



# NNOAC *Insight*

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*The Official Position of the National Narcotic Officers' Associations Coalition*

## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DRUG ENFORCEMENT**

**By**

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To justify the expenditure of scarce public funds for drug enforcement, we must first answer the question, "does a strategy of drug enforcement help to reduce the availability of drugs and does it improve the quality of life in America."

Our nation's drug problems are extremely complex and it took decades for our country to reach the current state of affairs. It would be naïve to think that the problem of drug sales and use could be solved quickly or easily. But by using a comprehensive approach that embraces enforcement, education and treatment to fight drug use, I believe that we can dramatically reduce the use of illegal drugs and the violent crime that is associated with it.

I am not an academic, a drug policy expert, or a ranking government official. What makes me qualified to speak to you is my employment as a narcotic officer who has spent the past twenty-eight years enforcing California's drug laws. I am a past president of the California Narcotic Officers' Association, representing 7,500 members, and the current President of the National Narcotic Officers' Associations Coalition (NNOAC).

I have seen how crime and drugs have devastated our communities and robbed people of their worldly possessions, their dreams and hopes. And like all of my colleagues in law enforcement, I have watched hopelessly as drug abuse threatens our nation's most precious commodity, its young people.

To discuss the effectiveness of drug enforcement, I want to examine the importance of the drug enforcement mission in this changing world. On September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, America was stunned by a vicious attack, which shocked the conscience of our nation. As anger turned to sorrow, we did what Americans have always done, we went about our lives, secure in the knowledge that America will always overcome adversity,

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because it is the greatest country in the world. But like our parents and grandparents, who were part of America's greatest generation, as they were recovering from the attack on Pearl Harbor, we know that the world, and our lives changed forever the morning of September 11<sup>th</sup>.

As the President and Congress shift resources and priorities to protect our homeland and America's interests abroad, it is natural for us to have a strong desire to be part of our countries efforts in the war on terrorism. Law enforcement officers are action oriented and I am sure that each of them want to join the fight to protect our great nation and their own communities. But it is important that we all remain focused on drug prevention and enforcement because that mission has even greater importance today than it did before the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.

Probably more than most Americans, the members of the NNOAC understand the danger that illegal drugs pose to the fabric of our society. The damage created by the abuse of illegal drugs has not been erased by the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. In fact, the use of illegal drugs weakens our nation's ability to respond to this threat and to fight for our continued freedom.

The resolve to fight drug abuse must be stronger than ever. It must be understood that drug trafficking is terrorism. We must fight the efforts to reduce our nation's commitment to fighting drug abuse. Most importantly, we must fight those groups that are working to legalize or decriminalize drugs through strategies of harm reduction, medical marijuana, and industrial hemp. The damage that will result from diluted drug policies and the increased drug use, along with its corresponding public health threat, will make the loss of life from the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks pale by comparison.

We have learned during congressional testimony by former Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Administrator Asa Hutchinson and Congressman Mark Souder, in the House Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, that the sale of heroin and hash have provided significant financial support to the Taliban and Osama Bin Laden's Al Qaeda network. We also know that the sale of pseudoephedrine by Middle Eastern crime groups has helped to finance the Hamas and Hezbollah. In a recent speech, President George W. Bush said, "terrorists get their money from global trafficking in narcotics... If you quit drugs, you join the fight against terrorism." Clearly, the efforts of police officers across the country that risk their lives each day in the fight to eradicate drugs, are performing an important service by reducing the profits used to support terrorism.

As the United States shifts its resources to fight the war on terrorism, the pro-drug lobby is taking advantage of the situation by calling on our nation's leaders to surrender in the fight against drug abuse. Those self serving individuals and corrupt organizations that propose drug legalization attempt to discredit our nations drug enforcement policies by saying that we have lost the war on drugs and that our country's limited resources would be better spent fighting terrorism. But we know that

there has never been a war on drugs. We have not committed the same resources to fighting drugs that we would, if we were waging war. Yet despite a less than complete commitment to the fight, we have reduced drug use and saved lives. From 1979 to 1992, by using a comprehensive strategy of prevention, treatment, and enforcement, we reduced drug use in America by half. A fifty-percent reduction of any public health plague should be considered a tremendous success. But because we do not announce our successes in fighting drug use, they have gone virtually unnoticed by the press and the public. Unfortunately, in 1992 we took our eye off the ball. Fewer resources were dedicated to a comprehensive fight against drug abuse, and predictably, drug use began to increase.

We now have the opportunity to repeat and exceed the outstanding success that we achieved throughout the 1980's. In the 2002 National Drug Control Strategy, President Bush and Drug Czar John Walters have pledged that we will reduce drug use by ten-percent within two years and twenty-five percent within five years. Those are ambitious goals but they are achievable. With the leadership provided by President Bush, Director Walters, House Speaker Dennis Hastert's Task Force For a Drug Free America, Chairman Mark Souder's Subcommittee on Drug Policy, and with enforcement, prevention, and treatment working together, I believe that we will be successful in making America a safer place to live and raise our families.

These goals will not be easily obtained. Law enforcement officers and our nation's leaders must remember that our cause is just. All Americans must stay focused on our mission of making America a safer place by reducing the availability of illicit drugs. We must never lose sight of the fact that drug manufacturing, smuggling, and sales are terrorist acts.

I recently had the privilege of representing the National Narcotic Officers' Associations Coalition at the White House when the President unveiled the National Drug Strategy. During his speech, President Bush said, "Drug abuse threatens everything that is best about our country. It breaks the bond between parent and child. It turns productive citizens into addicts. It transforms schools into places of violence and chaos. It makes playgrounds into crime scenes. It supports gangs. Over time, drugs rob men, women, and children of their dignity and their character."

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that in 1999, fifty-two persons died each day as a direct result of drug induced causes. That is more than 19,000 of our fellow Americans, a steady increase from the 9,000 people that died from illicit drug use in 1990. And, the ONDCP currently estimates the annual economic costs to society from illegal drug use at \$160 billion. In 2000, Americans spent more than \$64 billion for illegal drugs. That is eight times the total Federal expenditures for research on HIV/AIDS, cancer, and heart disease. Clearly, the sale of drugs on the streets of America is a bio-chem attack on our citizens. Yet, even these stark figures cannot capture the human tragedy of drug abuse. The loss of children to drugs, the fear generated by violent crime, the despair and corrosion of economic opportunity cannot be fully captured in dollar amounts or other statistics. In a recent editorial, former Drug

Czar William Bennett wrote, "Governors who want to curb child abuse, teen pregnancy, and domestic violence must face up to this reality: Unless they prevent and treat drug abuse and addiction, their other well-intentioned efforts are doomed."

It is time we realize that the loss of 19,000 lives and a cost of \$160 billion makes drug trafficking an act of terrorism of tremendous magnitude. And yet many Americans continue to accept drug use as something that cannot be stopped. We must take it upon ourselves to educate the American people to the realities of the dangers posed by illegal drugs and to our opportunity to reduce drug abuse if we have their support. Although there are many links between drug trafficking and international terrorism, we only have to look at the death and destruction in our own country to realize that selling drugs is an act of terrorism.

Both polling and anecdotal information shows that the American people want drug use eliminated and they are looking to law enforcement along with our partners in prevention and treatment to stop it. But many in the media and other forums have downplayed the threat posed by drug criminals. A common debate now portrays individuals who sell drugs for a living as victims rather than the hardened criminals that they really are. But that argument overlooks the real victims: the mother who loses a child through a drug overdose, the family that can't go out at night because of violent neighborhood gangs, and our senior citizens who are prisoners in their own homes because they live in fear of drug violence.

Tragically, America has become a place where children cannot safely play outside, where parks and neighborhoods are infested with violent gangs, and where our kids feel the pressure to participate in dangerous and illegal conduct. At the center of so much of our crime and violence are drugs. For a period of time, discussions of the crime problem and solutions to those problems were disassociated from the public policy issue of drug use. It is important for each of us to remember that drugs fuel criminal activities and are at the root of many community problems.

People who buy and use drugs commit crimes. Many of these crimes are directly related to manufacturing, growing, selling, possessing and using drugs. There are also many visible drug related crimes including, homicides, assaults, and property crimes committed by persons under the influence of drugs or trying to pay for their addiction. And there will always be drug lifestyle crimes and social problems, which are less obvious but no less attributable to the scourge of drug abuse. Drug use fuels problems such as domestic abuse, child neglect, prostitution, driving under the influence, homelessness, mental illness, lost productivity at work, and a shirking of one's responsibility to family and community, all of which contribute to a weakened society.

The statistical evidence is overwhelming: Increases in drug arrests are followed by drops in violent crime. Drops in drug arrests are followed by increases in violent crime. This is no surprise to the residents of drug-infested neighborhoods or to those of us who deal with these matters professionally. Make no mistake; violence is the primary tool of drug dealers. Drug criminals use force and intimidation to control turf, ensure the

swift payment of drug debts, and deter those who might cooperate with law enforcement. A 1997 Bureau of Justice Statistics study of state prison inmates found that criminals who were under the influence of drugs while committing their crime accounted for twenty-seven percent of all murders and forty percent of robberies, a dramatic example of the link between drug use and violent crime.

It is clear that vigorous law enforcement strategies can greatly reduce the number of victims of drug related violence. New York City's experience with drug related crime control clearly proves that point. In 1994, the New York Police Department implemented a program that targeted those individuals and drug gangs that were believed to be responsible for much of the city's violent crime. It targeted all levels, from street dealers to the drug kingpins that were responsible for supplying the bulk of the drugs that made their way to the streets of New York. The results were nothing short of phenomenal. From 1994 to 1998, narcotics arrests doubled from 64,000 to 130,000. At the same time, serious and violent crimes dropped from 432,000 to 213,000. In fact, New York City's per capita homicide rate was reduced to that of Boise, Idaho. The cumulative effect of this multi-year trend means that 750,000 people were spared from being the victims of violent crime and as many as 6,500 of our fellow human beings are alive today who would have been the victims of a homicide if had not been for the aggressive enforcement of laws including drug violations.

Conversely, the city of Baltimore, under the leadership of Mayor Kurt Schmoke, an advocate of harm reduction and reduced drug enforcement, suffered the consequences of a soft on drugs policy. Compared to the time period when New York's violent crime was plummeting, Baltimore's jumped to six times that of New York City and its drug overdose rate is now five times that of New York. To compare results, in 1998, if New York had Baltimore's homicide rate, the city would have been faced with 3,000 deaths rather than the 627 that it experienced.

One of the most accurate barometers of the relationship between crime and drugs is the Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (ADAM) Program operated by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs). It measures whether those who committed crimes tested positive for the use of drugs. The program includes the Borough of Manhattan and what it published in its 1997 report is shocking. Almost 80 percent of the male adults who were arrested for committing a violent crime tested positive for drug use. And this isn't just a New York phenomenon. In smaller cities like Birmingham, Alabama and Omaha, Nebraska, the figures are as high as 60 percent. Many citizens think that people on drugs commit crimes only to buy more drugs. That's simply not true. A 1991 study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that only 12 percent of the inmates in state prisons committed violent crimes to get more drugs. These statistics are a clear indicator that drug use by its self is bad. And while this analysis may not satisfy the rigid academic standards of social science, it is clear to me that if 60 or 70 percent of the criminals are using drugs, and only 12 percent of them commit their crimes to get more drugs, the drugs themselves are a clear cause of the violent crime wave in America. The drug-related crime wave doesn't

result from the enforcement of drug laws, but from the ill effects of the drugs themselves.

Clearly, whatever efforts we can make to get drugs out of our schools and neighborhoods will go far towards improving the quality of life for all Americans.

A 1980's study of high school students in California and New Jersey indicated that 76% of the high school students studied that did not use drugs made that choice in part due to the fear of arrest and the social stigma associated with drug use. That is what drug enforcement accomplishes. It increases price, reduces availability, put those that participate in a drug lifestyle in jeopardy of incarceration and increases the negative social stigma associated with drug use. The potential of sanctions of incarceration following a drug conviction is frequently the catalyst to push a drug user into treatment. I know that we will never arrest our way out of America's complex drug use problems, but I believe that the evidence is clear, a strategy that embraces strong drug enforcement in a comprehensive program along with treatment and education is crucial if we ever expect to achieve success in our fight against illegal drugs. Similar successes have been gained in obtaining compliance with helmet and seatbelt laws and in reducing driving while intoxicated.

When we look at the crime problem in America today, and for the preceding years, we need to put it in a broader context. While the most visible manifestations of our crime problem are the crack dealer on the street corner, or the armed gang member terrorizing neighborhoods, or the carjacker lurking in a parking lot, we need to look beyond these people to the ultimate source of our crime problem: international narcotics organized criminal mafias.

For the first time in our history, major criminals who live outside our borders are orchestrating criminal activities in the United States. All of the cocaine and heroin, and most of the methamphetamine and marijuana trafficked and consumed in the United States come from abroad or through foreign national criminals that have their command and control structure outside of the United States. The crack dealer and the gang member are simply surrogates for major international drug traffickers operating out of Colombia and Mexico. These major traffickers use violence and intimidation in their own countries and in ours. In the past decade the FARC and other criminal groups involved in drug trafficking have killed more than 3,000 Colombian Police Officers.

That is not to say, however, that street level drug dealers, or local gang members are not responsible for their activities. To the contrary, these hometown criminals are the individuals who choose a life of crime, and work on a daily basis to denigrate our communities and terrorize our citizens. While it is difficult, although not impossible, to arrest and prosecute the world's most significant drug traffickers, we have had major successes in reducing the levels of violent crimes in our communities, and reducing the numbers of juvenile offenders in recent years.

Law enforcement has been stretched thin, but we have made a real difference and have done so for a few key reasons. Civil societies are the product of an unspoken consensus that for whatever else we may desire, we *all* want to have safe neighborhoods, a chance to raise our families without violence, and protection of our property. Law enforcement is the last line of defense against the dark tide of drugs and crime that threatens our civil order. Societies that do not protect civil order don't last long. And, drug traffickers are the engines of this century's social disorder. They terrorize our country state-by-state and community-by-community. They are so powerful that they terrorize entire nations like Colombia, Bolivia, Peru and Mexico by dominating and intimidating local law enforcement. They terrorize the international community beyond those borders by funding the forces of larger terrorism through such well-known forces of evil as the al Qaeda, FARC, Shining Path, Hamas, and Hezbollah. And they do so without regard for race, religion, gender, or political affiliation.

But where does a civilized society turn to get the protection it needs from crime and violence? To you, the everyday man and woman – who answers the call - to become a police officer. Who goes into the uncertainty and chaos on the streets of America - where drugs, violence, and despair provide the only certainty. And who perform a job that calls for real commitment and courage. That is why we have a civil society. Because we have law enforcement officers, the military, members of the fire service and other public safety professionals, ordinary people are willing to heed the call and answer with commitment and dedication. That call is only made more sharp and urgent by the devastating social impact of violent and ruthless drug traffickers.