

U.S. Embassy Georgetown

OP-ED: New U.S. Drug Control Strategy Targets Prevention, Treatment, and International Cooperation

by
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On April 17, President Obama released his 2102 National Drug Control Strategy. The new policy reinforces the innovative strategy he launched in 2010 to reduce illicit drug use in the United States while strengthening our international partnerships to combat illicit trafficking.

Contrary to recent media reports that suggest the U.S. is continuing a “war on drugs,” the Obama Administration made clear from the outset that we cannot arrest our way out of the drug problem. Instead, success requires a balanced approach guided by three core facts: addiction is a disease that can be treated; people with substance use disorders can recover; and innovative new criminal justice reforms can stop the revolving door of drug use, crime, incarceration, and rearrest.

The United States recognizes that U.S. demand for drugs contributes significantly to illicit narcotics trafficking. That is why we are sharply focused on reducing domestic demand. In fact, demand reduction accounts for the largest share of our national counternarcotics funding. President Obama requested over \$10 billion to support drug education programs and expand access to drug treatment for people suffering from substance use disorders this year, with \$9.4 billion targeted for domestic law enforcement, \$3.7 billion for interdiction, and \$2 billion for international programs.

The President’s 2012 *National Drug Control Strategy* continues our efforts to reform, rebalance, and renew our national drug control policy to address the public health and public safety challenges of the 21st century. It rejects the false choice between an enforcement-centric “war on drugs” and drug legalization. Rather, the *Strategy* is based on the premise that drug addiction is a chronic disease of the brain that can be prevented and treated. Simply put, we are not powerless against the challenge of substance abuse – people can recover, and millions are in recovery.

Our emphasis on addressing the drug problem through a public health approach is grounded in decades of research and scientific study. Illegal drugs not only harm a user's mind and body, they devastate families, communities, and neighborhoods. They jeopardize public safety, prevent individuals from reaching their full potential, and place obstacles in the way of raising a healthy generation of young people.

Over the past three decades, we have reduced illegal drug use in America – rates of drug use among young people today are far lower than they were 30 years ago. More recently cocaine use has dropped nearly 40 percent and use of meth has dropped by half. The President's strategy seeks a further 15 percent reduction in drug use over five years.

Reducing the burden of the drug problem stretches beyond prevention and treatment. All countries need a comprehensive approach that includes reforms to the criminal justice system to break the cycle of drug use, crime, incarceration, and arrest by diverting non-violent drug offenders into treatment, bolstering support for reentry programs that help offenders rejoin their communities, and advancing support for innovative enforcement programs proven to improve public health while protecting public safety.

Continued close regional and global cooperation remains vital for preventing the damage that drug use does to people in Guyana and throughout the Hemisphere. Our international drug control cooperation seeks to reduce the supply of illicit drugs in all countries, while assisting nations that are adversely affected by the illicit drug trade.

By embracing the concept of “shared responsibility” and engaging in effective cooperation, the United States—working with international partners—can reduce illicit drug use, production, trafficking, and associated violence. The Obama Administration's international counternarcotics programs are designed to reduce drug production and trafficking, promote alternative livelihoods, and strengthen rule of law, democratic institutions, citizen security, and respect for human rights.

And these efforts are succeeding. In 2011, the United States and its allies removed 193 metric tons of cocaine from the illicit supply chain as it traveled to the United States from South America. We actively supported alternative livelihoods for farmers in drug producing regions. We are working with our neighbors to reduce transnational organized crime. Through our regional security programs, the United

States is helping to expand judicial, social, educational, and law enforcement capacities to counter the influence of transnational organized crime in the region.

In this effort, the government of Guyana is an active partner with the U.S. and other nations of the Caribbean through the Caribbean Basic Security Initiative. The CBSI was developed by the United States and Caribbean countries in partnership to address the Caribbean region's specific security challenges and meet its most urgent needs in combating the drug trade and other transnational crime and preventing crime and violence that undermines citizen safety

CBSI funding is supporting Guyana with an array of equipment, training, and programmatic support including:

- patrol/interceptor boats to be delivered in 2013;
- advanced command, control, and communications systems;
- logistical and maintenance support to security and law enforcement entities;
- training to increase maritime interdiction capability;
- training and equipment to increase the capabilities and effectiveness of police and customs units at ports of entry;
- support for the Financial Intelligence Unit and independent investigative capabilities to combat money laundering and other financial crimes;
- partnerships with local NGOs to provide rehabilitation for juvenile offenders and offer alternatives to violence;
- remedial education in basic literacy and math; and
- training and increased access to microfinance for young entrepreneurs.

Together, our domestic and international efforts reflect the United States' firm commitment to reduce the use and abuse of illicit narcotics in the United States and to counter their nefarious impact on the safety and security of citizens throughout the Hemisphere. If we continue to work in partnership across the full spectrum of prevention, early intervention, treatment, recovery, criminal justice, domestic law enforcement, and international cooperation, we can succeed in reducing the enormous damage that illegal drug use imposes on our people and our societies.

A full copy of the *2012 National Drug Control Strategy* is available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/ondcp/2012_ndcs.pdf

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