



NNOAC *Insight*

The Official Position of the National Narcotic Officers' Associations Coalition

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DRUG ENFORCEMENT

By

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Congress must make a tough choice in 2005: should the federal government pull back in the fight against illegal drugs by eliminating or reducing funding for law enforcement assistance programs, or should it recognize the positive impact of strong drug enforcement and embrace the programs that have generated reductions in drug abuse rates and crime?

If we accept that a robust national drug control strategy is dependent upon strong state and local drug enforcement efforts – officers on the street who are arresting drug pushers and reducing local supply – then we must not cut the resources available for these efforts. Federal assistance to state and local narcotics enforcement efforts is the incentive that has caused dramatic improvements in cross-jurisdictional cooperation and overall effectiveness. If the proposals contained in the President's Budget Request for FY 2006 are embraced by Congress, all of the progress we have made in recent years will be in jeopardy.

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, we can continue to dramatically reduce the use of illegal drugs and associated violent crime.

Every day, state and local drug enforcement personnel witness how crime and drugs devastate communities and families, rob people of their worldly possessions, and

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shatter hopes and dreams. The most painful effect of drug abuse and trafficking that we see is the threat to America's young people.

Since September 11, 2001, the federal government has shifted massive resources to address our highest priority – protecting our homeland and America's interests abroad. It is natural for all of us to want to play a role in protecting our nation – and law enforcement officers are usually the first to step up. But in paying attention to homeland security, we must also remain focused on drug enforcement and prevention. In fact, drug enforcement has even greater importance today than it did before the September 11th attacks.

The damage created by the abuse of illegal drugs has not been erased by the events of September 11th. Probably more than most Americans, the members of the NNOAC understand the danger that illegal drugs pose to the fabric of our society. We lost almost 3,000 Americans on September 11th. But every year we lose more than 19,000 Americans to drug abuse and its effects. It must be understood that drug trafficking is terrorism.

We must fight efforts to reduce our nation's commitment to fighting drug abuse. This includes fighting those groups that are working to legalize or decriminalize drugs through strategies of harm reduction, medical marijuana, and industrial hemp. It also includes proposals to eliminate or reduce federal assistance for state and local drug enforcement. The impact of diluted drug policies and a reduced federal commitment to fighting drug trafficking would be devastating to society.

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 hashish 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. These individuals and organizations that propose drug legalization attempt to discredit our nation's 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. We simply state the facts: from 1979 to 1992, by using a comprehensive strategy of prevention, treatment, and enforcement, drug use in America was reduced by half. A fifty-percent reduction in any public health threat should be considered a tremendous success. But because our successes in fighting

drug use – and the benefits realized by these successes – are not adequately communicated, they have gone virtually unnoticed by the press and the public.

Beginning in 1992 we took our eye off the ball. Throughout the mid-1990s, fewer resources were dedicated to a comprehensive fight against drug abuse, and predictably, drug use began to increase. From 1999 through 2003, however, resources began to flow back into the fight against drugs. We saw a leveling-off and subsequent decline in drug use and crime rates. Today drug use is down significantly and crime rates are the lowest in 30 years. This is evidence of what we can achieve when our leaders direct resources and attention to the issue.

We must not rest on our laurels. The successes of the past few years do not mean that we can ease up on our commitment to the drug issue. We have already seen what can happen: witness the trends beginning in 1992 when resources were shifted away from the problem.

During the release of the National Drug Control Strategy in 2002 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 on 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 chemical 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.

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. Our leaders in Congress and in law enforcement must continually educate the American people about the realities and dangers posed by illegal drugs. 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 the terror that is caused by the sale and abuse of drugs.

Both polling and anecdotal information show 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 because of a drug overdose, the family that can't go out at night because of violent neighborhood gangs, the children who are poisoned in their own houses by their parents manufacturing methamphetamine, and the senior citizens who are prisoners in their own homes because they live in fear of drug violence.

Drugs are at the root of much of the crime and blight in our communities today. Many crimes are directly related to manufacturing, growing, selling, possessing and using dangerous 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. These problems include 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 27% of all murders and 40% 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” drug 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.

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, puts those that participate in a drug lifestyle in jeopardy of incarceration, and increases the negative social stigma associated with drug use. The potential for incarceration following a drug conviction is frequently the catalyst that pushes a drug user into treatment.

We know that we will never arrest our way out of America’s complex drug use problems, but the evidence is clear that a strategy that embraces strong drug enforcement along with treatment and education is crucial if we expect to build on recent successes in fighting illegal drugs.

When we look at the crime problem in America today 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 one of the ultimate sources of our crime problems: organized international narcotics 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 much of the methamphetamine and marijuana trafficked and consumed in the United States comes from abroad. 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. On 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. Much of this has been accomplished with the help of federal resources and federal agency partners, but the bulk of the work is done by state and local narcotic officers.

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 the everyday men and women who answer the call to become a police officer. State and local narcotic officers walk willingly into the uncertainty and chaos on the streets of America to address the problems of drugs and violence at their source.

As members of Congress consider proposals to eliminate or reduce assistance to state and local drug enforcement efforts, they should keep in mind two things:

- Decreases in commitment to the fight against drugs now will result in increases in the drug-related crime and drug use in the future
- A comprehensive national drug control strategy includes robust state and local enforcement and constant intergovernmental cooperation. Without these pieces, our national strategy is in jeopardy.