

THE WAR ON DRUGS

As the Nation has become increasingly aware of these problems and trends, efforts by the Federal Government to prevent drug abuse and trafficking have increased. Following the example of several predecessors, the President has declared war on drugs and has given the problem high visibility.

The national strategy for attacking the drug problem has five components: education, enforcement, treatment, research, and international cooperation. Efforts in each of these areas are expanding, but there is little evidence yet of success in the current war on drugs.

If the war on drugs is to be successful, the character of that war will need to be broadly understood. Perhaps the most important thing to recognize is that there will be no clean, clear victory. The enemy will not surrender, fold his tents, and return home. Understanding the challenge the Nation faces requires starting with the recognition that the drug problem is not new. Drug use has a long history in the United States. However, the relatively recent and large-scale use of cocaine seems to have triggered the latest declaration of war.

Thus, the war on drugs must be designed and executed with a recognition of the following factors:

- illegal drug use is woven into the fabric of the population,
- the population of drug users is large,
- there is literally a mass market, and
- the profits made from serving that market are very large.

The recent rapid growth in cocaine use has resulted in the development of a number of major new drug trafficking cartels with large financial resources and flexible and sophisticated delivery systems. When one adds these relatively recent cocaine cartels to the trafficking networks that supply the other drugs, the challenge faced is clearly formidable,

The networks that supply the Nation's drug users—the enemy in the war on drugs—is ill defined. While drug trafficking can be characterized as a system, it is a system made up of complex, decentralized, and infinitely flexible subsystems. Drug traffickers respond rapidly to pressure by using other strategies, routes, or delivery methods.

Evidence suggests that even when major law enforcement operations disrupt or eliminate particular drug trafficking arrangements the benefits are only temporary. The vacuum that is left is quickly filled by other drug traffickers. And, finally, at every level from production through processing, transportation, and marketing the drug trafficking system can be changed to avoid detection.

The starting point for an effective war, and, more specifically, an effective interdiction program is to know what effectiveness means. Effective interdiction requires a tight linkage between national goals, organizational arrangements, and strategies. It seems evident that the Nation's goals involve stopping the growth of drug abuse. Doubtless, the public wishes to do more than that: specifically, to reduce the extent and frequency of drug abuse. The ideal would be to eliminate drug abuse in the United States.

None of the goal statements by high-level national policy groups provide clear direction for drug interdiction agencies on where to set priorities. Rather they allow each agency to define its goals as it deems appropriate. Redefinition can occur at will. In sum, such goal statements allow the individual agencies to define their individual goals to fit their capabilities and programs and not vice versa.

Certain drugs have been considered more threatening than others at certain times. Priorities for particular drugs were established in the past. Such priorities have followed changing drug popularity and changing perceptions of the magnitude of the drug problem. At present the Administration specifically refrains from setting priorities for specific drugs. However, it is generally agreed that limited resources require that some problems be given more attention than others. Interdiction programs have therefore been focused more on those drugs and modes of smuggling where they appear to have the most success (i. e., maritime smuggling of marijuana and private air smuggling of cocaine) and less on those drugs and modes where success is questionable (e. g., port of entry smuggling of heroin). The drug enforcement agencies argue that it is more effective to counter heroin trafficking by means other than interdiction, but that interdiction is effective against marijuana trafficking.

OTA's investigation suggests that a successful war on drugs will require clear goals and a long sustained effort (decades). Evidence of success will

be difficult to obtain and interpret unless goals are fixed and long-range trends are measured.