

Latin American Drug Trade

Policy Brief

Foreign Policy and Defense

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Executive Summary

Drug trading and trafficking in the United States and Latin American countries has continuously evolved into a major issue over the last quarter century. Because of increases in violent crimes involving drugs trade and trafficking, the rapid growth in illegal drug organizations known as cartels, and the stress the violence and cartels place on the business of political leaders domestically and internationally economically speaking, the need for policy reformation is extremely appropriate. Many suggest that the proliferation of drug trading is a result of failed political reform and state-building efforts which leads to more countries connecting and increasingly globalizing drug cultivation and drug smuggling routes throughout the Northern Hemisphere. The main argument brought forth by many Latin American political leaders against the United States is that if American citizens did not consume illegal drugs at such a large rate and quantity, then Latin American countries' drug production and trade rates would diminish along with drug trafficking organizations, informally known as cartels.

Despite the outlining facts and information, this policy brief addresses the main issue of reducing drug trade and trafficking. The main concept of prevention and intervention is clear, but how to effectively intervene is not. The main strategies to effective prevention are as follows:

- Promoting adequate and successful United States domestic drug and crime control policies that restrict the use and distribution and effective regional and international drug control policies that would decrease trade rates.
- Limiting involvement in regime change and political reform of Latin American countries to prevent unintended consequences of the United States organized wars on drugs.
- Creating International alliances to assist in decreasing the proliferation of drug cultivation and of drug smuggling routes throughout the respected hemispheres to decrease globalization of drug consumption.

In order to effectively communicate and convey change to our nation, limiting involvement in regime change and political reform of Latin American countries to prevent unintended consequences of the United States organized wars on drugs is the most critical to obtain the Presidents attention and support.

Context and Importance of Drug Trade

Background of the Problem

The problem started in 1970 when the United States passed several laws prohibiting narcotics use under the Controlled Substances Act, which was set up as a way to resolve the drug trading issue. In 1971 President Nixon declares a “war on drugs.” Nixon also in 1973 sets up the Drug Enforcement Administration, which is another way to resolve the issue of drug trading. Drug trading started to become a more powerful industry and significant issue when a drug lord named Pablo Escobar took over. He then goes on to form the Medellin Cartel with other Colombian traffickers. One of the most important aspects of Latin America is they are a crucial geographic zone for drug production. Several countries like Colombia, Peru and Bolivia are the worlds’ largest cocaine producers. These countries are major contributors to the worldwide issue with drug trade they are important for understanding the background of the problem.

Current Status of the Problem

In Colombia they just rejected an American plan that was made to fight against drugs. The plan was designed to continuing aerial spraying of the coca plant used to make cocaine. Bolivia kicked out the United States Drug Enforcement Administration years ago, which increased the growth of the coca. Chile, one of Latin America’s most socially conservative countries, is gathering its first medical marijuana harvest. Across the Americas, governments are increasingly resisting the tenets of the United States-led approach to fighting drugs, often challenging

traditional strategies like prohibition, the eradication of crops, and a militarized stance to battling growers in a fundamental shift in the region.

- Current U.S policy:
- In many ways, the resistance reflects the declining influence of the United States in Latin America and a sweeping sense that its methods to fight drugs in the region have failed. In Latin America many countries do not want military support, which means more drugs will be transferred into the U.S illegal.

Importance of the Problem

If the problem is left alone there will be an increase of drug dealing in the U.S and will bring more illegal drugs into the U.S. It is important to consider the problem because since Nixon and his “war on drugs” there has been an increase. Also, it makes the U.S look bad that we are slacking when it comes to cracking down on drugs. Drug dealing in itself is a problem because people are dying over the trafficking of drugs. In 2006 more than 60,000 people have died in Mexico because of prohibition-related violence. The drug business is not an easy profession, but people participate in drug trafficking because it is the only way to survive. American lives are being taken as well, so drug trafficking is not only affecting Latin America it is hurting America too. The U.S should care about drug trafficking because illegal drugs are entering the country causing problems with our borders.

Definition of the Problem

A. Statement of the Problem

- The problem is clearly defined because it has been an on going issue since 1970, so there are several databases that cover this issue. Drug trafficking is a major problem that sometimes is overlooked because it is not an immediate threat.

- Cultural and political aspects of the problem are included in the definition because Nixon set up the DEA. Culturally we know the specific areas where it is the worst which includes, Colombia has one of the main areas of drug use.

B. Actors Involved

- There are several stakeholders in the Latin American drug trade issue. The first one is the U.S and all the governments that are dealing with the issue specifically, like Colombia's government.
- The people of Latin America are affected because the farmers of these plants, like the coca plant, make more money growing and selling the plants to people then producing coffee with little pay from the government of their county like Colombia.

Impact of the Problem

U.S Citizens are being kidnaped, injured in armed car jacking's or killed. More than 130 kidnappings of U.S. citizens were reported to the U.S. Embassy and consulates in Mexico between January and November of 2014. U.S. authorities are reporting a spike in killings, kidnappings and home invasions connected to Mexico's cartels, and at least 19 Americans were killed in 2008. Another 92 Americans were killed between June 2009 and June 2010. The number of U.S. citizens reported to the Department of State as murdered in Mexico was 81 in 2013 and 100 in 2014.

Drug use is a growing problem. The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) estimates that in 2008 there were 1.9 million current (past-month) cocaine users, of which approximately 359,000 were current crack users. Adults aged 18 to 25 years have a higher rate of current cocaine use than any other age group, with 1.5 percent of young adults reporting past

month cocaine use. There have been over 32,000 deaths from overdose on cocaine alone since 2006.

Critique of Foreign Policy

Merida Initiative

The current foreign policy in place to help combat the Latin American drug trade is the Merida Initiative, this plan is an unprecedented partnership between the US and Mexico to fight organized crime and associated violence while furthering respect for human rights and the rule of law. Based on principles of common and shared responsibility, mutual trust, and respect for sovereign independence, efforts to transform bilateral relationship. Mexico is the main smuggler of illegal drugs such as cocaine into the United States. This pact with Mexican government was designed to disrupt organized criminal groups. Although the two governments are joining together to rid Mexico of organized crime, there is little success

Military led effort

Although the military is making a large effort to work to stop the drug trafficking, there is little success because of the influence the cartels have on the government, the military does not have a strong stance in the eyes of the people and neither does the government. The cartels have a large and undeniable presence in the government, although the government has been making efforts to prosecute cartel leaders, it has proven to be ineffective because of the weakness of the justice system in Mexico. The citizens of Mexico are not in favor of the government because they believe the government cannot be trusted. There is high corruption in the justice system of Mexico because of the large influence the cartels have on the Mexican government.

How the approach is failing?

The Merida Initiative is an approach that continues to fail because of the fact that it neither addresses the gap between federal and local police forces, nor offer a solution to fixing the issue, this separation is allowing Drug trafficking entities to benefit from eradication efforts. The current structure of the Merida Initiative allows for trafficking routes to not only shift, but also become more complex to determine. The current structure of this plan has not significantly reduced or undermined the Latin American drug trade whatsoever.

Considered alternatives

There are some alternatives to be considered that could reform the Merida Initiative and make it a strong and effective plan. These alternatives include:

- Using technology and combined military efforts to ensure the effectiveness of this plan.
- The Provision of airborne warning and control system aircraft would help interdict the flow of drugs This would be beneficial because it would undermine the power of drug trafficking organizations shipped from Latin America through the Central American corridors.
- Restore the stability of the Mexican government and stabilize the southern US border.

The United States Air Force and Navy would also work closely with the Mexican military to provide intelligence and monitoring assets that work in real time and include imagery; they would also train and equip crews to facilitate ground based marine interdiction operations.

Possible Options for Solving Drug Trafficking

Option One:

Although in its current state the Merida Initiative is proving to be an ineffective plan, this does not mean with the revisions suggested it would not be a strong and effective procedure in diminishing the amount of influence the drug cartels have on Latin America.

Pros: the suggested revisions to the Merida Initiative would to reduce the flow of drugs and undermine the power of drug trafficking organizations, restore order and stability in Mexico, and Stabilize the southern US border because of the strict US involvement that would be incorporated in order to strengthen the Mexican government

Cons: It would take a long time not only for the citizens of Mexico to re-gain trust in the government even with efforts to bridge the gap between the local and federal government of Mexico because the cartels are so deeply rooted in the government. Also even with all of the involvement of the American military, it would be easy for Mexico to become so dependent of the support of the US, that they would just go back to the weak government system they have in place now.

Option Two:

Provide more jobs in order to help the economy for example in Colombia. Colombia is known for growing coffee and many locals produce it, but they don't receive enough money from their product. In order to gain more money, they will grow drugs instead because it produces more revenue. Providing jobs may help individuals in poor countries to stop producing and selling drugs. There are some pros and cons to this plan:

Pros- Producing more jobs can decrease the amount of drug dealers and growers. This could also help lower the crime rate that many Latin American countries are experiencing. In Colombia the government could increase the pay farmers get for the coffee they grow.

Cons- Drug deals still can make more money selling and growing drugs because they don't have to go through the government. The Colombia government may not be able to provide more money for the coffee beans that farmers are growing. The individuals that deal with drugs may not like the jobs that the government is providing. Selling drugs is an easy way to make cash quickly, unlike a regular job where there is a process to go through before a worker gets their paycheck. Also, drug dealers make up their own price on drugs that they are trying to sell.

Option Three:

The U.S could completely leave all the countries that are experiencing high levels of drug trafficking and only worry about U.S borders. In the U.S we already are dealing with several conflicts abroad, so we need to focus more on U.S soil. Protecting our borders would decrease drug smuggling into the country and it will be harder for dealers to obtain illegal drugs.

Pros: The U.S is already spending too much time and money in Latin America, so the U.S will save money. Also, the U.S could afford more bodies to protect the borders that lead into American soil. At the borders it is under staffed, which is why it would be wise to pull-out of Latin American countries.

Cons: If we left Latin American countries we could lose valuable allies. Also leaving Latin America would increase the dangers involved in U.S. Foreign Policy, as far as diplomatic relations are concerned.

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