97 Drug Control Budget to domestic law enforcement and demand reduction programs.<sup>e</sup> Additionally, the National Drug Control Strategy serves as a

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<sup>e</sup> The FY 97 budget breaks down as follows: Domestic Law Enforcement, \$8.3 billion (55%); Domestic Demand Reduction, \$5.0 billion (33%); Interdiction, \$1.4 billion (9%); and International / Source Nation Support \$0.4 billion (3%). Source: "Reducing Drug Use and its Consequences in America," p 6. (See bibliography)

cornerstone of the National Security Strategy in support of furthering the development of democracies in Latin America. This is a promising and sound strategy.

The National Drug Control Strategy represents a broad plan of action, portions of which advocate direct military participation in support of U.S. international and domestic objectives. The DoD has developed a great deal of experience with respect to detection and monitoring as well as interdiction support while involvement in a considerable number of military operations other than war (MOOTW) has broadened U.S. understanding of the function of the military in a support role. The U.S. military is better prepared now, both doctrinally and with respect to training, than at anytime in the past to play a vital role in host nation support. This role, in support of the National Drug Control Strategy, should be sustained until source nations can carry the burden.

Military involvement comes with some qualifiers. There is no "military end state" in the war on drugs and oversight organizations should stop looking for one. Drug abuse is primarily demand related and substance abuse will continue until people stop misusing drugs. The supply interdiction campaign must continue to assist in creating an atmosphere in which the demand reduction strategy can prevail. Finally, this will be an extended "war." Failures of past drug control strategies have been due in no small part to a lack of commitment of time, based on expectations of a quick and decisive victory. Critical analysis, introspection, experimentation, and national level debate have produced a coherent National Drug Control Strategy but it will take a level of perseverance, unseen to date, to win this "war."

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