

It has been four decades since President Nixon declared “war on drugs” in 1971, yet the Drug War shows no sign of ending and in many ways is getting worse.

Drug imports from Latin America are at record levels. Opium production in Afghanistan – which provides much of the world’s supply – is at the highest level ever. Huge drug profits are corrupting entire governments: Mexico is rapidly become a “narco-state” ruled by vicious drug gangs. In the U.S. powerful and deadly drug gangs continue to operate in many U.S. cities and towns. At the same time, our police and legal system have been corrupted by huge drug profits.

Internationally, thousands of U.S. troops are now fighting a literal war on drugs, particularly in Latin America. However, despite spending billions on bombs and deadly pesticides, they have had little success in curtailing drug production.

What’s the solution to our drug nightmare?

Increasingly people favor legalizing most drugs. In much of Europe, penalties for drug use are much lighter than in the U.S., and clinics provide safe, prescription-grade narcotics to hard-core drug users, making both them and the public much safer.

In the U.S. medical marijuana is now legal in 28 states, and recreational pot is now legal in DC and eight states: Alaska, California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Nevada, Oregon and Washington. A majority of Americans now say they favor marijuana legalization and more and more favor the legalization of other drugs.

However, the federal government and some states remain committed to a brutal War on Drugs: Over the last 40 years, federal and state governments have spent over \$1 trillion on the War. Since 1980, the number of Americans imprisoned for drug law violations has soared from 50,000 to over 500,000. And the war on drugs may soon get much worse.

President Trump and Attorney General Jeff Sessions have announced their intention to step up federal attacks on *all* illegal drug use and push for even harsher penalties for drug users. That means more closed marijuana clinics . . . more violent federal drug raids . . . more patients denied medical marijuana . . . and more families torn apart.

It’s clear that our 40 year Drug War has been lost. The reason is simple: We have been fighting the wrong enemy: We have been told that the cause of our drug nightmare is drug sellers and users. The real cause is *drug criminalization*.

Prohibition Revisited

The War on Drugs is not the first time the US government has tried to save Americans from themselves. In 1919, the 18th Amendment to the Constitution prohibited the manufacture of alcoholic beverages. Suddenly responsible Americans who just wanted a drink, were turned into criminals. Respectable bars became underground speakeasies, and legitimate liquor manufacturers were replaced by criminal bootleggers.

Gang shoot-outs became common. There was massive bribery of police and judges. Bootleggers paid little attention to quality, and some consumers went blind or died from tainted products.

Eventually politicians were forced to admit the futility of trying to legislate morality. Liquor *was* harmful – but liquor prohibition was even worse. In 1933, Prohibition was repealed.

Violence and the Social Costs of Drugs

Today, liquor is legal and there are no longer any shoot-outs over kegs of beer or barrels of gin. However, the disastrous consequences of alcohol prohibition are being repeated with drug prohibition.

The more the government suppresses drug use, the more drug-related violence increases. Drug criminalization results in huge black-market profits and the domination of the drug trade by criminal gangs.

Thousands of social drug users have also had their lives needlessly destroyed by drug prohibition. A single arrest can result in hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees, and destroy a career or family. But no matter how many Americans are arrested for drug use, no matter how many middle-class users lose their homes and jobs, drug prohibition cannot succeed.

Drugs are still readily available in many prisons. If brutal repression cannot keep drugs out of *prisons*, then turning our entire country into a prison will not keep drugs off of our streets.

How Dangerous Are Illegal Drugs?

The violence associated with illegal drugs is certainly real, but how great is their medical danger? Each year, over 88,000 Americans die from alcohol abuse. Over 480,000 die from cigarette-related illnesses. Less than 16,000 die from illegal drugs – and many of these deaths are related to drug adulteration. Unlike tobacco and alcohol, marijuana – the most commonly-used illegal drug – is not addicting, and there has never been a case

recorded of anyone dying from a marijuana overdose.

Eliminating illegal drugs may be impossible: The desire to “get high” seems to be as fundamental as the sex drive – and is nearly as pervasive. The most humane policy would be to honestly educate people about the risks of drugs, encourage moderation, and make sure that intoxicants are as safe as possible. However, such policies are made impossible by the criminalization of drugs.

Today, over 130 million Americans use illegal drugs occasionally – particularly marijuana. The vast majority are *not* addicts or criminals, but moderate social users. The few who really *are* addicts deserve our compassion and help, not persecution and imprisonment.

Inhumanity of the Drug War

Poor, largely black and Hispanic, inner-city communities are particularly sad victims of the War on Drugs. Few poor teenagers will take entry-level jobs at \$10 or \$12 an hour when they can make thousands a week selling drugs. Failing to acquire job skills early in life, they may end up as criminals or on welfare their entire adult lives.

Other victims of the War on Drugs are middle-class Americans fired from their jobs for casual drug use; children treated like criminals in schools and subjected to intrusive searches; glaucoma and cancer victims denied medical marijuana; and middle-class families torn apart when the primary breadwinner is imprisoned or their homes, cars, and bank accounts are confiscated.

The War on Drugs Is a War on Liberty

Our proudest heritage as Americans is our freedom to live our lives as we see fit, so long as we don’t harm others. That birthright has been ravaged in the name of winning the War on Drugs. Under Zero Tolerance policies, which target casual drug users, police confiscate cars, homes, bank accounts and businesses *without trial* from thousands of innocent people every month.

The U.S. War on Drugs is also destroying many countries. In South America, U.S. drug warriors provide repressive regimes with training, support and gunships to attack the field and villages of farmers accused of growing drugs. Thousands of innocent men, women and children have been killed or crippled by these raids. The most lasting result of these brutal tactics has been to make the U.S. hated and turn drug lords into local heroes.

Many Benefits of Drug Legalization

Would drug legalization result in major increases in

drug usage? In Holland, Belgium and other European countries which have *de facto* legalized drugs, drug use increased only slightly while crime, drug overdoses, and drug-related deaths fell dramatically.

Drug legalization also ends the “forbidden fruit” appeal of illegal drugs. It eliminates huge profits for drug dealers and the incentive to sell drugs to minors. It ends the hype, hysteria, and murderous insanity that are the handmaidens of prohibition.

For over 150 years, all drugs *were* legal in the U.S. George Washington grew hemp (marijuana). Cocaine was one of the original ingredients of Coca-Cola. In the 19th Century, thousands of productive Americans regularly used drugs that are now illegal, even while they held regular jobs. Before the war on drugs, there was no U.S. drug nightmare.

Ending Our Drug Nightmare

For decades, the government has been waging a futile, violent, and enormously expensive war on drug users. With every new crackdown, drug violence and brutality have increased, and our freedom has declined. If all drugs are legalized, drug use would become just another vice, like smoking or drinking.

Legalization would end most drug violence, brutalization of drug users, destruction of families and communities, corruption of police, clogging of courts and prisons, and most deaths from drug overdoses. Legalization would free social resources for compassionate treatment of addicts

Illegal drugs should be legalized not because drugs are good or beneficial, but because drugs do less harm to our lives, communities, and our humanity, than drug *prohibition*.

Drug use without repression is a tolerable evil. An endless and futile War on Drugs is an intolerable assault upon the very essence of America.

The War on Drugs is the cause of our drug nightmare, not the solution to it. It's time to declare drug peace. America will be safe only when we are once more free, and drugs are legal.

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Time to Declare Drug Peace



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drug nightmare that will
make us all much safer**

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