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Current and Future Strategy in the War on Drugs

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Date Written: 27 November 2007

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Class 58

Thesis:

The military's role in the War on Drugs suffers from a flawed national security strategy that seven presidents have followed for over the past 40 years.

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Abstract

The United States military's role in the War on Drugs has had a negative impact domestically and internationally. The military's strategy in the War on Drugs has depended on a concept of interdiction and eradication that has suffered from a lack of resources necessary to accomplish its objectives. Moreover, it has contributed to the overworked and overextended use of the armed forces. Internationally, the military's strategy has contributed to the criminalization of source countries peasant populations and has undermined the military's strategy for winning the War on Terror. Furthermore, this strategy has caused the United States to shift scarce resources from domestic law enforcement and local agencies to the Pentagon and the Military Industrial Complex.

Current and Future Strategy

The military's role in the War on Drugs suffers from a flawed national security strategy that seven presidents have followed for over the past 40 years. During this time, the United States implemented a strategy that focuses on the supply side control of illicit drugs in hopes of securing the national objective of a drug free society. This focus has led Department of Defense leaders to develop a military strategy based on the concept of interdiction and eradication in order to achieve its military objectives to protect the United States from the flow of drugs, and prevent Narco-Terrorists from benefiting from the drug trade.

The national security strategy of supply side control of illicit drugs indicates that the United States will use its military to focus on regional military training, source countries production, and the smuggling and trafficking of illegal drugs. In contrast to, a demand side control of illicit drugs, which means the United States, would focus on drug education, substance abuse treatment, urban development, and investment in domestic law enforcement agencies to control local consumption of illegal drugs. By focusing on the supply side control of illicit drugs, the United States has shifted scarce resources from the domestic efforts to the Pentagon and the Military Industrial Complex.

The current strategy assumes that Narco-Terrorists receive monetary benefits from their relationship to the worldwide drug trade, which in turn funds their terrorist activities against the United States. Subsequently, if the United States can have the military interdict and eradicate the illegal drugs, it can prevail in the War on Drugs. This focus on source countries instead of on its own patterns of domestic consumption, the demand, will continue to be the cornerstone of United States drug policy for the near future.

However, this concept ignores the overwhelming amount of resources needed to interdict and eradicate drug production worldwide. This inability to resource this concept has put the military objective at risk of failure. Currently the U.S. is interdicting 15 percent of drugs coming into America. Somehow this has been triumph as proof of a successful strategy by politicians and lobbyists, which benefit financially from this concept. One could argue that it takes time for progress to develop at the macro level and in the coming years the U.S will reach its national security objective. However, it has been almost a half a century and we are no closer to a drug free society than we were 40 years ago. The reward has not been worth the risk, a risk paid for with the lives of many law enforcement personnel domestically and internationally. Sadly, this effort has been in vain, producing only minimal results in the amount of drugs entering the United States. More importantly, it ignores the second and third order effects that this idea has on regional countries and their relationships with their own people. Consequently, a by-product of this concept for regional countries is the strengthening of the bonds between the Narco-Terrorist and the local peasant population who are often the target of United States military forces drug interdiction and eradication operations.

Since the Nixon administration, this supply side control of illicit drugs has only rearranged the map of drug production and trafficking. As the military effort focuses their interdiction and eradication policies in one area, drug producers just move their operation to other countries or areas, and continue their supply of illicit drugs to the world. Drug production is a worldwide effort and drug producers know the United States military does not have the resources to conduct a worldwide War on Drugs. If Narco-Terrorists such as Al Qaeda are benefiting from the drug trade, then eradication is definitely an ineffective solution. Even if the United States can eradicate all drugs in Afghanistan, in the absence of a large-scale reduction in worldwide demand for

opium, poppy cultivation would simply shift into another territory where supply and demand side economics would push the price and profits for Narco-Terrorist up the so-called balloon effect (Felbab-Brown, 2006). Consequently, the eradication of drug cultivation results in the criminalization of the peasant population. In turn, they are more likely to side with belligerent groups opposed to the United States.

The current military strategy in the War on Drugs lacks any real achievable objectives, a clear concept of the operation and support, and a synchronized effort with domestic law enforcement agencies. The current threat to domestic law enforcement is the interdiction of illegal drugs along the United States and Mexican border, and the Gulf Coast areas. Domestic law enforcement are increasingly over burdened and under funded as the United States tries to fight the Global War on Terror at the same time as the War on Drugs. This lack of synergy at the national level has led to a financial burden on the American taxpayer and other domestic agencies. The most cost effective means to battle the War on Drugs would be for the United States to cut Defense spending and shift the money to domestic law enforcement and border control. This would allow civilian agencies to expand personnel, equipment and operations, and at the same time increase spending for education and treatment. While domestic law enforcement has suffered under a United States supply side strategy against drugs, military commander fighting the Global War on Terror are also suffering from the ramifications of this strategy.

Internationally the current threat is in Afghanistan where the United States policy of conducting both the War on Terror and the War on Drugs before the formalization of a stabilized government has undermined the military's effort in conducting counter insurgency operations. A military concept of interdiction and eradication passes a negative information operation (I/O) message to the Afghan population. This policy does not win the hearts and minds of the local

population because they are the drug cultivators, and have few other options. This concept unfortunately helps belligerent groups such as Al Qaeda and the Taliban recruit from the peasant class and subsequently extend the conflict. The civilian leadership of the U.S. military, pressure the ground commander in the combat zone to execute a concept that undermines their successful asymmetric tactics. They are now at risk of losing the support of the people, and allowing the Taliban to grow in strength and continue their insurgency. This is not the only region where this strategy provides a negative impact on United States national security objectives.

Colombia occupies a unique position in the United States administration's global war on terror in that its targeted terrorist groups are Marxist as opposed to Islamic-based and have no reported links to Al Qaeda or other Islamic groups (Feickert, 2005). Over the last four decades, the American strategy towards the Colombian cocaine trade was to eliminate the supply in order to curtail the amount of drugs entering the United States. Today Colombia produces over 800 metric tons a year of cocaine with 85 percent of it ending up on American streets. Over the last two decades this effort resulted in illegal drug production as high as ever, street prices at a low and the governments of the region in open revolt. The United States counter-narcotics operations have intruded on Colombia's sovereignty and have helped finance terrorism in the region. This strategy creates a militarization of the Colombian government and resentment among the peasant population, who increase their support of local terrorist groups.

As long as the military continues its present concept, it will find itself in the "profit paradox". Where the United States seeks to drive the price of drugs upward in hopes of stifling demand, but only increases the profitability of the production and sale of drugs (Steven, 2005). Even if this concept is successful in driving up the price, it does not reduce the drug trade. Instead, it encourages it and ultimately the United States becomes its own worst enemy in trying to reduce

drugs on American streets. The military fails because it does not have enough resources to support its concepts and objectives to fight the global drug trade. Narco-Terrorists know this, and will take advantage of the United States weaknesses in manpower and logistics.

In order to dismantle Narco-Terrorists organizations, the military along with the United States government's domestic agencies must expose the financial network supporting the global drug trade. If the military continues a concept of interdiction and eradication to confront future threats, then it will be a contributor to its own overextended and overworked armed forces. The cost of fighting both the War on Terror (1 Trillion Dollars plus) and the War on Drugs (100 Billion Dollars plus) is slowly sabotaging the United States economy and putting a burden on the American taxpayer. On 7 October 2007, the Department of Defense Counter- Narco-Terrorism Technology Program continued to throw billions of dollars on this faulty strategy by awarding a 15 billion dollar contract to Blackwater USA, Raytheon, Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin, to provide equipment, material, and services to the Department of Defense. One must wonder if the Department of Defense had given that 15 Billion dollars to its combat commanders to help in their counter-insurgency fight, if that would have been a better use of the American taxpayer's money. The United States should stop wasting money and instead concentrate on the Narco-Terrorist financial infrastructure.

The future strategy in the War on Drugs must focus on the financial networks and money laundering organizations that are the real heart of the drug trade. The Black Market Peso Exchange System (BMPE) is a major money-laundering association used by Central and South American Narco-Terrorist to handle drug profits (Casteel, 2003). The BMPE handles billions of dollars of contra band trade each year at the expense of regional economies by denying them billions of dollars in tax revenue. In addition, the Hawala/Hundi System is a laundering organization used for

centuries throughout Asia to by-pass regional governmental control (Casteel, 2003). These organizations should be the target of a combined American and international effort in winning the global War on Drugs. The United States cannot and should not bear the global burden in the War on Drugs. The United States should follow a “Dublin” strategy its name taken from the importance of the international community to define workable solutions to the drug problem, which focuses on international economic and social development that would lead agrarian communities away from illegal drug cultivation. In addition, it needs to reevaluate its national security objectives and synchronize its national power to support an international strategy to fight the War on Drugs. Only by combining the efforts of the international community can the United States hope to prevail in the War on Drugs.

The current military concept of interdiction and eradication in the overall national security strategy of supply side control of illicit drugs continues to fail domestically and internationally. The amount of resources the armed forces would need to police the worldwide production of drugs would bankrupt the American economy. In addition, it causes the shift of scarce resources from, domestic law enforcement and local agencies fighting the domestic consumption of drugs, to the Pentagon. Internationally, the United States military strategy criminalizes the peasant populations and militarizes regional governments that have threatened the liberties of the local people. The future strategy in the military’s role in the War on Drugs requires synchronization with an international effort that addresses money laundering infrastructure and economic development of source countries lower class populace. America must change its military and national strategy and re-embrace its role as a champion of freedom in the world, and not promote strategies that suppress the liberties of the poor for the intended or unintended enrichment of criminal organizations, international financiers and the Military Industrial Complex.

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