

Congressman Ron Paul U.S. House of Representatives June 28, 2002

Unintended Consequences of the Drug War Mr. Speaker, I highly recommend the attached article "Unintended Consequences" by Thomas G. Donlan, from Barron's magazine, to my colleagues. This article provides an excellent explanation of the way current federal drug policy actually encourages international terrorist organizations, such as Al Queda, to use the drug trade to finance their activities. Far from being an argument to enhance the war on drugs, the reliance of terrorist organizations upon the drug trade is actually one more reason to reconsider current drug policy. Terrorist organizations are drawn to the drug trade because federal policy still enables drug dealers to reap huge profits from dealing illicit substances. As Mr. Donlan points out, pursuing a more rational drug policy would remove the exorbitant profits from the drug trade and thus remove the incentive for terrorists to produce and sell drugs.

In conclusion, I once again recommend Mr. Donlan's article to my colleagues. I hope the author's explanation of how the war on drugs is inadvertently strengthening terrorist organizations will lead them to embrace a more humane, constitutional and rational approach to dealing with the legitimate problems associated with drug abuse.

From Barron's, June 24, 2002 UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES By Thomas G. Donlan

It's harvest time in Afghanistan. While the delegates to its grand council, the loya jurga, met under the great tent in Kabul and grudgingly acknowledged Hamid Karza as the president of a "transitional government," the impoverished farmers of Afghanistan reaped the rewards of their best cash crop, the despised opium poppy.

A few months ago, newspaper correspondents reported that the American proconsuls in Afghanistan had abandoned their hopes of reducing the opium harvest. They had considered buying the crop or paying farmers to destroy their poppies, but concluded that in the lawless Afghan hinterland they would simply be paying a bonus for non-delivery.

Karzai's previous "interim administration" had banned opium production, but its writ did not run many miles beyond the city of Kabul. Warlords and provincial governors did as they pleased,

and they were pleased to tax the opium trade and indeed participate in it as traders and transporters and protectors.

That's what the Taliban did for most of the years that the mullahs ruled and protected the al Qaeda terrorist network. In 2000, Afghanistan accounted for 71% of the world's opium supply. (Opium in turn is the building block for heroin, which most drug-fighters believe takes the greatest human toll and provides the greatest profit in the whole illicit industry.)

In 2001, the Taliban decreed an end to opium cultivation, not so much to carry favor with the West but to maintain the price: A bumper crop provided enough for two years of commerce. Indeed, the Taliban and al Qaeda may have earned more from their stockpiles in 2001 than they did from high production in 2000.

"As ye sow, so shall ye reap." The Biblical passage is an apt reminder that America's undercover agents nurtured Islamic fundamentalism to strengthen Afghan resistance to the Soviet Union. We reaped chaos in Afghanistan and a corps of well-trained fanatics bent on our destruction. America has also sown a war on drugs, and those same fanatics have harvested the profits.

This was not what we intended. Nor did we intend to let huge profits earned by terrorists and common criminals be used to corrupt police in every country where the trade reaches, including our own. Nor did we intend to put hundreds of thousands of Americans in prison for their participation in the drug trade. Nor did we intend to create periodic drug scarcities that turn addicts to crime to pay for their habits.

But all those things are unintended consequences of the war on drugs. Drug use is eventually a self-punishing mistake; the drug war turns out to be the same.

Now the war on drugs and the war on terrorism are beginning to look like two currents in a single river. Nearly half of the international terrorist groups on the State Department's list are involved in drug trafficking, either to raise money for their political aims or because successful drug commerce requires a ruthlessness indistinguishable from terrorism.

The currents don't always run together: The FBI and other federal law enforcement agencies acknowledge that the extra resources they are devoting to the detection and apprehension of terrorists are not new resources; the money agents and equipment come to the war on terror at the expense of the war on drugs.

In the domestic war on drugs, officials are trying to make the two currents serve their purposes. The government runs TV ads portraying young Americans confessing, "I killed grandmas. I killed daughters. I killed firemen. I killed policemen," and then warning the viewers, "Where do terrorists get their money? If you buy drugs, some of it may come from you."

Bummer.

Like they wanted to do that? The buyers of drugs would be perfectly happy to buy them in a clean, well-lit store at reasonable prices, with the profits heavily taxed to support schools, medical benefits, or any other legitimate function of government- even police. That's how they buy cigarettes and liquor, neither of which finances international terrorists. (In a current prosecution, smuggling cigarettes from low-tax North Carolina to high-tax Michigan allegedly raised \$1,500 for an alleged affiliate of Hamas. But big violence needs bigger sums from more lucrative sources.)

It was bad when drug laws gave the Mafia an opportunity to do big business. It was worse when the laws encouraged Colombian and Mexican drug cartels to obtain aircraft and heavy weapons. Now that the drug laws provide profits to people who want to kill Americans wholesale instead of retail, it's time to change the laws.

Using drugs is stupid enough; making the users finance international terrorists is even more foolish.