

Drug war finances global terror operations

We can defeat al-Qaida. We can blow up the Shining Path, kill the FARC and wipe out the Taliban. We can eliminate the support these terrorist organizations enjoy, we can cut off their finances and watch them wither and die.

We can do this without firing a shot. We can repeal drug prohibition.

Repealing drug prohibition is hard because it requires admitting that we've made a mistake. That's a very tough thing to do. It's particularly hard when we've made a real stinker. And make no mistake: Drug prohibition is awful. It is lousy domestic policy, but it is truly horrible foreign policy. The drug war is basically a blank check made out to every terrorist organization that hates our guts.

Facts aren't easy to find in the shady world of narcoterrorism, but the U.S. government report "A Global Overview Of Narcotics-Funded Terrorist And Other Extremist Groups" is a good place to start. From this and other reputable sources, I learned that:

1) The Taliban nets \$40 million-\$50 million a year from the illegal drug trade, the FARC in Colombia between three and four times that.

2) Last October the U.S. extradited a Taliban-linked individual planning to import \$25 million worth of heroin into the United States.

3) Hezbollah clerics have issued fatwas permitting drug trafficking.

4) Colombia's paramilitary and guerilla revenue from the drug trade is more than half a billion dollars a year.

The list goes on and on.

But it's not just the money that gives narcoterrorists power. Thanks to the law of supply and demand, narcoterrorists enjoy popular support. Drugs are made because people want them. Many of these people live in America. Opium or coca production is often the only source of income in poverty-stricken countries. America has a problem with drug demand, which we "solve" by trying to destroy the livelihood of a poverty-stricken population.

By contrast, narcoterrorist organizations offer security, a means of support for coca farmers, and a sense of pride by standing up to what they see as the hypocrisy of America. I couldn't write a better recipe for insurgent support if I tried.

We must face our drug prohibition prob-



OPINION

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lem head on, but right now it's hard to do because of our political discourse. Nobody wants to talk about repeal because you'll be painted as a pro-drug, anti-family crack addict. But that's just nonsense.

I've tried marijuana a few times in my youth, but never got high. I think I'm immune, but in any case I never understood what the fuss was about. I'm also very happily married with two impossibly well-adjusted teenagers, who attend a school they'll be expelled from if drugs are involved in their lives anytime, anywhere. End of discussion.

But just because cocaine and heroin shouldn't be a part of a teenager's life doesn't mean they should be illegal under all circumstances. Life is far more complicated than that.

I understand that repealing drug prohibition won't create a fantasy utopia. The search for chemically induced ecstasy appears to be innate (after all, the brain makes opiates). Some people appear to be extremely susceptible to addiction, and if prohibition is repealed they'll probably wind up on the street with wasted lives. Others (like me) are immune to the lure of narcotics. Most are somewhere in between.

But I'd rather live with the imperfections of a world where drugs are legal, because I can live with them. I can imagine ways to hold people responsible for the consequences of their own drug use. I can envision how society can function with legal cocaine and heroin, produced domestically and nonviolently in ways I can understand.

What I can't do, and what we as a nation should not do, is sit idly by pursuing failed policies that are ultimately counter to our own interests. Sure, I'd rather live in a world without drugs. I'd also rather live in a world where groups of murdering sociopaths had no money, no support, and were hunted down like dogs with the enthusiastic cooperation of civilized people everywhere.

Right now, we are poised between those two alternatives, and we, as a nation, have to choose. I think the first is delusional fantasy, the second based in reality. When it comes to politics, I always pick reality. That's because I'm not on drugs.

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