

Reducing the Harms of Drug Prohibition in the Americas
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The failure of the war on drugs is practically conventional wisdom these days, not just in the United States but throughout much of the world. That this failure is not just past and present but also future is also acknowledged widely. Nowhere is this truer than in Latin America, where long simmering dissent is popping up in more corners than can be contained.

Drug policy discussions among policy makers and experts in the Americas used to conclude with a standard recitation of mutual agreement to cooperate on reducing supply in the South, reducing demand in the North, respecting sovereignty and making sure the drug issue stayed on the back burner, away from more pivotal bilateral and multilateral issues. Those recitations persist, but ring ever hollower.

Look at the evidence. The United States alone has spent hundreds of billions of dollars, incarcerated millions of people, seized many tons of illicit drugs and eradicated, directly or indirectly, hundreds of thousands of hectares (2.5 acres) both in Latin America and within its own borders -- just in the last decade. Eager to justify all this, U.S. officials point to declines in the number of people who admit to using cocaine or marijuana¹, cynically ignoring the evidence that serious drug abuse and other drug-related problems - - overdose deaths, new HIV and hepatitis infections, not to mention the health and social harms associated with the drug war – persist at levels far above those in other industrialized countries².

U.S. officials similarly boasted of dramatic declines in coca production in Bolivia and Peru a few years ago, notwithstanding the fact that Colombian producers instantly made up the difference³. Now they're boasting of declines in Colombia, even as production in Bolivia and Peru picks up⁴. A recent White House analysis reports that the retail prices

¹ Walters, John P. "Fiscal 2006 Budget." FDCH Congressional Testimony 10 Feb. 2005.

² Center for Disease Control and Prevention. "Diagnoses of HIV/AIDS—32 States 2000-2003." Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Available online at: <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5347a3.htm>; and European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. Annual Report 2003: The State of the Drugs Problem in the Acceding and Candidate Countries to the European Union. Lisboa, Portugal: EMCDDA, 2003.

³ Mack, James. "Andean Initiative." FDCH Congressional Testimony 28 June 2001.

⁴ Farrar, Jonathan D. "Plan Colombia." FDCH Congressional Testimony 11 May 2005.

of cocaine and heroin in the United States are at all time lows⁵. No one knows how much is stockpiled, and the market is increasingly global. It's like pushing on a balloon, some say. It's like stepping on mercury, say others. No surprise, say the economists: we're dealing with a global commodities market, not an infectious virus.

Latin American leaders are not blind to the consequences of the U.S. government's political myopia. Colombia over the past two decades has been like Chicago under Al Capone -- times fifty. Much the same can be said of Brazil's *favelas*, where urban drug lords hold most of the power. In Mexico, the names of the major traffickers, and those they intimidate, kill and corrupt, keep changing, but the stories stay the same. Poverty and desperation are mounting in Bolivia and Peru among *campesinos* striving to feed their families; ultimately they will plant whatever enables them to survive. The problems in Central America, the Caribbean and Ecuador are much the same.

What's the solution? Certainly not the "carrot and stick," as U.S. officials like to call it, of crop substitution and crop eradication. That's been a tried and true failure for decades, producing localized success stories that ultimately prove both ephemeral and irrelevant to the bigger picture. "We don't need *alternative* development," Latin Americans say. "We need economic development." True enough, but even that's no answer to the drug problem. If it were, the United States -- one of the world's most economically developed nations -- would not be one of the world's leading producers of marijuana and methamphetamine. Meanwhile, there's no better way today for a developing nation to attract development assistance from the U.N., the U.S. and other governments than to produce lots of illicit coca and opium. Some incentive!

More and more the unspeakable is spoken not just behind closed doors but out loud, and not just by intellectuals but by elected officials and other leaders. We all have drug problems, they are saying, but most of our drug problems -- the violence and corruption, the empowerment of organized criminals and distortion of economies, even the human rights abuses and environmental depredations -- are the results of the costly and futile prohibitionist policies effectively imposed on us by gringo power.

In June 1998 I drafted a public letter to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, published in *The New York Times*, which called on him to initiate a truly open and honest dialogue regarding the future of global drug control policies⁶. "We believe," the letter said, "the global war on drugs is causing more harm than drug abuse itself." The hundreds of signatories included former heads of government and distinguished ministers as well as Nobel laureates from around the world, but the list from Latin America was most striking. The signers included former presidents of Bolivia (Lidia Gueiler Tejada), Costa Rica (Nobel Laureate Oscar Arias), Colombia (Belisario Betancur), Guatemala (Ramiro

⁵ United States. Office of National Drug Control Policy. Executive Office of the President. [The Price and Purity of Illicit Drugs: 1981 Through the Second Quarter of 2003](#). Washington, D.C.:ONDCP, 2004.

⁶ Drug Policy Alliance. "Public Letter to Kofi Annan." Advertisement. [New York Times](#) 8 June 1998: A12-A13. Available online at: <http://www.drugpolicy.org/global/ungass/letter/>

de Leon Carpio), and Nicaragua (Violeta Barrios de Chamorro); former foreign ministers in Bolivia (Antonio Aranibar Quiroga), Colombia (Augusto Ramirez Ocampo), Peru (Allan Wagner), Venezuela (Simon Alberto Consalvi) and Nicaragua (the Sandinista, Miguel D'Escoto Brockman); the authors Isabel Allende and Ariel Dorfman from Chile as well as Argentina's Nobel Laureate, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, and Mario Vargas Llosa, the Peruvian writer and former presidential candidate; the former presidential minister of Ecuador, Washington Herrera; the former presidential candidate, now president, of Brazil, Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva; Jesus Silva Herzog, the former Mexican ambassador to the United States; as well as Diego Arria, former Venezuelan representative to the UN⁷.

Since that time, some Latin American leaders have gone even further, openly raising the issue of legalization even while in office. "Why don't we just legalize drugs?" Uruguay's president, Jorge Batlle, said in 2000.⁸ "The day that it is legalized in the United States, it will lose value. And if it loses value, there will be no profit." "My opinion," said Mexican President Vicente Fox in March 2001, "is that in Mexico it is not a crime to have a small dose of drugs in one's pocket. . . . But the day that the alternative of freeing the consumption of drugs from punishment comes, it will have to be done in the entire world because we are not going to win anything if Mexico does it, but the production and traffic of the drugs . . . to the United States continues. Thus, humanity will one day view it [legalization] as the best in this sense." "In the end," said Fox's former foreign minister, Jorge Castaneda, in 1999 shortly before joining the government, "legalization of certain substances may be the only way to bring prices down, and doing so may be the only remedy to some of the worst aspects of the drug plague: violence, corruption, and the collapse of the rule of law."⁹ "From the Colombian point of view," said Jaime Ruiz, senior adviser to President Pastrana, it's "the easy solution. I mean, just legalize it and we won't have any more problems. Probably in five years we wouldn't even have guerrillas. No problems. We [would] have a great country with no problems."¹⁰

These voices articulate a sentiment that is pervasive, and both perplexed and angered by the hypocrisy of the United States: global apostle of the free market in most cases but, when it comes to certain drugs, passionately committed to a sort of anti-economics that presumably had been discredited with the fall of communism. Indeed, U.S. drug policy can seem so absurd that many in Latin America assume it's not really about drugs but rather a cover for other economic and security interests, or simply another way to humiliate and subjugate weaker nations. Sometimes drug war strategies do dovetail with other U.S. interests -- such as the current desire to suppress leftist insurgents and protect oil supplies in Colombia -- but it's important for Latin Americans to realize that the

⁷ Drug Policy Alliance. "Public Letter to Kofi Annan." Advertisement. New York Times 8 June 1998: A12-A13. Available online at: <http://www.drugpolicy.org/global/ungass/sigs1/>

⁸ Clifford Krauss. "Uruguay's Chief is Frank (and Frankly Insulting)." New York Times. 11 January 2001: A8.

⁹ Jorge Castaneda. "How We Fight a Losing War." Newsweek. 6 September 1999: 31.

¹⁰ Russ Kick. "World Leaders on Dope." Village Voice. 5 June 2001: 36.

United States really is a bit crazy when it comes to drugs. The same quasi-religious faith in abstinence which produced alcohol Prohibition in the United States¹¹ remains vibrant today, but the "demon rum" of old has been replaced by marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine and whatever else tempts our teenagers and excites the media. The U.S. drug war may wreak proportionately greater harm on smaller countries, but the greatest victim in absolute terms is the United States.

The fellowship of reason when it comes to drug policy can make for the strangest of bedfellows. What do the Nobel Prize economist, Milton Friedman¹², and the Republican former U.S. Secretary of both Treasury and State, George Shultz¹³, have in common with political leftists like Bolivia's Evo Morales¹⁴ or Lula in Brazil¹⁵? They all think that U.S. drug policy is doing far more harm than good. The funny thing is that Friedman and Shultz are more radical in their proposed solutions.

But no matter how much sense legalization makes for Latin America, it's politically inconceivable now and for the foreseeable future. No one country -- indeed no group of countries -- could realistically legalize cocaine or heroin unilaterally. To do so would be to invite pariah status among the society of nations, and to be subject to potentially draconian sanctions.

Most Latin Americans I know simply throw up their hands in frustration. Let's pray, they say, for the emergence of new synthetic drugs that will eliminate the demand for the region's illicit exports. But that prayer has been uttered, and gone unanswered, for decades already. Even the spread of Ecstasy, methamphetamine and synthetic opiates in the U.S. and elsewhere has offered no relief to Latin America.

Clearly there are no easy answers, no quick solutions. But that does not mean there are no alternatives but despair. Let me suggest ten steps that might prove productive.

First, open the debate! U.S. government officials work hard at keeping it closed, both within the United States and outside. Expert reports are suppressed, conferences

¹¹ James A. Morone, Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003: 281-344.

¹² Milton Friedman and Thomas Szasz. Friedman and Szasz on Liberty and Drugs: Essays on the Free Market and Prohibition. Washington, D.C.: Drug Policy Foundation Press, 1992.; Friedman, Milton. "A War We're Losing." Editorial. Wall Street Journal 7 Mar. 1991: A14.; and Friedman, Milton. "There's No Justice in the War on Drugs." Editorial. New York Times 11 Jan. 1998: A19.

¹³ George W. Shultz. Editorial. Wall Street Journal 27 Oct. 1989: A16.

¹⁴ Fiona Smith, "Bolivian Presidential Candidate Says He Would Oppose U.S.-backed Coca Eradication." Associated Press 21 Sept. 2005, BC cycle.

¹⁵ Drug Policy Alliance. "Public Letter to Kofi Annan." Advertisement. New York Times 8 June 1998: A12-A13. Available online at: <http://www.drugpolicy.org/global/ungass/letter/>

cancelled, critics uninvited and disinvented¹⁶. U.N. agencies, the OAS and other international organizations dare not engage the real issues, while the U.S. drug czar studiously avoids debate with informed critics. U.S. officials fear that to allow criticism of U.S. policies will be to legitimize those criticisms, and the smarter ones know that the policies themselves are indefensible. But Latin Americans need not go along with this censorship campaign. Better policies will flow from more vigorous, open and informed debate.

Second, keep in mind that better cooperation among law enforcement and other agencies is nice, but ultimately irrelevant to addressing the more fundamental problems. Indeed, the constant focus on "improving cooperation" may well be counterproductive insofar as it distracts policy makers from focusing on the substance rather than the process of drug policy. Police, prosecutors and others involved in enforcing drug laws are often the last ones to think critically about those laws. Many instinctively support those laws, and habitually advocate for new criminal laws to improve their capacity to enforce old laws, without ever asking how or why the laws were enacted in the first place, whether they still make sense, or whether those laws might actually be doing more harm than good. That's not their job, after all.

Third, know the history of how and why Latin American nations embraced drug prohibition in the first place.¹⁷ Those who look will find that many drug laws were enacted not in response to domestic drug abuse problems, but rather in response to pressures from the U.S. government. They will find that no studies were commissioned to try to determine the likely impact of prohibiting drugs that almost no one was consuming at the time. And they will find that the supposedly scientific claims made about coca and marijuana when they were criminalized in local laws and included in global anti-drug conventions decades ago were grounded not in real science but in pseudo-science, racism and prejudice.

Fourth, change the rhetoric. The war on drugs is not a policy to control drug markets and drug use. It's a prohibition policy, just like alcohol Prohibition was in the United States. It represents not the maximum form of regulation but rather the abdication of regulation, effectively putting whatever cannot be suppressed into the hands and pockets of those willing and able to profit from the black market. Prohibition ended in 1933 because most Americans made a clear distinction between the problems of alcohol misuse -- which they initially hoped Prohibition would solve -- and the problems generated by Prohibition itself. They came to understand that Prohibition had not only failed to reduce alcohol problems, but had generated an entire other set of problems: violence, organized crime,

¹⁶ Transnational Institute. "Coca, Cocaine and the International Conventions." TNI Drug Policy Briefing. 5 (April 2003): 3.; and Nadelmann, Ethan. "Commonsense Drug Policy." Foreign Affairs 77.1 (January/February 1998): 124-125. Available online at: <http://www.drugpolicy.org/library/foreign1.cfm>

¹⁷ Paul Gootenberg, ed., Cocaine: Global histories (New York: NY Routledge, 1999): 46-79; 183-191 and Joseph Gagliano, Coca Prohibition in Peru: The Historical Debates (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1994).

corruption, booming black markets, escalating disrespect for the law, and even more deadly black market alcohol.¹⁸

People need to make that same distinction today. U.S. officials like to talk about one big "drug problem" to obscure the fact that so many of today's drug problems, especially in Latin America, are the results not of drugs per se but of prohibition. Latin American governments may have no choice today but to collaborate in this failed policy, but at least they can start changing the rhetoric of their collaboration. We are committed, they might say, to assisting the U.S. in enforcing its "drug prohibition" policies. When mainstream media start referring to drug policy as "drug prohibition," and start distinguishing between the harms of drugs and the harms of prohibition, not just in their editorials but also in their journalistic coverage, that will mark the beginning of the end of the war on drugs.

Fifth, keep your eyes on Canada, where the drug policy debate has evolved rapidly in recent years. A Canadian Senate commission called for legalizing cannabis and other major drug policy reforms;¹⁹ a Parliamentary commission subsequently offered its own, somewhat more cautious, recommendations for reforms²⁰; and even the prime minister said it's time for change.²¹ Canadian cities are debating and adopting the sorts of harm reduction measures that western Europe pioneered in the 1990s.²² If Canada can do it, so can Mexico, Brazil, and others. It shouldn't be so hard to insist that drug policies be grounded in science, health and economic common sense, not prejudice, fear and abstinence-only ideology.

Sixth, recognize and embrace the potential alliance -- both political and conceptual -- not just with Canada but also growing parts of Europe as well as Australia, New Zealand and

¹⁸ David E. Kyvig, Repealing national prohibition, 2nd ed. (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2000): 26-27; 74-74; 112-113.

¹⁹ Canada, Senate Special Committee on Illegal Drugs, Cannabis: Our Position for a Canadian Public Policy - Report of the Senate Special Committee on Illegal Drugs (Ottawa: Senate of Canada, 2002). Available online at:

http://www.parl.gc.ca/common/Committee_SenRep.asp?Language=E&Parl=37&Ses=1&comm_id=85

²⁰ Canada, House of Commons Special Committee on Non-Medical Use of Drugs, Policy for the Millenium: Working Together to Redefine Canada's Drug Strategy: Interim Report of The Special Committee on Non-medical Use of Drugs, (Ottawa: House of Commons of Canada, 2002). Available online at: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/infocomdoc/37/2/SNUD/Studies/Reports/snudrp01/snudrp01-e.pdf>

²¹ Tom Cohen, "Canada proposes decriminalizing possession of small amounts of marijuana," Associated Press. 28 May 2003.

²² MacPherson, Donald; Rowley, Mary-Louise.

A framework for action: A four-pillar approach to drug problems in Vancouver: Prevention, treatment, enforcement, harm reduction, (Vancouver, Canada: City of Vancouver, 2000). Available online at:

<http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/planning/dtes/pdf/frameworkforaction.pdf>; Donald

MacPherson, Donald, Zarina Mulla, Lindsey Richardson, Theresa Beer, Preventing Harm from Psychoactive Substance Use (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2005). Available online at:

http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/fourpillars/pdf/preventingharm_report.pdf

others. These parts of the world were quick to adopt "harm reduction" policies in the 1980s and early 1990s to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS by and among injecting drug users. These policies included making sterile syringes more readily available to reduce addicts' needle sharing, expanding methadone and other treatment, establishing research programs to provide pharmaceutical heroin to addicts unable to quit, and working directly with drug users to reduce overdoses as well as anti-social behavior.²³ By and large, those countries that embraced harm reduction were more successful in reducing HIV/AIDS, hepatitis and other infectious diseases, as well as drug-related criminality and dysfunction, than those countries that did not.²⁴ One now finds more and more support for harm reduction in Brazil, Argentina and other Latin American countries in response to their own growing problems with illicit drug use.²⁵

The notion of harm reduction originated as a public health approach to reduce the harms of drug use by and among people unable or unwilling to stop using drugs. But today harm reduction is often defined more broadly as a strategic approach to reduce the negative consequences of both drug use and drug prohibition, acknowledging that neither is likely to disappear in the immediate future. Implicit in this approach is the recognition that treating drugs first and foremost as a criminal problem generates more harm than good. Therein lies the commonality of perspective between those countries where the most deadly aspect of drug policy is the spread of HIV/AIDS and those where organized crime, violence and corruption represent the principal harms. In 1985, the conservative government of Margaret Thatcher concluded that "the spread of HIV is a greater danger to individual and public health than drug misuse."²⁶ Accordingly, services which aim to minimise HIV risk behaviour by all available means should take precedence in

²³ Robert J. MacCoun, Peter Reuter, Drug War Heresies: Learning from other vices, times, and places (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 265-299; Robert L. Hubbard, Drug abuse treatment: A national study of effectiveness (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Gerry V. Stimson, Don C. Des Jarlais, Andrew L. Ball eds. World Health Organization, Drug injecting and HIV infection: Global dimensions and local responses (Bristol, PA: UCL Press, 1998): 149-182; 183-200.

²⁴ World Health Organization, Programme on substance abuse: Multi-city study on drug injecting and risk of HIV infection; a report prepared on behalf of the WHO International Collaborative Group (Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, 1994): 459-473; Erich Goode, Between politics and reason: The drug legalization debate (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1997):126.; Nicky Metrebian, William Shanahan, Brian Wells, Gerry V. Stimson. "Feasibility of prescribing injectable heroin and methadone to opiate-dependent drug users: Associated health gains and harm reductions," Medical Journal of Australia 168 (1998): 596-600. Available online at: <http://www.mja.com.au/public/issues/jun15/mtrebn/mtrebn.html>

²⁵ Hilary L. Surratt, Paulo R. Telles, "The Harm reduction movement in Brazil: Issues and experiences," in: James A. Inciardi, Lana D. Harrison, eds. Harm reduction: National and international perspectives (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000) 137-154; Transnational Institute Drugs and Democracy Programme, A Pointless war: Drugs and violence in Brazil (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, 2004) 20-21. Available online at: <http://www.tni.org/reports/drugs/debate11.htm>; Linda Hutchinson-Jafar, "HIV/AIDS continues to increase in Caribbean," Miami Times 25 Dec. 2001: 6A.

²⁶ United Kingdom. Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. Aids and drug misuse, Part I (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1988): 17.

development programs." The time is well past for Latin American leaders to reach a comparable conclusion: that the harms of drug prohibition represent a greater danger to Latin American societies than drug misuse, and that efforts to reduce those harms should take precedence in government policies.

The implications for Latin America are many, but perhaps the principal one is the opportunity to think afresh about the best ways to deal with coca and cocaine. Is there a middle ground between the outright prohibition that has wreaked such havoc and the outright legalization that seems politically impossible anytime soon? Consider the Dutch "coffeeshop" system, which emerged as a *de facto* model of regulating retail sales of cannabis notwithstanding the *de jure* prohibition,²⁷ or recent Swiss advances in trying to license the production and distribution of cannabis,²⁸ or the proliferation of heroin maintenance trials in Europe and now Canada to reduce the harms of illicit heroin addiction.²⁹ None provide specific answers for dealing with coca and cocaine in the South American context, but both can provide inspiration and stimulation for designing models of *de facto* regulation.

Seventh, step up efforts to re-legitimize and legalize the production, sale and consumption of coca-based products, i.e., products containing small amounts of cocaine. Millions of people in Bolivia and Peru chew coca daily, a process which releases a slow drip of cocaine into the body.³⁰ The World Health Organization has concluded that coca chewing is not harmful, and may even be beneficial, to one's health.³¹ Millions of others consume coca teas and tonics and other coca-based products. There are good reasons to believe that these products, including lozenges and gums, could sell well internationally,

²⁷ A. C. M. Jansen. "The development of a "legal" consumers' market for cannabis: The "coffee shop" phenomenon." In: E. Leuw, IHaen Marshall Eds., Between prohibition and legalization: The Dutch experiment in drug policy (New York: Kugler Publications, 1996): 169-181.

²⁸ "Cannabis report of the Swiss Federal Commission for Drug Issues (EKFD)" Switzerland. Swiss Federal Commission for Drug Issues. 1999. Available online at <http://www.drugpolicy.org/docUploads/cannabise.pdf>

²⁹ North American Opiate Medication Initiative. "Backgrounder." September 2005. Available online at: http://www.naomistudy.ca/pdfs/naomi_background.pdf; Ambros Uchtenhagen, Anja Dobler-Mikola, T. Steffen; et al. Prescription of narcotics for heroin addicts: Main results of the Swiss National Cohort Study (New York: Karger, 1999); Wim Van den Brink, et al. Medical Co-Prescription of Heroin: Two Randomized Controlled Trials. Utrecht: Central Committee on the Treatment of Heroin Addicts (CCBH), 2002. Available online at: <http://www.ccbh.nl/ENG/index.htm>; Bing Spear and Joy Mott. Heroin Addiction, Care and Control: The British System. (London: Drugscope, 2002).

³⁰ Transnational Institute. "Broken Promises And Coca Eradication In Peru." TNI Drug Policy Briefing. 11. (March 2005): 2. Available online at: <http://www.tni.org/policybriefings/brief11.pdf>; United Nations, Office on Drugs and Crime, World drug report 2004: Volume 2: Statistics. ([New York]: Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004). Available online at: http://www.unodc.org/pdf/WDR_2004/volume_2.pdf

³¹ Phillip O. Coffin, "Coca eradication," Foreign Policy In Focus 3.29: (1998): 1-4. Available in full text at Foreign Policy In Focus <http://www.fpif.org/briefs/vol3/v3n29coca.html>

and that they would prove no more addictive, and possibly even less harmful, than the caffeinated products with which they would compete. It's time for a PR campaign to "put the coca back in Coca Cola."

The ban on international trade in coca-based products has no basis in science.³² Recent scholarship on the use and criminalization of coca and cocaine in the United States a century ago makes clear that neither the anti-drug rhetoric of the day nor the criminal laws that followed distinguished between the most potent forms of cocaine, with their higher potential for misuse, and the essentially benign coca-based and low potency cocaine products that presented few if any problems.³³ The current U.S. prohibition on importing coca tea and other coca-based products, no matter how benign, like the U.S. ban on cultivating hemp (which is legal in dozens of countries) and selling hemp-based food products reveal the quasi-religious nature of U.S. drug prohibitions and the global drug prohibition regime.³⁴

Eighth, understand that the international anti-drug conventions do not present insurmountable obstacles to reform.³⁵ European governments have become increasingly creative and bold in interpreting these treaties to accommodate their own drug reform innovations. But there's also a growing recognition that the prohibitionist elements of the anti-drug conventions represent part of the problem, not part of the solution. These conventions ultimately need to be revised, if not abandoned, but that process can begin with creative interpretations of the current treaties as well as exceptions to their more problematic provisions.

Ninth, don't despair on prospects for reform in the United States, notwithstanding Congress's blind enthusiasm for tossing money down this particular sinkhole. More and more conservatives think the Bush administration's drug policy is a reckless waste of

³² Joseph A. Gagliano, Coca prohibition in Peru: The historical debates (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1994): 119-139.; Paul Gootenberg, ed. Cocaine: Global histories (New York: Routledge, 1999): 21-45; 46-82.

³³ Joseph F. Spillane, Cocaine: From medical marvel to modern menace in the United States, 1884-1920 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins U. Press, 2000).

³⁴ Ronald K. Siegel, Mahmoud A. Elsohly, Timothy Plowman, et al; "Cocaine in herbal tea," Journal of the American Medical Association 255.1(1986): 40.; Rawson, Jean M. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, Hemp as an agricultural commodity. Congressional Research Service. 5 Jan 2005. Available in full text at the Federation of American Scientists <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/RL32725.pdf>

³⁵ Cindy S. J. Fazey, "The Commission on Narcotic Drugs and the United Nations International Drug Control Programme: politics, policies and prospect for change," International Journal of Drug Policy 14.2 (2003): 155-169.; David R. Bewley-Taylor, "Challenging the UN drug control conventions: problems and possibilities," International Journal of Drug Policy 14.2 (2003): 171-179.; Craig Reinman, "Geo-political and cultural constraints on international drug control treaties," International Journal of Drug Policy 14.2 (2003): 205-208. These three articles available in full text at Science Direct <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/09553959>

money as well, and some also see it as stupid, cruel and counterproductive as well.³⁶ A growing drug policy reform movement in the United States is proving increasingly successful in reforming state and local drug laws and blocking new drug war initiatives in Congress. Budget crises in many states have generated pressures to cut back on foolish luxuries like the war on drugs.³⁷ The war on drugs costs roughly \$40 billion per year -- a lot of money, even in the United States.³⁸ Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld says the drug problem is primarily about reducing demand, not supply.³⁹ The Pentagon, FBI and CIA are all cutting back on drug enforcement and shifting their focus to terrorism.⁴⁰ Change is afoot.

Tenth, start to act and think strategically within Latin America. I suspect that if someone convened a meeting of all the Latin American presidents and prime ministers and foreign ministers -- past and present -- who have thought, whispered or proclaimed that the drug war is a destructive sham, and that legalization or some other fundamental alternative probably makes the most sense, the room would be standing room only. Invite other cabinet ministers as well as leaders from the Caribbean, and you'd probably need an auditorium.

Such a meeting would likely reveal that this viewpoint represents not a deviant, minority perspective but actually a majoritarian sentiment among regional leaders. There's often

³⁶ "Secretary Colin Powell states more important than winning the drug war is controlling demand by Americans." CBS Evening News. CBS Television. 26 April 2001.; "The Right Angle." Poz Magazine June 2001. Available online at http://www.poz.com/articles/189_1199.shtml; Leslie Linthicum, "Former Governor enjoying life, may not be done with politics," Associated Press April 28, 2004; William F. Buckley, Jr, "Free Weeds," National Review Online 29 June 2004. Available online at: <http://www.nationalreview.com/script/printpage.p?ref=/buckley/buckley200406291207.asp>. "Rep. Hinchey, Rohrabacher, Supreme Court plaintiff Raich, others call for House passage of medical marijuana amendment to protect patients." US Fed News. 14 June 2005.

³⁷ "Proposed FY 2006 Federal Drug Control Budget Reduces or Eliminates Funding for Many State-Level Programs," CESAR Fax. Univ. of Maryland, College Park. 14.15 (2005).; "The Federal Drug Budget." Carnevale Associates. Feb. 2005. Available online at http://www.carnevaleassociates.com/CA_PB-FY2006_Drug_Budget.pdf

³⁸ United States, Office of National Drug Control Policy, National Drug Control Strategy: FY 2006 Budget Summary (Washington, D.C.: Office of National Drug Control Policy, 2005). Available online at <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/publications/policy/06budget/>; National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University (CASA), Shoveling up: The impact of substance abuse on state budgets (New York: National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, 2001). Available online at <http://www.casacolumbia.org/pdshopprov/files/47299a.pdf>

³⁹ Rumsfeld, Donald. "Hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee: The nomination of Donald Rumsfeld to be Secretary of Defense." Federal News Service. 11 Jan. 2001.

⁴⁰ FY06 Budget Priorities, United States Office of Management and Budget. Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/fy2006/budget.html>; Kelly Thornton, "In terror's shadow; Anti-drug efforts have taken a hit as the fight against terrorism has siphoned away money and personnel," San Diego Union-Tribune 31 July, 2005, final: A12.; Dan Eggen, "New FBI Cases Down Since 2001; Drop Reflects Anti-Terrorism Focus," Washington Post 4 October 2005.

power, moreover, and courage, in numbers. It's one thing for the U.S. government to attack individual leaders who say the drug war is like the emperor's new clothes. It's quite another when the sentiment is expressed collectively.

I don't think much will change in Latin America until that meeting happens, but it could prove catalytic when it does. The global drug prohibition regime that evolved over the past century is rotten to its core. It took the AIDS pandemic to provoke even modest reforms, but now support for public health measures grounded in harm reduction principles is blossoming worldwide, not just in Europe but even in China, Vietnam and Iran.⁴¹ No one, meanwhile, knows what to do about Afghanistan, whose illicit drug economy rivals and possibly exceeds anything found in the Americas. But it is Latin America that possesses both the moral standing and the critical mass of political leadership needed to force a fundamental re-thinking of global drug policy in the 21st century.

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⁴¹ Jim Yardley, "Chinese City Emerges as Model in Nation's Effort to Reverse Once Abysmal AIDS Record," *New York Times* 16 June 2005, final: A17.; Alex Dominguez, "Chinese official tours Baltimore needle exchange program," *Associated Press* 22 July 2005.; "WHO official praises Vietnam's HIV/AIDS strategy" *BBC Monitoring International Reports* 3 April 2005.; Karl Vick, "AIDS Crisis Brings Radical Change In Iran's Response to Heroin Use; Health Concerns Given Precedence Over Prosecution," *Washington Post* 5 July 2005, final: A9.