

COMBAT DRUG ZONE 2010: THE UNITED STATES SOUTHWEST BORDER

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

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ABSTRACT

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Globalization and associated domestic variables such as the economy, energy, weapons proliferation, environmental issues and terrorism, dominate today's discussions, and resulting priorities. While a majority of Americans can readily identify with the everyday realities and stressors of life, few are cognizant of the looming crisis of narco trafficking. Given the proximity of the major friction points, spill over effects and regional security implications are increasingly amplified which potentially affect every citizen and the security of the nation.

This analysis will illustrate the precipitating factors contributing to the rise in drug trafficking, discussion on the multiple second and third order effects and an examination on policy alternatives for the U.S. Government. Statistics and experience illustrates that previous and current U.S. policies have not created the desired effect on narco trafficking. Considering the security environment post 9-11, increased counter drug budgets, the illicit drug trade is flourishing requiring radically new strategies. The Mexican Border drug epidemic arguably requires urgent and careful action by the U.S. Government.

COMBAT DRUG ZONE 2010: THE UNITED STATES SOUTHWEST BORDER

The pure cocaine to feed America's annual drug habit can be transported in just 15 40-foot container and it takes on average five agents three hours to thoroughly inspect a single 40 foot container

—S.E. Flynn

America's indulgence in drugs has been a historical, cultural and social aspect of history for numerous decades. Government inefficiency, conflicting government objectives, international politics, and societal norms coupled with the impact of globalization, has heavily manipulated conditions in the drug world. The net resultant has influenced a significant increase in the trajectory of demand, trafficking, violence and associated second and third order effects.

The U.S. war on drugs has a lengthy history beginning in 1915 and accelerating rapidly in the 1970s with the redeployment of U.S. troops from Vietnam. Although this has been an issue that has suffered from an ebb and flow focus, today's world trends suggest that this is not a problem that can be easily solved with the "traditional" U.S. problem solving mentality, through money, technology or military might. With numerous and often parallel complex issues facing the country, this paper will illustrate that the drug problem on the southwest border should be confronted, embraced and firmly woven into the essential fabric U.S. policy, strategy and vital interests. Several leading factors describing the associated historical background, current contemporary environment and potential strategic policy positions to the problem of growing drug trafficking and violence will also be examined.

Background

Despite combined U.S. and Mexican Government efforts and strategies to combat the rising tide of supply and demand, favorable circumstances have been progressively created, thereby allowing Mexico to become a center of gravity in the world of drug trafficking. The National Drug Intelligence Center now consider the Mexican drug cartels as currently dominating the illicit drug trade within the U.S.¹ While Mexico has been long known as a drug producing country, it is now firmly positioned as the key supplier of methamphetamine, heroin and up to 90% of cocaine transported to the U.S. Given the impetus and dominance of the drug market, this has simultaneously precipitated the expanded growth, overarching influence and raw strength of the affiliated cartels. In addition to market dominance, other consequences resulting from this dramatic shift are of significance.

Mexican drug cartel violence has exponentially increased during the past several years and has now escalated into large scale armed drug war skirmishes. Considering the mounting tenacity of violence, the magnitude of government corruption and the cartel faction's struggle for dominance within the regional drug markets, this mounting friction not only presents a domestic threat to the Mexican government. This also poses a significant threat to the U.S. as the "neighborhood effects" of lawlessness spill across the border presenting an enormous security implication at the very foot of the U.S. southern border.

This conflict has evolved far beyond the traditional warfare between competing drug cartels, but now encompasses belligerent activities with the cartels engaging with the Mexican government forces (law enforcement, police and military). Many experts consider the cartel's uprising as an overt signal that momentum is gathering and that

this phenomenon shows no sign of diminishing. The combined effect of the growing operational tempo and aggressive offensive posture of the Mexican government has placed an almost catastrophic demand on the legal system, almost to the point of paralysis. This new demand has often overwhelmed the current legal system design and harbors a realistic probability of enveloping and potentially exhausting the resources aimed at combating the drug war, thus placing the government and nation in further jeopardy. The widening demand on Mexico's politicians, judicial system, police and military forces for law enforcement, security and safety measures, presents mounting pressure on a system that was not designed for this type wide scale reform.

Given the backlog of legal cases, rampant corruption and inability to enforce order and security of the populace, the U.S. Justice Department, U.S. Department of Defense and Joint Forces Command now consider the Mexican drug problem as the largest organized crime organization within the U.S. In addition, these agencies similarly view this situation as the largest threat to homeland security, especially given the heightened probability of a failed or failing neighboring state and the adverse consequences that those scenarios may bring.

Background Primers

Numerous fundamental primers have led to this epic level of violence. Three major actions are commonly viewed as the initial escalation points leading to today's treacherous conditions which has pitted governmental forces against the criminal elements. These actions consisted of U.S. efforts against the key Columbia cartels, the election of Mexican President Calderon and the passage of North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA).

A crucial repercussion of the U.S. government's targeting and dismantling of the Columbian cartels in the 1980s and 1990s has had multiple unforeseen effects that were not anticipated nor adequately planned for. One resulting immediate effect has been a sudden shift in the balance of power among the cartels. The removal of key Columbian and Mexican cartel leaders has ultimately displaced the strength and balance of power of the traditional power base in both Columbia and Mexico. The net result was an ungoverned and decentralized regional crime environment in Mexico that has energized efforts by the remaining cartels to establish themselves as a dominant force in the midst of this power vacuum transition period.²

Secondly, in 2006 President Felipe Calderon was elected as the Mexican president and with it, injected a renewed sense of enthusiasm, ethics reform and a renewed commitment on the drug war. For years the drug cartels utilized their significant financial means or terrorist tactics to manipulate and corrupt influential public officials. Calderon's tenacity has fueled the reversal of the previous administration's decades of passivity and non action on the overt signatures of the drug trade business.

Upon his election, Calderon initiated several sweeping initiatives. Noteworthy examples have included immediately dispatching troops to intervene in known drug crisis hotspots, implementing steps to combat government corruption by firing corrupt leaders and overtly embracing the support of the U.S. as a partner in counterdrug efforts. For the first time, interdiction operations were initiated in 9 of Mexico's 32 states, and as a result 284 federal police commanders were purged including federal commanders of all 31 states and federal districts. The Mexican Government immediately named new replacements and stipulated a requirement that all candidates r

successfully pass an array of examinations designed to weed out corrupt officers, including financial checks, drug testing and psychological and medical screening.³ Lastly, an aggressive extradition policy was adopted to act as a new deterrent, which has prompted over 64 drug related criminals being sent to the U.S. for prosecution.⁴

A lesser known, but arguably the most powerful variable affecting drug interdiction efforts must include an analysis of the coordination and synchronization of U.S. government interests and policy alignment. An overarching and landmark decision that has significantly altered efforts and jeopardized gains in U.S. security, surrounds the North American Free Trade Act Agreement (NAFTA) which was passed during the Clinton Administration.

NAFTA facilitates and requires the relatively unrestricted movement of people, goods and services across the borders between the U.S., Mexico and Canada. With free trade as a stated national priority, agencies quickly responded by quickly instituting policies to support economic initiatives, often in an uncoordinated political vacuum that conflicted with other national interests, policies and efforts. With the advent of NAFTA, the drug gangs capitalized on this opportunity and expanded into many legitimate businesses which could be used for smuggling. Experts noted a corresponding increase in the purchasing of airline tickets, growth of trucking companies, expansion in car dealerships, petroleum transport corporations, immigration and other similar commerce type activities to support and further diversify the drug network and associated infrastructure.⁵ NAFTA requirements significantly weakened border security policies and the surrounding environment, therefore making it significantly easier to

smuggle drugs in and weapons and cash out, further fueling the dysfunctional efforts of the U.S. government agencies to stop it.

Of particular note was the first order effect reflecting a massive increase in volume of trucking commerce entering the U.S. Given the expansive border of roughly 2,000 miles and 50 official border crossing sites, the southwest border remains the busiest in the world⁶. Figures reflect an increase of nearly 50% over the previous year (1993) prior to NAFTA's passage.⁷ By 2002, the numbers of legal crossings for passengers was at 252 million people, 86 million cars and 4.4 million trucks and about 600,000 trains.⁸ To further illustrate the resourcing and demand problem, the U.S. Customs and the Government Accounting Office estimates that only between two to five percent of vehicles crossing the border in the U.S. are inspected.⁹ Inspectors were given a priority of "facilitating" the traffic flow, preventing the back up of hour long traffic lines which had resulted in strong political complaints and increased political oversight. Efforts to increase and expand U.S. inspection and security procedures were sometimes met with parallel counteractions from the Mexican government. These actions included heavy tariffs for Mexico bound shipments from the U.S. and successful lawsuits from Mexican owned trucking companies under provisions of NAFTA that were often upheld further complicating security efforts.¹⁰

Effects

As with any business, the ultimate objective is to expand and to derive more profit potential. Growth inherently brings associated problems in the form of logistics, increased security requirements and liability. Facing attractive and lucrative markets, the scope of the narco trafficking trade cannot be underestimated in terms of increasing

organizational sophistication, revenue, weapons arsenals, and most horrifically, the associated death toll.

U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration officials have maintained that the cartels have a firm command and control system emplaced over the drug trade and demonstrate increased levels of interdependence, similar to well known organized crime elements. Narco trafficking cartels have evolved into highly compartmented cells within Mexico and the U.S., entered into treaties/ alliances with competing organizations, aligned with multiple U.S. prison and street gangs and shown an amplification of money laundering activities.¹¹ Estimates vary but federal officials believe that \$25 billion in drug proceeds are smuggled out of the U.S. each year. This compares to just \$61 million seized in the past year, the \$3 million blocked in banks through the Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act and the \$58 million seized by border inspectors. This net effect is that authorities are interdicting a mere 25 cents of every \$100 in cartel earnings.¹²

Analyst estimates vary, but some cautiously place illicit drug earnings from the Mexican drug market alone between \$13 - \$48.4 billion per year.¹³ In comparison, the US Department of Defense budget for FY 09 was at \$518 billion prior to supplemental funding additions. Although this comparison represents just a 10 percent ratio, it must taken into account that this ratio just represents one country's statistics out of the other entire drug producing and trafficking states in the world.

Vast sums of money are not only earned by the cartels, but also spent on the protection of their product and markets. High tech weaponry, communications systems and transportation modes such as boats, planes and even submarines are common place in emerging business strategies to survive and to prosper.

To illustrate the unforgiving atmosphere of the various factions and competitive quest for market and territorial supremacy, a concept of enforcer gangs has emerged. One of the well known cartels (Los Zetas), specifically employs it's own paramilitary force against advisories conducting assassinations, arms trafficking, kidnapping and gather payments. Some estimates place the strength of this particular organization as high as up to 200 individuals comprising of ex- Mexican Special Forces personnel, used to execute swift, complex and ruthless operations for the Zetas.¹⁴

An unfortunate consequence of this paramilitary employment tactic is that organizations on both sides of the law have started to seek resource parity. Now military style weapons of all types to include automatic weapons, body armor, rocket propelled grenades and high caliber weapons have proliferated thought out the nation in the struggle for dominance.

The illicit activity also had a natural consequence in the terms of human lives. The result has had a dramatic spillover effect on the populace in terms of bloodshed for those involved in the drug war as well as innocent civilians. In 2008 over 6,290 people were killed in drug related violence and already this year (2009), over 6,397 have been killed.^{15 16} Unfortunately, this figure does not account for the numerous unrecorded acts of terrorism, kidnappings and mutilations that have scared this region since the tensions began.

Strategy

History has shown that changes within the political administrations of the U.S., are usually complimented by a corresponding shift in prevailing enthusiasm, prioritization, and alignment with national goals. A brief contrast within the previous 20

years of U.S. history identifies a government cultural and attitude shift especially as it applied to the topic of drugs.

In 1986, President Reagan advocated elevating the drug problem as an element of national security. This placed the issue squarely in the forefront of the domestic and international spotlight. An underlying theme began to shape attitudes and perceptions of Americans which many are still valid even today. The prevailing concept was that America is filled with good and the bad elements harbor the potential to threaten and destroy the underlying fabric of American life, society and erosion of values. As a natural outcome of this perspective, an image was cast that characterized the “good” guys and “bad” guys mentality. This approach would portray the Americans of course as the good guys and the narco traffickers and drug dealers that threatened U.S. national security, as the bad guys. This pervasive ideology also served as the foundation on how many of the policies and strategies were analyzed.

A predisposed mind set of the threatened victim mentality carries with it strong prevailing attitudes. It was interpreted by many as an implied justification to establish any policy necessary and to employ any means available to preserve the existence of the American society. Without an objective viewpoint and critical analysis of the problem, attitudes prevailed eventually yielding to biased opinions on the problem and the essential strategies to remedy the drug issue.

The United States cannot continue to deny that the problem of drugs as a domestic issue. There must be a prevailing attitude shift within the government and the population. It cannot solely appeal to military solutions that might enable only a tactical or temporary solution where a temporary tangible gain is realized through the partial

disruption of the drug supply or a particular quantity seized. At the root, it is not a military problem, therefore a military approach is hardly neither applicable nor sustainable. Additionally, the U.S. cannot believe any longer that the reasonable behavior of its citizens will take them out of harms way and save them from the evil temptation of drugs. The U.S. needs to confront and address the problem of demand. Similar to the current nation's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, time has proven that strategies must contain an interagency approach for maximum effects and persistence is critical for eventual success.¹⁷

The U.S. has cited that a strong relationship with Mexico as vital to core national interests. The new Obama administration is committed to multi faceted approaches in combating the growing violence and drug penetration into the US. Tenants of key programs include border security, intelligence sharing, bi-lateral law enforcement operations and efforts to thwart funding and trafficking. Over \$700 million has been appropriated law enforcement and judicial capacities against the cartels and counter drug efforts. Future initiatives include provisions for over \$1.3 billion of external support over the next several years.¹⁸

Current administration officials have revealed new comprehensive strategies in attempts to combat trafficking. One such effort is the national Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy. Sets forth several guiding directives such as directing federal agencies to increase coordination and information with state and local level law enforcement agencies, identifies national efforts to interdict the southbound flow of weapons and bulk currency and calls for continued close collaboration with the government of Mexico in their efforts against drug cartels. "The plan calls for tougher

inspections, more enforcement personnel and close coordination with our partners in Mexico as we work across federal, state and local governments to achieve safety and security in our communities,” said U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano.¹⁹

The National Southwest Border Counternarcotics Strategy represents a comprehensive approach at strengthening regional focus on the drug issue. The document provides strategic objectives and initiatives to create favorable conditions along the border. The document seeks to: enhance intelligence capabilities associated with the Southwest border, interdict drugs, drug proceeds and associated instruments of violence at the ports of entry, between ports of entry and on the air and maritime domains along the Southwest border, ensure the prosecution of all significant drug trafficking, money laundering, bulk currency and weapons smuggling/ trafficking cases, disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking organizations, enhance counterdrug technologies for drug detection and interdiction along the Southwest border and lastly, to enhance U.S.- Mexico cooperation regarding joint counterdrug efforts.²⁰

Although an encouraging sign that a clear long term strategy is articulated, it still retains the classic Achilles heel of all governmental bureaucracies, as it is reliant on the cooperation, coordination and synchronization of numerous external agencies and associated oversight layers. The Director of National Drug Control Policy will oversee the implementation of the strategy, in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security, Office of Counternarcotics Enforcement, Department of Justice, and Office of the Attorney General. The director will also ensure that the strategy is coordinated with

other border related efforts, including the Merida Initiative, led by the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security's Southwest Border Operations Plan.

The formulation and promotion of a coherent drug strategy is encouraging and sorely needed, however it is not without several inherent flaws. Glaringly absent is the incorporation and leveraging of the strengths and capabilities of the disciplines of the various other fundamental governmental cabinet level agencies. As a true revolutionary and comprehensive approach, it does not mention the other agencies that would be required to successfully assimilate and synchronize tasks to effectively carry out the presidential tasks. Nowhere is the Department of Defense, Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Energy, Department of Transportation or Department of Treasury mentioned.

Secondly, although Mexico is understood to have the most dominant role of any nation in narco trafficking into the U.S., it still lags behind Afghanistan and Columbia in U.S. counternarcotics assistance. Recent trends indicate that the funding approvals have decreased in FY 08 by approximately 22% from FY 07 amounts and a decrease not seen since FY 2004 (\$37.0 M).²¹ Despite vows from the Bush administration, and now the Obama administration, to help Mexico in it's three year assault on the cartels, actual spending has only totaled approximately \$24 million by the end of FY09. This figure represents approximately 2% of the original aid package that was promised. The State Department has attributed some of the delays in the challenge of tracking all the money and programs spread across numerous government agencies, contracting rules, congressional delays, staff hiring at the American Embassy and other delays.²² The

perception of slowed U.S. aid creates doubts about if the government is truly committed to counterdrug efforts.

To stem the flow of illegal drugs, illicit proceeds, proliferation of weapons and to significantly reduce the outbreak of drug related violence and crimes, more needs to be done. The security of the nation must become a stated strategic communications objective. Clear guidance is unquestionably needed, but agencies must be directed and forced to interact for any plan to be successful. Diplomacy must be used to cultivate multi-lateral agreements to include the UN in adopting accepted and stringent security procedures.

From a financial perspective, it is difficult to correctly determine what the true costs of the drug war. Given the numerous and diverse governmental agencies, involved, estimates for domestic drug enforcement efforts are upwards of \$5 billion dollars this year. It is no secret that the epicenter of the drug problem in the U.S. as it is well known as the world's single largest consumer of illicit drugs. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton said during a later March visit to Mexico that the United States "insatiable" demand for drugs and that it bears "co-responsibility" for helping Mexico fight the drug cartels.²³

Although successes in the drug war have been noted in some countries, drug trafficking and demand has been not been reduced even after years of focused efforts, National Guard troops manning the borders and in the era of increased security measures stemming from the 9/11 attacks. Several potential strategies will be discussed and analyzed in an attempt to illustrate a viable counternarcotics strategy to counteract its corrosive effects on American society.

Prevention and Treatment

Studies conclude that military intervention efforts largely fail because they do not target the correct variable which is U.S. demand. Given the country's immense territorial borders, air/ seaports and amount of trade activity, it is unreasonable to believe that the tide and momentum of drug trafficking can be severely thwarted by interdiction efforts alone. A policy study by the RAND Drug Policy and Research Center concluded that treatment is the cheapest and most cost effective method to cut drug use and demand. The study released in the 1990s found that drug user treatment to reduce drug consumption in the U.S. is seven times more cost effective than law enforcement efforts alone and it could potentially cut consumption by a third.²⁴

Current estimates of illicit drug use in the U.S. range as high as 20 million people. Of particular note is the prevalence and popularity of marijuana, as it solely accounts for 80% of the overall use statistics. The past eight years indicates that comprehensive prevention and education programs lessen the incidence of first time users. By affecting the target population, both the drug market and inherent demand is also reduced at an early stage and represents another line of defense for our country. For the treatment and prevention programs to be successful, this approach must complement and synchronize health care and treatment efforts at the local, state and national level. The Obama Administration is focusing on integrating substance abuse services into national healthcare systems with early screening, diagnosis and intervention as regular preventative medicine.²⁵

This program has numerous elements that are currently available and in place that would enable this initiative to become highly successful. The support resources and mechanisms are already in place throughout the country. Most US cities and towns

now have access to basic health care and would thus serve as the point of initial influence in this plan. For dependency cases, specialized care that may not be in the purview of the primary care giver, sources within private industry can fulfill the potential gap as numerous companies exist that specialize in drug and alcohol treatment programs.

The embracement of this program is logical and should be viewed not as reactive but as a preventative measure. It provides a defensive measure as a backstop for the illegal products that are able to circumvent interdiction efforts. The U.S. Congress is intimately involved in the efforts to combat illegal drugs and would most likely see this as an extension of many of the policies that are in place. Given the exorbitant anti drug budget and fragmented nature of the drug war bureaucracy, funds are available and could be easily diverted from other requirements. If not taken from interagency budget coffers, another valid source may be easily reprogrammed from the growing foreign drug war aid packages where costly helicopters, aircraft and high technology surveillance packages are routinely included. This could also be viewed as an investment domestically and into the economy of the U.S. and it's citizens.

Many preventive, coercive or deterrence policies present difficult variables to measure. Considering the numerous variables involved pertaining to all aspects of the drug world, it is highly unlikely that drug use will ever stop completely in the U.S. Therefore, this proposal should not be viewed as an "end all solution" but rather as a program to compliment other prevention efforts. This program would merely present a realistic safety net, where none exists today. To gauge effectiveness, it may be linked

to other indicators and data trends regarding the market pricing of illicit drugs, violence, treatment and ingestion statistics.

This particular course of action carries with it, several potential risks. First, any reduction of aid to Mexico on the drug war may be interpreted as an indication of our lack of increased commitment to the drug issue. This may negatively impact many of the alliances and positive relationships that have been established with the Calderon Administration. Another element of risk is the potential monetary costs involved. Most health care programs are expensive and accurate drug population statistics would render it difficult to estimate the approximate financial impact on the U.S. Government. As with most large programs, this would prove to be extremely costly and slow to yield tangible results over a short term.

Another strategy to counter the drug epidemic revolves around the concept of decriminalization and legalization. For the sake of analysis, decriminalizing marijuana will have more of a singular reactive impact primarily within the judicial system as opposed to prevention strategies. A more worthwhile analysis surrounds the concept of legalization.

The U.S. represents the most criminal country in the world. It holds only 5% of the world population yet accounts for 25% of the world's prison population. Yearly expenditures within the various correctional institutions is approximately \$68 billion, coupled with an additional \$150 billion spent on policing actions and court expenses. Currently 48% of the prison populations that is convicted of drug type offenses are for marijuana related infractions²⁶. One would quickly believe that by legalizing marijuana, pressure on the judicial and law enforcement systems would dissipate, freeing more

resources for other requirements. Upon closer examination, there remain numerous facts that discourage any hasty conclusions.

A large percentage of those convicted have been plea bargained down to a lesser charges stemming from hard drugs, weapons and other violent crimes. The mechanism to support such a strategy of legalization would be revolutionary. Far ranging statute reforms would have to be reformulated and vetted at the federal and state level that could conceivably take several years and many of millions of dollars to legislate and implement. Public sector employers, educational institutions as well as governmental agencies would all be affected and policies reformed to comply and implement the proposed changes. The range of impact would be substantial as it would span from criminal laws to corporate personnel policies. Considering the interwoven fabric of American culture, institutions still exert influence on the nation's future path. Factions within the religious, secular and medical communities mostly oppose any initiatives to legalization efforts.

The size of the U.S. government bureaucracy directly involved or performing in a supporting role is growing of counter drug efforts is significant. As the organizations grow, so does the allotted budget, number of personnel, number of agencies and political oversight. With billions of department budget dollars at stake, pressure from political lobbying efforts all coupled with increased media exposure of the drug epidemic, any change in a political stance on the drug policy would prove to be extremely risky and potentially hazardous. Additionally, a legalization stance may serve as a catalyst for citizens of other nations, including our neighboring countries to enter the U.S. to ingest drugs with relative impunity.

An examination of Europe's position on legalization would most relevant and appropriate at this point. There is no single position on drug policies within Europe as each country has developed their own specific laws. Policies range from legalization of all drugs to strict zero tolerance. The Netherlands has led Europe in the liberalization of drug policy reform. Although illegal to sell or possess marijuana products, since the 1970s the government has sanctioned "coffee houses" where marijuana can be sold in a tightly regulated environment. Since that time, trends indicate that crime has increased, marijuana use among young adults (18-25 year olds) has doubled and heroin addiction levels have tripled.²⁷ The social implications bear some discussion also. Many believe that the current laws have paved way for a new drug culture and identity for the nation. The government has been forced to administer treatment facilities and penal treatment facilities for drug addiction. The Netherlands now has the distinction of being one of the largest manufactures of the drug Ecstasy in Europe. This has forced government officials to combat this trend with law enforcement methods.

Legalization, taxation and the general acceptance of marijuana in the US would have little significant impact on the proliferation of illicit drugs. Actually, legalization may facilitate a transition to several other detrimental issues. First, with the removal of marijuana as a major cartel business sector, there would have to be an economic enterprise substitute for the numerous workers and cities that solely rely on drug dollars. With an uncanny ability to react quickly to market conditions, the cartels would be forced to diversify into some other industry (weapons, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, etc), which could potentially have more harm on society than marijuana. Lastly, legalization would send a strong signal to U.S. citizens and our youth that drug

use is acceptable and with it, responsibility shifts to family units and governments as a social endorsement.

Conclusion

America has a drug epidemic that has unthinkable far reaching tentacles. This paper discussed just one small segment of the larger macro problem. The information and viewpoint contained in the writing should not be surprising to any reader. It is imperative that national interests become prioritized and guiding principles set forth with consistent, comprehensive strategies that are communicated to the interagency as well as the common citizen. As with the U.S. war fighting mentality evolves to become effective and relevant, so should our nation's strategy on drugs.

The government's strategic communication mantra should emphasize security as a paramount national interest. The position should further illustrate that the world has experienced change and the threats that we face are complex. Therefore it is impossible to have the complete range freedom and the way of life as we once knew it, while protecting the populace in the manner that it requires. Security comes with a cost and it must become paramount in all of our activities as this aspect is the very essence that allows our nation to exist.

Past practices, attitudes and strategy are in need of an overhaul. The drug issues are larger than just one organization or one segment of the U.S. population. U.S. Government agencies exist to support the people and they need to be empowered to accomplish their jobs. The perceptions must change to affix responsibility where it rightfully belongs.

Endnotes

¹ Cook, Colleen W. (October 16, 2007), CRS Report for Congress: Mexico's Drug Cartels". Congressional Research Service,.pp CRS-4

² Burton, Fred (May 2, 2007). "Mexico: The Price of Peace in the Cartel Wars". The Stratfor GlobalIntelligence. http://www.stratfor.com/mexico_price_peace_cartel_wars.

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