WHAT IS OURS TO DEFEND?
A Military Strategy for the 1990s
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Drug Problems

As chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives' Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control, I read with interest the forum "What Is Our Drug Problem?" [Harper's Magazine, December 1985]. While I concur with many of the observations made by the participants, I find some of the rhetoric and alternatives to be deceptive.

It is true that the trafficking in and abuse of narcotic and psychotropic substances have increased. Despite record seizures of illegal substances by enforcement agencies, record quantities remain a threat to our citizens. Yet the short-term inability to control the problem does not justify proposals to abandon current policies. Although our drug problem has grown, this has been in the face of our best law enforcement efforts rather than because of them.

In short, our current policies have had a marginal deterrent effect. There is no telling how big the addict population and the supply of drugs would be if drugs were to become legal. Arguing, in a different context, for capital punishment, Ernest van den Haag has asserted that the burden of proof lies with death penalty opponents to demonstrate that capital punishment produces no marginal return. Applying his argument to narcotics control, the burden of proof rests with those, like Arnold Trebach, and himself, who seek to legalize these substances. They have not proven their position.

That is not to say our current policies are wholly adequate. What is needed is a public policy that will result in a reduced supply of drugs as well as a reduced demand for them. This means federal, state, and local education, treatment, and prevention programs that are well designed and adequately funded; cooperative and appropriately funded law enforcement efforts; and effective use of diplomacy and foreign aid to support countries attempting to control narcotics production and trafficking and to induce those that are not to do so. If both supply and demand are reduced in a balanced fashion, there will be less likelihood of increased consumption and/or increased availability.

A demand-reduction strategy encompasses treatment, prevention, and education. I find it noteworthy that the forum participants agreed that there is a need for education, although they disagreed as to what the content of that education should be. I strongly disagree with Trebach's argument that we must begin teaching people the responsible use of mind-altering substances. The more we learn about the long-term effects of using drugs, even marijuana, the more we come to understand that no drug can be labeled harmless. The aim of federal policy is not to frighten adolescents, as Lester Grinspoon suggests, but to provide informed and up-to-date medical evidence, which supports the conclusion that the only sane and responsible approach to vo-
ocial and recreational drug usage is to say no.

That law enforcement is part of the supply-reduction strategy is evident, but it is also part of the demand-reduction strategy. In drawing the line between what is and is not permissible, criminal law is directed toward not only the lawbreakers but the law-abiding. The message communicated by the law in this century is that recreational drug use is not acceptable behavior. This message is consistent with our traditions. Legislated substances such as cocaine, marijuana, and heroin would send a message to our young people that drug use is socially acceptable and will not harm them. This message is not only inconsistent with our traditions but also untrue. Thus, the "moral educative" function of criminal law dictates the continued prescription of drugs.

Moreover, I believe it is naive to think that if there were a relaxation of legal restraints on drugs, the criminal would go away or be satisfied with non-threatening pursuits. Even van den Haag, in his work on the death penalty, acknowledges that there are always non-deterrables. Should we change our laws to allow certain behavior because some people are not deterred? I think not.

Reduction of demand is necessary but not sufficient; there must also be a reduction in the supply of narcotics. Supply is most vulnerable to eradication where it originates as an agricultural crop. While the Reagan Administration has claimed to be waging a war against drugs, it is, in fact, the Congress that has voted to cut off all aid, other than anti-narcotics and humanitarian aid, to countries such as Peru and Bolivia—countries that have ignored their obligation to the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, which requires that they wipe out illicit crop cultivation.

On a recent seventeen-day trip to Latin America, the Select Committee met with top officials of seven nations—Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. The leaders of these countries told us that if we do not move quickly to help them, their countries will fall into the hands of the drug traffickers or fall prey to anti-democratic forces.
which can appear to be a stable alternative in the chaos created by the traffickers. We need to use diplomacy more effectively and to allocate adequate resources to help the producer countries eliminate illicit cultivation.

It is time to escalate the war on drugs, not to capitulate by legalizing these substances. To support this effort, I have proposed three initiatives. First, I have introduced the State and Local Assistance Act of 1985. It provides for grants to state and local governments to assist them in drug law enforcement and drug abuse treatment. Second, I have proposed a new U.N. initiative whereby the industrialized democracies, under the auspices of the U.N. Fund for Drug Abuse Control, would work with the source nations to develop plans to rid them of their illicit crops. Once such plans have been developed, the industrialized nations would contribute funds and technical assistance for law enforcement, rural development, and crop substitution. Third, I have introduced legislation that would deny most-favored-nation status to drug-producing nations that are not complying with their drug control obligations.

We must continue to fight to curtail drug trafficking and end this threat to our national security and well-being. It is time to act assertively and effectively, rather than to fall victim to despair or to be victimized by utopian proposals.

Representative Charles B. Rangel
Washington, D.C.

After fifteen years of "wars on marijuana," it is obvious that wars cannot solve social and health problems. There are alternatives to these wars that would not result in marijuana being sold in candy stores.

With regard to marijuana, two practical forms of legalization have been worked out. The first, "limited legalization," allows adults to possess and cultivate marijuana for their own use. This has been the law in Alaska since 1975 and has worked well. It will also be voted on next November in Oregon. The advantages of this system are that it undermines the black market and allows people to spend thousands of dollars they currently spend for marijuana on other products. At the same time it allows the government to send a message that the sale and commercial cultivation of marijuana are illegal—and allows enforcement resources to focus on those areas.

The other alternative is regulation and taxation. A model bill for this type of system has already been drafted. It is modeled on alcohol policy, with some major differences: no advertising allowed and no marijuana bars or public use of marijuana. The system would allow the government to control the sale of marijuana. This would result in licensed rather than criminal retailers, purity and potency labeling, and the eventual weakening of organized crime. It would also raise between $10 and $15 billion in annual tax revenues. This money could be spent on education and discourage-
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dealing nicely with health, economics, and law enforcement, included no one who believed we have the right to control our own bodies. Isn’t it logical to believe that the government has as much, or as little, right to ban drugs thought to poison our bodies as to ban books that might poison our minds?

David Kahn
New York, N.Y.

Counseling the Pro-Lifers

I have rarely been as offended by anything as I was by the excerpt from the manual "How to Start and Operate a Pro-Life Out-Reach Pregnancy Service Center: 'Pro-Life' Abortion Clinics," Harper’s Magazine, December 1983. When will the pro-life advocates realize that abortion is a difficult but necessary decision for most young women to make? The idea that pro-life clinics should be near abortion clinics to catch the unsuspecting and most vulnerable is disgusting. Abortion is not a decision most women make lightly. It is a desperate decision made when there are no other choices. The false advertising and non-disclosure suggested in the manual reveal a lack of honesty, if not integrity.

If the pro-life advocates are really worried about unwanted pregnancy, why don’t they take positive steps to reduce the problem? I am willing to wager any amount that the "abortion clinic" offers no birth control information. Birth control, and proper use of it, is the only solution to this desperate situation. We can reduce abortion only if we reduce unwanted pregnancies.

Maya Weisman
Eugene, Ore.

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