

New book edited by UCSD professor Peter Smith recommends sweeping new changes in U.S. drug policy, finds many existing programs wasteful

October 23, 1992

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NEW BOOK EDITED BY UCSD PROFESSOR RECOMMENDS SWEEPING NEW CHANGES IN U.S. DRUG POLICY, FINDS MANY EXISTING PROGRAMS WASTEFUL

Newly published research provides conclusive support for a radical change in U.S. drug control policy, which now allocates \$8.5 billion for law enforcement, border interdiction, and other international activities aimed at curtailing the supply of illicit drugs. Well under half that amount -- only \$3.2 billion -- is being spent on drug rehabilitation and education awareness programs.

"Our studies offer hard evidence in favor of reversing these priorities," said Peter H. Smith, editor of "Drug Policy in the Americas," (Westview Press, 1992) and director of the Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies (CILAS) at the University of California, San Diego. "After three years of intensive research and analysis," he added, "we conclude that governments should redirect their energies away from supply control and toward antidrug education, prevention, and treatment programs, strategies which have proven to be the most effective for curtailing drug use."

The U.S. government, Smith argued, should terminate or reduce programs that are ineffective. That means taking funding that is being used for interdiction of drug supplies in U.S. border areas and rechanneling it into efforts to reduce consumer demand for illicit drugs.

"The evidence clearly shows that the paramilitary 'war on drugs' has been expensive and counterproductive," said Smith. "It also shows that treatment, rehabilitation, and education offer sound alternatives."

Besides having little impact on the retail price and availability of illicit drugs in the United States, interdiction efforts may have the unintended consequence of eliciting more production, thus increasing social and political problems for Latin America.

The heart of the drug problem, Smith explained, is the continuing demand for illicit drugs in the U.S., especially among disadvantaged groups in the inner cities. Also troubling is rising consumption in Latin America of such dangerous substances as adulterated cocaine, airplane glue, and paint thinner. "For precisely this reason," said Smith, "we need to develop a strategy for international collaboration to reduce demand for drugs."

Most encouraging, Smith said, is the fact that high-level policymakers are starting to take note of these new research findings. John Conyers, a congressman from Michigan, and Irving Tragen, a top official at the Organization of American States, both have issued strong endorsements in favor of the book and its policy recommendations. Prominent leaders from Latin America -including cabinet-level officials from Mexico, Central America, Columbia, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil and Argentina -- have also expressed support for the book's general thesis.

"Drug Policy in the Americas" provides the perspectives of some of the world's leading specialists from Latin America and the U.S. on national and regional drug policies. The book includes an analysis of the illicit drug market, the impact of the "war on drugs," the importance of therapy and treatment, and some novel perspectives on the idea of legalization.

"There is a strong intellectual case to be made in favor of legalizing marijuana," Smith reported. "We cannot say the same for cocaine, heroin, or most synthetic drugs."

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