

Failure of The Drug Control Regime
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JUNE 26th, yet another Anti-Drugs Day, is being observed worldwide. Every passing year brings disillusionment to Governments everywhere, at the tardy progress made in enforcing and controlling drug proliferation.



Now, a growing body of evidence suggests that, the current drug control approach has failed to eliminate or reduce drug problem. Documentation like:

- *2008 World Drug Report (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime)*
 - *Report on Global Illicit Drug Markets 1998-2007 (European Commission)*
 - *Drug Policy : Lessons learned and options for the future (Global Commission on Drug Policy)*
 - *The development of international drug control – Lessons learned and strategic challenges for Policy)*
 - *Why is the outcome of the United Nations drug policy review so weak and inconclusive (IDPC)*
 - *The war on drugs : Are we paying too high a price? (Count the Costs Campaign)*
- reveals that, the current criminal – justice – led approach, has been a failure.*

The War on Drugs is a campaign of prohibition and foreign military aid and military intervention being undertaken by the United States government, with the assistance of participating countries, intended to both define and reduce the illegal drug trade. This initiative includes a set of drug policies of the United States that are intended to discourage the production, distribution and consumption of illegal psychoactive drugs. The term "War on Drugs" was first used by President Richard Nixon on June 17, 1971.

On May 13, 2009, Gil Kerlikowske, the current Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy signalled that although it did not plan to significantly alter drug enforcement policy, the Obama administration would not use the term "War on Drugs", as he claims it is "counter-productive". One of the alternatives that Mr. Kerlikowske has showcased is Sweden 's Drug Control Policies that combine balanced public health approach and opposition to drug legalization. The prevalence rates for cocaine use in Sweden are barely one-fifth of European neighbors such as the United Kingdom and Spain .

The global war against drugs has failed to eliminate or reduce drug production dramatically. It has, however, according to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime,

Undermined international development and security, and fuelled conflict

Threatened public health, spread disease and caused death

Undermined human rights

Promoted stigma and discrimination

Created crime and enriched criminals

Caused deforestation and pollution

Wasted billions on ineffective law enforcement

The Global Commission on Drug Policy has issued a report in June 2011, that said "Political leaders and public figures should have the courage to articulate publicly what many of them acknowledge privately: that the evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that repressive strategies will not solve the drug problem and that the war on drugs has not, and cannot, be won". The commission said discriminating certain drugs would help nations "safeguard the health and security of their citizens". It said this recommendation applies especially to marijuana.

"The global war on drugs has failed, with devastating consequences for individuals and societies around the world", the members of the Global Commission on Drug Policy says in its report.

Fifty years after the initiation of the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, and 40 years after president (Richard) Nixon launched the US government's "War on Drugs", fundamental reforms in national and global drug control policies are urgently needed.

Decriminalization initiatives do not result in significant increases in drug use:, the report says, citing policies in Australia , the Netherlands and Portugal .

Restrictions on marijuana should be loosened, and governments should "end the

criminalization, marginalization and stigmatization of people who use drugs but who do no harm to others”, the report says.

The 19-member commission includes former U.N. Secretary Kofi Annan and former U.S. official George P. Schultz who held cabinet posts under U.S. Presidents Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon. Others include former U.S. Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker, former presidents of Mexico , Brazil and Colombia , writers Carlos Fuentes and Mario Vargas Llosa, U.K. business mogul Richard Branson and the current prime minister of Greece .

The commission is funded by Richard Branson of Virgin Group and George Soros's Open Society Foundation among others.

The commission is especially critical of the United States , which its members say must lead changing its anti-drug policies from being guided by anti-crime approaches to ones rooted in health care and human rights.

The United States has the second highest incarceration rate in the world. A very large portion of people who are incarcerated are imprisoned for drug-related crimes. In 1994, it was reported that the “War on Drugs” results in the incarceration of one million Americans each year. Of the related drug arrests, about 225,000 are for possession of cannabis, the fourth most common cause of arrest in the United States .

In 2008, 1.5 million Americans were arrested for drug offences. 500,000 were imprisoned. In addition, to prison or jail, the United States provides for the deportation of many non-citizens convicted of drug offences.

A 2008 study by Harvard economist Jeffrey A. Miron has estimated that legalizing drugs would inject USD 76.8 billion a year into the U.S. economy- USD 44.1 billion from law enforcement savings and at least USD 32.7 billion in tax revenue (USD 6.7 billion from marijuana, USD 22.5 billion from cocaine and heroin, remainder from other drugs). Recent surveys held to confirm the consensus among economists to reform drug policy in the direction of decriminalization and legalization.

Similarly, India , is overburdened by multiple agencies, tasked with controlling proliferation of the menace of narcotics. At the Central and State level, several organizations are vested with overlapping jurisdictions to handle the narcotics problem. Huge bureaucratic hierarchies have been created in various organizations as part of our global commitment to eradicate narcotics. However, the flourishing narcotics trade in Goa , Himachal Pradesh and other parts of the country, demonstrates that our policies, have also been a failure. In line, with the current global thinking, India has to also start initiatives to legitimize the production, distribution and consumption of narcotics.

(The author works with the Department and the views expressed are personal)