Can the Military's Effectiveness in the Drug War Be Measured?

Christopher M. Schnaubelt

Questioning DOD's Results in the War on Drugs

In September 1989, Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney declared: "The detection and countering of the production, trafficking and use of illegal drugs is a high priority national security mission of the Department of Defense" (Joint Chiefs of Staff 1993: I 1). Five years and billions of dollars later, the results of the military's efforts have been ambiguous. The Department of Defense (DOD) counterdrug budget for fiscal year 1993 exceeded $1.1 billion (U.S. Office of Management and Budget 1993), yet there is little empirical evidence to suggest that the armed services' involvement in the war on drugs has reduced the availability of illegal drugs within the United States. Despite massive, heavily funded DOD and federal law enforcement agency efforts to prevent illegal drugs from entering the United States, cocaine and marijuana remain readily available on American streets while heroin use may be increasing (National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee 1993). Although it was once considered catchy rhetoric, use of the drug war metaphor is now officially discouraged.

The initial criticism of proposals for DOD involvement in drug interdiction came from civil libertarians concerned that military participation in law enforcement activities could pose a threat to domestic liberty. Now, the questionable utility of military involvement has begun to result in additional skeptics. Due to the lack of demonstrated results, the DOD's role in the nation's counterdrug effort is also drawing an increasing volume of fire from policy wonks and congressmen.

Cato Journal, Vol. 14, No. 2. (Fall 1994).

The author is Chief of Research and Analysis at the National Interagency Counterdrug Institute. The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessary reflect the official policy or position of the National Guard Bureau, the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government. The author wishes to acknowledge helpful comments from Katherine Underwood and Charles Andrain.

In *America's Drug Strategy: Lessons of the Past . . . Steps toward the Future*, for example, Senator Joseph Biden opines,

> It is time to reassess the wisdom of devoting massive resources to the international interdiction effort—particularly to the Department of Defense, which has received the most significant funding increases during the past four years, but whose programs have not proven effective [Majority Staffs of the Senate Judiciary Committee and the International Narcotics Control Caucus 1993: 3].

Harvard University's Mark Kleiman (1990: 14–15) has argued:

> Stopping the drug flow is like stopping the tide. . . . The two goals of the "international supply reduction" strategy—creating a physical shortage of cocaine [and] increasing its import price enough to force consumption down [cannot be achieved]. [See also Murray 1990.]

Attorney General Janet Reno has likewise expressed skepticism, stating, "It's time that we start and come up with hard data that deals with the issue of whether or not interdiction is efficient and effective" (Ostrow 1993: A 2).

Determining the efficacy of programs once adopted is one of the classic dilemmas of public policy. The mere absence of data does not necessarily indicate that a policy has been without merit. However, the case of military support to drug interdiction efforts is particularly fraught with conceptual and methodological challenges, as shall be pointed out later. Furthermore, the rabid response to Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders' suggestion that we even study the idea of legalizing drugs illustrates the degree to which ideology can influence attempts to perform rational cost-benefit analysis when the subject is U.S. drug policy.

It is probably impossible to provide an unequivocal answer to the question, "Is the country getting its money's worth for what it spends on military counterdrug operations?" Directly associating DOD's counterdrug efforts with the availability of drugs in the United States is to build a straw man. It will never be feasible to say that devoting x numbers of DOD counterdrug dollars result in a y-reduction of drug abuse—there are simply too many intervening variables. This lack of proof for a causal relationship should not be surprising; the interaction between civilian law enforcement and crime also remains ambiguous. Yet, the problem is worth considering because in many respects the question of military counterdrug effectiveness reflects the difficulty of assessing other aspects of drug policy.[1] Examining

[1]Franklin Zimring and Gordon Hawkins suggest that national drug policy planners have been deliberately indifferent towards the need for rigorous analysis regarding the economic costs of drug abuse and enforcement efforts. The "lack of attention to cost," Zimring and Hawkins assert, has resulted in an atmosphere that is an "invitation to waste" (1992: 42–43).

this particular conundrum may reveal insights concerning the effectiveness of drug control efforts as a whole.

The Scope of Military Counterdrug Support

Just what has DOD been doing with the billions spent on counterdrug support? While the larger part of its counterdrug support budget is devoted to interdiction-related tasks, the Department of Defense performs a wide variety of missions in support of law enforcement agencies and the national drug control strategy. The National Defense Authorization Act of 1989 assigned three major responsibilities to DOD:

1. Act as the single lead agency for detecting and monitoring the aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs into the United States.
2. Integrate U.S. command, control, communications, and technical intelligence assets that are dedicated to the interdiction of illegal drugs entering the United States into an effective communications network.
3. Approve and fund state governors' plans for using the National Guard to support the operations of drug law enforcement agencies.

Further guidance from the Secretary of Defense broadened DOD support of the national drug control strategy to increase the amount of training provided to law enforcement officers (including languages, planning skills, and field craft) and to establish special offices to coordinate the loan or transfer of military equipment to law enforcement agencies. The DOD counterdrug strategy is to attack the flow of illegal drugs along three fronts: at the source, in transit, and in the United States.

Fighting Drugs at the Source

At the source (e.g., drug producing countries such as the Andean nations), DOD provides equipment, advice, and training to assist cooperating nations in fighting the production and export of illegal drugs. Such support is performed in coordination with the U.S. Department of State, which has the primary responsibility for counterdrug assistance to other nations. When requested, assistance is also provided to U.S. law enforcement agencies working with the law

---

Although the Clinton administration has placed greater emphasis on the collection and analysis of relevant data, most studies suffer from numerous threats to validity. See "Drug Use Measurement: Strengths, Limitations, and Recommendations for Improvement" (U.S. Government Accounting Office 1993b).

enforcement, military, and other agencies of foreign countries (Brown 1991; Harmon et al. 1993).

In Latin America, for example, typical instances of support include providing transport aircraft, helicopters, river patrol boats, and tactical vehicles. U.S. planning assistance teams provide communications and logistics experts, specialists in air, ground, and riverine operations to help other nations' law enforcement, and military team leaders to plan counterdrug missions. However, U.S. personnel may only assist host nations in planning; they do not participate in mission execution nor in activities where hostilities are imminent. Mobile training teams train foreign personnel in military skills such as patrolling, tracking, and how to plan operations.

Tactical analysis teams, known as "TATs," operate within a U.S. embassy. These teams consist of U.S. military intelligence analysts who compile or "fuse" intelligence from all available sources prior to counterdrug operations. In other instances, airborne radar platforms such as the U.S. Air Force AWACS, and U.S. Customs Service P-3 aircraft have worked with ground-based radars operated by U.S. military units to assist foreign nations in identifying and pursuing drug traffickers.

Drug raids in Latin America frequently use Drug Enforcement Administration pilots and aircraft to fly their agents and host nation law enforcement personnel to a drug processing site to make arrests and to seize and destroy drugs and processing equipment. They may work in coordination with military planning assistance teams who obtain maps and aerial photos of clandestine airstrips, select suitable landing zones for the aircraft used in raids, and review raid plans to ensure logistical requirements (such as food, fuel, medical support, and transportation) are adequately addressed. The military teams can also help coordinate U.S. Air Force AWACS flights and other radar assets to track suspected smuggling aircraft and maintain communication with law enforcement teams on the ground. When the time comes to perform an actual raid, however, planning assistance teams remain behind. Like all U.S. military personnel in Latin America, they are prohibited from directly participating in law enforcement operations—their role is limited to planning, advising, and coordinating.

Fighting Drugs in Transit

Most of the military efforts usually described as interdiction are directed towards smugglers in transit between the source countries and the United States. In the transit zone, DOD's primary role is to detect and monitor smugglers operating in the air or on the sea. The priority effort is directed toward drug trafficking across the Caribbean

and the southern U.S. border. Various maritime, air, land, and space military systems are integrated to provide information and intelligence on suspected drug trafficking.

Resources devoted to detect and identify aircraft and ships suspected of carrying drugs include U.S. Navy vessels on patrol (some carrying Coast Guard law enforcement detachments), Air Force and Army ground-based radars, and U.S. Air Force airborne radar and interceptor aircraft. Military forces also conduct reconnaissance along the U.S. border using aircraft, patrols, observation posts, and remote sensors to support U.S. law enforcement agencies requesting such support. The military passes the detection and monitoring results on to law enforcement agencies for the possible apprehension of smugglers.

Fighting Drugs within the United States

Within the United States, military support consists of a broad range of activities. Military personnel help to train law enforcement officers in a wide array of military skills that may be useful to counterdrug operations. Members of the armed services are assigned to help law enforcement agencies to perform administrative, liaison, planning, logistics, and intelligence functions. They also perform language translation, assist with criminal investigative support, help the U.S. Customs Service to perform the inspection of cargo at ports of entry, and provide military dive teams to inspect the hulls of ships suspected of smuggling drugs. Special research, development, and acquisition offices help to make emerging and current technologies used by the military (such as remote sensors, night vision devices, and secure communications equipment) available to law enforcement for counterdrug use. Regional logistic support offices located in Buffalo, N.Y.; Long Beach, Calif.; El Paso, Tex.; and Atlanta, Ga. help law enforcement agencies obtain surplus military equipment and arrange training from mobile training teams.

A frequently performed mission along the U.S.-Mexican border is the deployment of military personnel to occupy observation posts and watch for potential drug smuggling activity. Similar missions are also performed to observe clandestine airstrips in remote areas, such as the high desert, in support of the U.S. Customs Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and state and local law enforcement agencies such as county sheriff's offices. During these operations, military teams report suspicious activity—such as possibly illegal border crossings—to the supported law enforcement agency. Any seizures or arrests that might be made in response to the military's reports are the responsibility of law enforcement officers.

Another common type of support is providing military helicopters and troops to help law enforcement officers locate and eradicate marijuana gardens. The military, especially the National Guard, also assists in drug prevention efforts by providing volunteers, equipment, and facilities to various programs that are intended to discourage youth from using drugs.

Legal and Policy Restrictions

Along each of the DOD's three drug trafficking fronts, the key to understanding the armed services' role in the war on drugs—and assessing their effectiveness—is the concept of *support*. The military conducts all counterdrug operations in "direct support" of and at the specific written request of a law enforcement agency. Direct support is a military term that means the supporting military unit has authorization to answer directly to the law enforcement agency's request for assistance. Nonetheless, the military chain of command remains in effect for all military personnel. Law enforcement officers do not exercise command over the service members providing support.

In the case of operations within a foreign nation, the U.S. military provides support in response to a request from that nation submitted via the U.S. ambassador. The Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines do not conduct independent operations to fight drug trafficking. There is no military effort to "seal the borders" equivalent to defending a position in a combat situation.

Both within the United States as well as outside its borders, the military's involvement in counterdrug operations is far removed from the fantasy scenarios found in Tom Clancy's *A Clear and Present Danger*. Although it controls vast resources, numerous legal and policy considerations restrict (some might say hamper) DOD's role in counterdrug operations. Perhaps the best known of these is the "Posse Comitatus Act." Enacted during the Restoration period following the Civil War, this act makes it a crime to use federal military forces to enforce civil law within the United States.[2] Other congressional statutes, such as those regarding intelligence oversight, also limit military endeavors to prevent drug trafficking.

[2]The Posse Comitatus Act is found in Section 1385 of Title 18, United States Code. Congress passed amendments in the 1980s to allow greater military participation in counterdrug efforts. Posse Comitatus does not apply to the Navy nor to National Guard forces that are in state service under the command and control of their respective governor. (State laws apply to the National Guard when in state service.) As a matter of policy, however, National Guard forces providing counterdrug support generally follow the same restrictions as federal forces and do not directly perform law enforcement functions. Under DOD policy, the Navy also complies with the act.

The basic principle governing DOD counterdrug activities is that military personnel must not perform direct law enforcement activities. This restriction generally prohibits service members from conducting searches, performing seizures, making arrests, or performing similar activities. Additionally, they are to avoid becoming part of the evidence chain of custody.

Military units providing counterdrug support are prohibited from possessing files on U.S. citizens, targeting surveillance at specific individuals within the United States, or interrogating suspects. Military linguists cannot perform real time or live translation—they must work from tapes or transcripts supplied by the supported law enforcement agency. Service members providing counterdrug support cannot perform duty as undercover agents. Military forces conducting counterdrug operations on private property must have either the owner's permission, a search warrant, or other legal authority for their presence. Rules of engagement generally limit the use of deadly force to situations of self-defense. As noted earlier, U.S. military personnel may not accompany the forces of foreign nations during actual counterdrug operations in the field.

The extent and types of support that would be appropriate for the military to provide have been the subject of considerable debate. The appeals for increased military involvement have *not* come from the Pentagon. One might even say that DOD was dragged, "kicking and screaming," into the counterdrug effort. (See Hundley 1990, Matthews 1992, McAllister and Hatchett 1993.) Reasons behind the reluctance of the military leadership included concern that drug-fighting would detract from the primary mission of training for war, belief that the drug war was unwinnable, and trepidation that it might draw the military into law enforcement tasks in violation of American tradition.

While any level of military participation alarmed civil libertarians, some policymakers were frustrated by the limits placed on DOD involvement. As one Bush administration official complained, "I do not understand why [the Pentagon] can't act a little more forward-looking" (Jehl and Ostrow 1992: A 1). In a bill successfully opposed by the Reagan administration, Senator Mitch McConnell planned to give the military the authority to shoot down suspected air smugglers who refused to land (Jehl and Ostrow 1990: A 19). Regarding concerns that the DOD might cross the line between military and civilian law enforcement roles, Congressman Duncan Hunter responded: "These are simplistic arguments by people who want to avoid the draft in this particular war. . . . It depends on which is more sacred, that line or your children's lives" (Hundley 1990: 1). The best example of the

arguments for greater military involvement may have been provided by Congressman Larry Hopkins:

> The only war going on right now is the drug war, and we are losing. . . . Those of us who care about the military are going to have to straighten out their priorities for them. This is war. And they are going to have to lace up their combat boots and get involved [quoted in Dillin 1989: 1].

While some true-believers in the war on drugs have called for giving DOD a free rein in preventing illegal drugs from entering the United States, the majority of policymakers generally recognize that most military personnel are not properly trained to conduct law enforcement-type activities.[3] War is a special situation. The response elicited by the nature of combat is usually not appropriate to the enforcement of civil law.

Law enforcement officers are specially trained to protect lives and property and to collect and preserve evidence. They are supposed to use only the minimum force necessary to make an arrest. Warfare, however, calls for different tactics. Military personnel are taught to kill people and break things. Application of maximum firepower to defeat and destroy the enemy is the norm during combat operations—an objective that is not very conducive to protecting the right to due process, and other constitutional protections that Americans enjoy.

Has Interdiction by Civilian Law Enforcement Been Effective?

The problem of attempting an objective appraisal of the military's contribution is related to the difficulty of assessing U.S. counterdrug efforts as a whole. The bulk of the military counterdrug effort is based on the assumption that interdiction is productive.[4] It is this underlying assumption, rather than the performance of the military, that is truly in question. Despite recent efforts by the Office of National Drug Control Policy and Congress to establish and monitor objective, measurable goals for the national strategy, the effectiveness of drug inter-

[3]Some personnel, such as the military police, do perform law enforcement functions. However, they account for a small percentage of the armed forces and are limited to areas of military jurisdiction—such as on military installations.

[4]Following this assumption also coincides with the military tradition of following orders. Determining the efficacy of military counterdrug support requires questioning the assumptions behind interdiction. Once the President (through the Secretary of Defense) has directed the military to perform drug interdiction, it would probably require cognitive dissonance on the part of the military leadership to truly analyze whether interdiction was worthwhile.

diction remains a puzzle. The title of a General Accounting Office (GAO) report captures the ambiguity of the situation: "Drug Interdiction: Funding Continues to Increase but Program Effectiveness is Unknown" (1990).

Seizures and Law Enforcement

There are many pitfalls in trying to measure the effectiveness of interdiction efforts. What, for example, are the indications of a successful interdiction program? Officials often interpret an increase in drug seizures as an increase in the efficiency and effectiveness of law enforcement efforts. This may indeed be the case if the amount of illegal drugs flowing into the United States is declining or remains steady and law enforcement agencies are capturing a greater percentage of the total drug volume. However, increased seizures may result despite a reduction in law enforcement efficiency if law enforcement agencies are actually catching a fixed or decreasing portion of an increasing supply of drugs being smuggled. And if fewer drugs are being smuggled, seizures may drop even though law enforcement is becoming more effective.

Seizures and Price

As an alternative to seizure data, illicit drug prices are frequently offered as a potential measure of interdiction success. If drug enforcement efforts are causing a significant reduction in the supply of drugs, we might expect to see a concomitant increase in street prices.[5] Unfortunately, the conventional supply and demand model may not reflect the true behavior of drug traffickers. Retail drug prices may be a misleading measure of the effectiveness of enforcement. In "The Interdictor's Lot: A Dynamic Model of the Market for Drug Smuggling Services," RAND Corporation analysts Peter Reuter and Jonathan Cave show why retail drug prices cannot be simply equated with interdiction efforts (Reuter and Cave 1988). Using a dynamic economic model, they demonstrate how differences in knowledge between experienced smugglers and novices affect the relationships between supply and prices in ways that might not be obvious.

Like all business people, drug traffickers face decisions concerning whether or not to participate in the market and what quantities to supply. They base their choices on what they perceive to be the likely costs and returns of drug transactions; they attempt to make a profit. The expectation of an immediate return, however, is not the only factor that informs smugglers' investment decisions. They also consider

[5]According to Mark Moore (1991: 548), the key issue concerning effectiveness does not involve price or volume per se, but whether the price shift discouraged use that would otherwise occur.

the possibility of future profits. Smugglers may therefore be willing to take a near-term loss in exchange for a greater return in the future. Novice drug traffickers in particular may be willing to accept such a trade-off between current and future returns.

Operating costs are lower for experienced traffickers than for newcomers. As smugglers gain experience, they learn which smuggling routes are the safest, which pilots and ship captains are the most proficient at evading enforcement, and which officials can be bribed. They develop working relationships with suppliers and customers to reduce transaction costs. Accumulated knowledge and the creation of buyer-seller networks also lower the costs of doing business for experienced smugglers. The price at which an experienced smuggler can make a profit will therefore be lower than the price at which a novice smuggler will make a profit.

This reduction in cost as experience increases gives smugglers an incentive to operate at a short-term loss as an investment in future profits. The greater the cost distinction between beginner and seasoned veteran and the higher the price, the greater the incentive to enter the ranks of experienced smugglers. In order to gain experience and its resulting increase in profitability, fledgling smugglers may operate at a loss as if they were serving an apprenticeship. Because an increase in prices can result in an increase in supply as more traffickers are induced by potential profits to enter the market, interdiction may increase prices but also result in increased smuggling.

Alternatively, variations in costs and the level of cooperation among smugglers can cause prices to fall. If they believe the future price trend is downward, smugglers may exit the market and supply will fall. Thus, law enforcement efforts may be effective in reducing supply even though prices are falling.

Military Role is Only a Part of the Process

The fact that the military has only a *supporting* role in counterdrug operations further complicates analysis of its value. Because military units do not perform independent counterdrug operations, their effectiveness is dependent on the actions of the supported law enforcement agency. The military applies most interdiction support to surveillance and identification, leaving the tasks of pursuit and apprehension to the supported law enforcement agency.[6] A model developed by Reuter, Crawford, and Cave (1988), to simulate interdiction efforts by law

[6]Coast Guard law enforcement detachments (LEDETs) on board U.S. Navy vessels might be considered a "pursuit" exception. Also, military aircraft is sometimes used to transport law enforcement officers to make seizures and arrests.

enforcement authorities, and the response by smugglers, illustrates this problem.

Reuter et al. describe interdiction ("the seizure of drugs, personnel, and assets") as the product of a series of activities that include "surveillance, identification, pursuit, and apprehension" (Reuter, Crawford, and Cave 1988: 55). No matter how many resources are devoted to any of the individual elements, the overall odds of a successful interdiction cannot be greater than those of the element with the lowest probability. The results of an improvement in surveillance and identification capability due to military support are thus limited by the probability of pursuit (how often law enforcement agents are able or available to chase traffickers that are identified), and the probability of apprehension (ratio of smugglers chased to smugglers caught). Because of this relationship even if the DOD were able to detect and monitor 100 percent of all smugglers trying to sneak drugs into the United States, the capability of law enforcement agencies to catch any traffickers identified would restrict the number of successful interdictions possible.

In testimony before Congress, the GAO has stated: "The problem is that the detection and monitoring of suspect ships and planes is not presently the weak link in the interdiction process." The shortfall lies in the "end game," arresting smugglers and seizing their drug loads (1993a: 3). The DOD's detection and monitoring results compared to the apprehension of air smugglers in fiscal year 1990 illustrate the situation. Out of the 6,729 suspected drug-smuggling aircraft that were detected by the DOD, law enforcement agencies pursued only 661. Of the aircraft chased, law enforcement successfully intercepted 49 (Morrison 1992: 270).[7]

If no satisfactory method exists to determine the effectiveness of the overall interdiction program in slowing the flow of drugs into the United States, measuring the effectiveness of the military's support is problematic. It simply might not to be possible to determine the impact of DOD counterdrug support on the availability of drugs in the United States. While the lack of data in itself does not conclusively demonstrate that the military's effort has been wasted, the models developed by Reuter et al. provide persuasive support to the critics of interdiction.[8]

Reuter et al., however, do not assert that military support to interdiction should cease. Although they do not think that military support

[7]Another 24 flights turned back, possibly because pilots knew they had been detected.

[8]They conclude that military support to enhance interdiction is "unlikely to significantly reduce drug consumption in the United States" (Reuter, Crawford, and Cave 1988: xiv; also see Reuter 1988).

will cause a *notable* decrease in drug consumption, they suggest it can be worthwhile. They point out that interdiction serves purposes other than reducing drug use, such as demonstrating to other countries that the United States is serious about counterdrug efforts. They also believe interdiction can provide "a degree of equity" by spreading the risk of arrest higher up the hierarchy of drug smuggling organizations (Reuter, Crawford, and Cave 1988: 130).

While scholarly, the agnosticism of Reuter and his colleagues does not provide much help to policymakers trying to determine the trade-offs between resources devoted to interdiction versus other counter-drug efforts. Strategies that directly target the upper echelons of the drug trade might be more effective in equitably distributing the potential for arrest than general interdiction efforts. Resources devoted to interdiction efforts detract from programs aimed at the top of the drug hierarchy.

Moreover, demonstrating resolve to other countries is an ambiguous proposition—drug warriors can glibly argue that any shift in priorities or reduction in spending sends a message to source countries that the United States is losing interest in the fight against illegal drugs. Such a view implies that we must spend evermore money regardless of results if only to confirm that United States politicians take the drug problem seriously. The era of continuous drug budget increases, however, is over. The cost of mostly symbolic efforts may be foregoing programs more likely to have a substantive effect.[9]

How DOD Evaluates Its Efforts

The methods DOD currently uses to assess the value of its support have little direct relevance to the principal objective of interdiction—reducing availability and increasing the price of drugs on the streets of America. One can find a significant example of this tendency in Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney's 1993 *Annual Report to the President and the Congress*. Under the section titled "Overall Progress in the Counterdrug Programs," the report asserts,

> To fully appreciate the progress that has been made by the Department of Defense in the performance of the counterdrug missions that have been assigned to it since the fall of 1988, it is only necessary to compare the condition of its several counterdrug programs with only a few years ago [1993: 109].

[9]For example, a model developed by Peter Rydell and Susan Everingham indicates that a 1 percent reduction in cocaine consumption could be obtained through increasing treatment spending by $34 million. Alternatively, the same reduction would require an additional $246 million in domestic enforcement spending, $366 million in interdiction spending, or $783 million in source-country control programs (1994: xiii).

Yet for the most part, the comparisons that follow merely describe an escalation of inputs, such as increases in the DOD counterdrug budget and the number of missions performed. Despite a contention that DOD "has performed its counterdrug missions with increasing effectiveness," the report makes little effort to show a direct relationship between the increase in DOD inputs and a reduction in the drug problem.

Examples of reported external successes are "[helping] to promote cooperation among Andean nations . . .," the "planning and execution of counterdrug operations [by law enforcement agencies and DOD assets] as a single, integrated team," and improvement in the "detection and monitoring of suspect narcotics-trafficking aircraft and vessels in the maritime zone, while supporting the interdiction efforts of law enforcement agencies within host nations and at our own borders." Yet these are intermediate steps in the chain of supply reduction events. The only section that addresses results in terms of drug use concerns drug use by service members, which DOD reported at an all-time low as a result of mandatory testing (1993: 110–11).

Rather than effectiveness, i.e., the significance and impact of military counterdrug activities in terms of the overall drug problem, the Department of Defense tends to use measures of efficiency, i.e., the comparison of internal inputs and outputs without regard to the end purpose of interdiction. Military operations could significantly improve efficiency, for example, by using two soldiers to observe a border area that previously required four soldiers. However, this improvement in efficiency tells us nothing about how that particular task helps to decrease the availability of drugs, nor does it tell us the best way to apportion scarce federal resources between the number of soldiers watching the border and the number of law enforcement agents available to arrest any suspected smugglers that soldiers might spot (or, for that matter, whether the money would be better spent on treatment or prevention programs).

The primary assessment tool currently used by the military is essentially a customer satisfaction survey of the law enforcement agencies receiving support.[10] Personnel also religiously gather data on the

[10]Law enforcement agencies receiving military counterdrug support from the National Guard are asked to complete a survey to rate (on a scale of 1 to 3) the quality of support in terms of timeliness, cooperation, proper equipment, flexibility, and "Did the [Law Enforcement Agency] feel that the operation was a success?" Units from the active component execute a similar feedback process but do not use a standard survey. The conduct of these surveys seems to be *pro forma;* no process has been implemented to use the results of these surveys to establish priorities or shift resources to types of support found to be more successful.

amounts of drugs seized. Despite the fact that DOD policymakers and spokespersons fervently state they are meaningless, drug seizure "body counts" inevitably appear in reports to Congress and counterdrug support briefings.[11] Units conducting operations also complete surveys concerning the training value of counterdrug missions.[12]

The evaluation measures used by DOD may indicate something about the military's level of effort and the efficiency with which it executes its part of the interdiction process. Unfortunately, these aspects of military support that can be readily evaluated may not be directly relevant to interdiction's results. The military may perfectly execute its role in providing counterdrug support and completely please the law enforcement agency receiving support, yet have little or no impact on the availability and use of illegal drugs. This ambiguity in the relationship between the military's actions and drug availability increases the influence of ideology and other biases in the policy debate. Critics of interdiction can continue to point to the lack of demonstrable results. Drug warriors, meanwhile, can assert that military involvement is an important symbol of U.S. resolution while arguing that alternative policies such as more treatment, demand reduction, or decriminalization are equally lacking when it comes to proof of their effectiveness.[13]

Establishing DOD Priorities of Support

In determining how to apportion its counterdrug budget between the various kinds of support it can provide, it is not always clear why DOD decides to spend a particular counterdrug dollar on a fighter pilot rather than a linguist. One consideration may be whether the

[11]An example of egregiously sloppy or misleading analysis, reports often compare counterdrug expenditures with the street value of drugs seized—implying a "good return on the investment" as if the government were to later sell the drugs at a profit. The habitual use of street prices is also misleading as they overstate the cost to traffickers and thus any deterrent value.

[12]Section 377 of Title 10, United States Code, requires that the provision of counterdrug support must either occur in the conduct of normal military operations or result in beneficial training for the military units and personnel providing such support. Otherwise, the "Economy Act" (Section 1535 of Title 31) requires the supported law enforcement agency to reimburse DOD. This requirement does not apply to the National Guard in a state status, which regularly conducts non-military training related activities such as cargo inspection in support of U.S. Customs.

[13]Of course, this is not an unusual policy situation. As James Q. Wilson (1983: 3–5) points out, "Social science is not and cannot be an unambiguous guide to policy: though a useful source of knowledge, that knowledge is neither sufficiently comprehensive nor adequately tested to constitute a wholly dependable guide. . . . We know a good deal more about what doesn't work than about what does."

support requested requires military-unique skills. The logic behind this concern is that law enforcement agencies should not ask the military to perform functions that are readily available through other sources. To law enforcement agencies, however, DOD represents "free" help. Without the military's assistance, obtaining the services of skilled individuals like translators and mechanics would require law enforcement agencies to hire additional personnel and pay for the resulting costs.[14]

Another consideration is the training value of the support to the service members providing it. The training value of at least some interdiction tasks, however, is questionable. In a report on military counterdrug surveillance, the GAO indicated that the differences between the tactics and equipment of drug traffickers and those of a potential enemy's combat forces are so great that the training value of counterdrug operations was often marginal. The GAO reported: "Some of the flying hours and steaming days that DOD uses for its counterdrug mission cannot be justified by either their contribution to the drug war . . . or by their contribution to military readiness" (1993c: 31).

Institutional Proclivities

As described earlier, the military's initial reluctance to become involved in the drug war has been well documented. Some analysts, however, assert that a rush of enthusiasm followed as the Pentagon came to recognize that the drug war might provide justification to maintain force structure and large budgets in the absence of a Soviet threat. According to Charles Oliver (1990: 6), "Just a few days after Defense Secretary Dick Cheney said that he would scale back defense spending, the Pentagon said that it would like to play a larger role in the war on drugs. Coincidence? No." Neoconservatives and military leaders may have seized upon a greater counterdrug role as a means to identify a new enemy worthy of continued military attention. For example, William J. Taylor of the Center for Strategic and International Studies advised,

> There is a declining perception of military threat in the Congress and among the American public. . . . If the DOD leadership were

[14]The fact that agencies do not directly pay for military support can skew law enforcement priorities; operations can be conducted with essentially no cost-benefit tradeoffs. Since there are few disincentives to requesting military assistance, law enforcement officials can naturally be expected to ask for all they can get. Nonetheless, some idea of how law enforcement agencies value military support might be gleaned from their willingness to "buy-in" by devoting overtime budgets and otherwise marginally increasing the resources they contribute to joint military-civilian operations.

> smart about the coming environment, they would approach the Congress with a military "social utility" argument which says that military manpower should not be further reduced because the Congress is mandating increased military involvement in the "war on drugs." They should, in fact, argue further that new funds should be appropriated for these expanded missions which are socially useful [quoted in Carpenter and Rouse 1990: 19].

If the military's higher echelons indeed once believed that the drug war could result in a bigger budget and more forces, the belief was short-lived. Even under President Bush, increases in the DOD counterdrug budget began to flatten in 1992. The Clinton administration's estimated budget for military counterdrug efforts during fiscal year 1994 was $868.2 million—a substantial decrease from the $1,140.7 million spent the previous year (Office of National Drug Control Policy 1994b: 23). Moreover, it is not certain that the counterdrug role actually resulted in a greater military budget or the retention of a larger force. What seems more likely, especially in the current situation of a shrinking counterdrug budget, is that counterdrug funds "come off the top" of the DOD budget. Rather than receiving additional money from Congress to support its counterdrug operations, the practical reality is that DOD is probably being forced to divert funds from combat training, new equipment, and other programs on which it would prefer to spend its money.[15]

Although the drug war might not have proven to be a cash cow, institutional and cultural factors still influence how DOD spends its counterdrug budget—and may help to explain the persistence of the interdiction component. The lack of result-oriented objectives and measures of effectiveness allow greater reliance on considerations not directly related to reducing the drug problem.[16] Not knowing what (if anything) will work in the drug war, the military's leadership falls back on the most eye-catching assets in the arsenal even though they may be much better suited to fighting a Soviet threat that no longer exists rather than Colombian cartels.

At first blush, interdiction looks to be the counterdrug activity most similar to the military's traditional role of national defense. A neophyte might easily believe that defending U.S. cities from enemy bombers

[15]Given the complexity of the budget process, this point is arguable. Yet, I doubt that any of the Pentagon's leadership perceive themselves the beneficiary of a drug war bonus.

[16]This certainly does not imply a deliberate selection of the wrong resources to perform the mission or deception on the part of military leaders. When there is a lack of sufficient information, such as feedback on which strategies and tactics work, decisionmakers naturally rely on actions they have found to be successful in the past or those with which they feel most comfortable.

is synonymous with defending the U.S. border from drug smuggling aircraft. Furthermore, interdiction provides the opportunity for the military to perform most spectacular activities, like using F-16 radars to track drug traffickers. Inserting law enforcement officers by helicopter is eerily reminiscent of a combat air assault. Observation post missions use elite infantry and reconnaissance teams to infiltrate into position and furtively watch the movements of "the threat." Providing the Navy with additional steaming hours to search the Caribbean for potential drug smugglers gives more ship's captains the chance to patrol the high seas.

The mundane (and lower cost) tasks that may be more likely to significantly contribute to law enforcement efforts, however, are not the stuff of which war movies are made. U.S. law enforcement agencies continue to have unmet demand for translators, intelligence analysts, ground and air transportation, administrative assistance, and mechanics to work on vehicles and equipment. These types of support could enhance the ability of law enforcement agencies to perform drug investigations by providing linguistic and analytical expertise. Supported agencies could also direct greater resources to "on-the-street" enforcement efforts or community-oriented policing if military assistance released sworn officers from paper work and increased the availability of equipment.[17]

A Drug Enforcement Paradigm Shift

Measures of effectiveness notwithstanding, the DOD's counterdrug efforts have been caught within shifting paradigms. The first *National Drug Control Strategy*, released in September 1989, clearly made a broad interdiction effort a high national priority. It cited an increase in drug seizures and forcing "drug traffickers to make significant operational changes" as evidence that interdiction had resulted in "successful disruptions of trafficking patterns" (Office of National Drug Control Policy 1989: 73).

The original logic behind interdiction was straightforward. Users could not consume drug shipments that were successfully interdicted. Seizures would deter drug trafficking by reducing profits and increasing the risk of arrest while rising prices discouraged drug use (Moore 1991: 544; Wilson 1990: 22).[18] Furthermore, enforcement officials

[17]DOD does provide limited amounts of such support, except for some kinds of administrative support (such as typing and answering telephones) which DOD generally will not perform for law enforcement agencies. The lion's share of budget, however, goes to interdiction.

[18]The Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) also found a correlation between cocaine price and purity with drug use. Lower prices from 1986 to 1988, and again in late 1990 to early 1991 were associated with indications of greater use. In contrast to Reuter and Cave's analysis, ONDCP also suggested that price increases after 1988 indicated a

could claim drug seizures as evidence of progress in the war on drugs. In accordance with these concepts, interdiction would cover a broad area to seize as many drugs and arrest as many traffickers as possible. With these objectives in mind, annual federal spending for drug interdiction (nonmilitary) rose from $263 million in 1981 to $605 million in 1986 (Reuter, Crawford, and Cave 1988: vi). When the military became heavily involved, the interdiction budget rose even faster. By 1991, the federal budget for drug interdiction efforts (including DOD) exceeded $2.3 billion (Office of National Drug Control Policy 1990: 100).

Yet after several years of tremendous increase, the federal budget for interdiction efforts started to flatten in 1992. Even ardent supply reduction enthusiasts began to recognize that significant, and probably increasing, amounts of drugs were continuing to reach U.S. streets.[19] The first three national strategies (1989–91) clearly made interdiction one of the highest priorities of the federal anti-drug effort. In 1991, the *National Drug Control Strategy* had responded to criticism of interdiction by stating,

> An abandonment of interdiction efforts against drug traffickers would be an abdication of our obligation to protect U.S. citizens from criminal elements who threaten our security and public well-being. Simply put, a civilized society does not leave its border totally open to those who would harm its citizens. Interdiction has both symbolic and real value. It demonstrates our national will to oppose drug traffickers on every available front, and it increases the chances of apprehending traffickers and their agents, thereby making the supply of drugs to their customers erratic and unreliable [Office of National Drug Control Policy 1991: 94].

In broad terms, the 1991 strategy asserted that "the ultimate goal of interdiction is to deter drug smuggling by intercepting and seizing illicit drug shipments entering the United States" (Office of National Drug Control Policy 1991: 93). The national strategy thus envisioned a general effort to increase the costs of smuggling by destroying the traffickers' product and neutralizing trafficking routes in order to disrupt the business of drug trafficking. The fourth strategy, however, indicated a subtle but perceptible shift away from a comprehensive interdiction effort.

---

reduction in the cocaine supply relative to demand (Office of National Drug Control Policy 1992b: 3). Peter Rydell and Susan Everingham (1994: 79) estimate the price elasticity of demand for cocaine to be −0.5.

[19]"Supply reduction," as opposed to "demand reduction," refers to the wide range of activities (virtually all involve law enforcement) directed at eliminating drug production, distribution, and possession. Mark Moore (1991: 549) points out, however, that supply reduction efforts cannot be considered effective if consumption is not reduced.

Implicitly recognizing the impracticality of sealing the border, the 1992 strategy suggested: "The principal interdiction objective is to identify and target those elements of the drug smuggling process that are of highest value to trafficking organizations." Supply reduction efforts outside the United States would accordingly focus on trafficking organizations' "center of gravity" instead of a broad effort to threaten all trafficking (Office of National Drug Control Policy 1992a: 99, 80).[20] The concept of attacking the center of gravity developed into two elements, the "kingpin" strategy, and the linear strategy. The kingpin strategy (formally titled the Drug Enforcement Administration's Targeted Kingpin Organization Strategy, or TKO) targets the highest echelons of drug trafficking organizations. The linear strategy attempts to dismantle large sections of drug trafficking organizations along the complex chain of operations necessary to move drugs from source countries to the United States and then return drug profits to organization headquarters in the source countries. Both strategies are primarily investigative in nature. Like drug seizures, putting drug lords in jail will be a tangible, although not necessarily relevant, product of enforcement activity.

The 1992 *National Drug Control Strategy* signaled that investigation was displacing interdiction as the preeminent tactic in the federal counterdrug effort. Interdiction would continue as a symbol of U.S. counterdrug resolve and to "hold the line" until long-term investigative programs began to dismantle the cartels. Although the level of effort would be reduced, the evolving strategy intended to "focus" interdiction activities to better support the actions directed at the drug traffickers' center of gravity. The expected means to destroy drug trafficking, however, would be investigation and arrest of the key members of drug production and smuggling enterprises, the seizure of their profits, and disrupting the availability of the precursor chemicals necessary to manufacture cocaine hydrochloride from coca leaf.[21]

It appears that the Clinton administration will sustain, if not accelerate, this shift in emphasis. The administration's interim strategy foreshadowed a continued movement away from a general interdiction

[20]"Center of gravity" is a military term, defined by Clausewitz as "the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends" (Department of the Army 1993: 179).

[21]This is, of course, quite a simplification. Supply reduction efforts entail much more than an either/or choice between interdiction and investigation. While proponents of the investigation paradigm have apparently gained the upper hand on the ONDCP supply reduction staff, interdiction has many advocates and remains a substantial effort. Supply reduction endeavors also include many other significant elements such as "on-the-street" law enforcement to arrest low-level dealers and money laundering investigations to seize profits from drug sales.

effort. It called for focusing interdiction and other supply reduction endeavors "on the international and domestic trafficking organizations that are the most significant and dangerous." Accordingly, the drug czar directed the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) to review the "costly undertaking" of interdiction to make sure operations are "effective and efficient" and to discontinue programs that are not proven effective (Office of National Drug Control Policy 1993: 22).

Following its review of interdiction strategy, ONDCP concluded,

> A shift [is] necessary from a strategy predominately based on interdiction to a three-pronged strategy that emphasizes the following: (1) assisting institutions of nations that show the political will to combat narcotrafficking, (2) destroying the narcotrafficking organizations, and (3) interdicting narcotrafficking in both source and transit countries. [Interdiction would nonetheless] remain an important element of the *Strategy* despite the redirection of resources from the transit zone to source countries [Office of National Drug Control Policy 1994a: 50].

Although it might not just quietly fade away, it is probable that DOD's involvement in counterdrug efforts will sharply decline during the next few years to allow the administration to shift funds to other elements of the national drug control strategy. The Clinton administration's request for the DOD fiscal year 1995 counterdrug budget was $874.2 million—a reduction of nearly 23 percent from its peak in 1992. The Department's interdiction-related funding was reduced by more than $200 million (Office of National Drug Control Policy 1994b: 23). This reduction in DOD funding is due to the federal shift to strategies that are less amenable to DOD involvement, such as investigations and demand reduction, rather than an empirical demonstration that military support per se was ineffective.

Other Drug Enforcement Efforts Are Also Plagued by Assessment Issues

Irrespective of the future of military counterdrug support, the federal law enforcement effort against illegal drug supplies is likely to face an increasing level of criticism. As noted previously, the major critique of military involvement is really a critique of interdiction. Since they share the same underlying rationale—that attacking the supply side of the drug trade will reduce the availability and use of drugs within the United States by deterring smugglers and increasing costs to users—scrutiny of the alternative investigative strategies is likely to reveal shortcomings similar to those attributed to interdiction.

Demonstrating an empirical link between drug use in the United States and execution of the kingpin and linear strategies will be no easier than showing that seizing hundreds of tons of cocaine and other drugs made them less available on American streets. The new strategies simply use the number of kingpins arrested as the body count in place of the number of kilograms seized. It is unlikely that this change will suddenly make the effectiveness of supply reduction efforts more apparent. New drug lords may spring up more quickly than long-term investigations and lengthy trials can put them away. After Colombian police killed Pablo Escobar, a Drug Enforcement Administration official said, "While the police hunted him down, other criminal groups had a heyday. The bottom line is that the cocaine business is bigger than ever" (Fedarko 1993: 46). Even drug enforcement enthusiasts James Q. Wilson and John J. DiIulio Jr. (1989: 23) assert that "nothing is easier than replacing Mr. Big."

The resilience of interdiction and other wholesale-level (as opposed to street- or retail-level) supply reduction efforts may be due to political considerations. Mark Kleiman believes that arresting street-level dealers is the most promising enforcement strategy. However, he asserts: "The ACLU doesn't like street-level enforcement because it means building more prisons. Police and prosecutors don't like it because chasing Mr. Big is more glamorous, less grubby, and safer" (Kleiman 1990: 16). Alternatively, supply reduction efforts may constitute what Wilson and DiIulio (1989: 24) describe as a necessary "holding operation" while other policies to reduce the demand for drugs begin to take effect.[22] In either case, these programs are likely to remain a major (though perhaps reduced) component of U.S. drug efforts. Although a more equitable balance of demand versus supply reduction has been instituted (after an exponential increase in pro-demand reduction rhetoric, 36 percent of the federal drug control budget is now demand-side), the kingpin and linear strategies will remain the new priority in federal supply reduction efforts. Whether or not they can be proven efficient and effective remains to be seen.

References

Brown, D.E. (1991) "Drugs On the Border: The Role of the Military." *Parameters* 21: 50–59.

Carpenter, T., and Rouse, R. (1990) "Perilous Panacea: The Military in the Drug War." Cato Policy Analysis No. 128. Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute.

[22]Harry Levine and Craig Reinarman (1991: 488) conclude that a consensus has developed that supply reduction strategies have an "inherently" limited potential. Therefore, law enforcement officials and policymakers alike believe that demand reduction is the key to long-term reduction of the drug problem.

Cheney, D. (1993) *Report of the Secretary of Defense to the President and the Congress.*

The Department of the Army (1993) *Field Manual 100-5: Operations (Final Draft).*

Dillin, J. (1989) "Congress Drafts Military to Battle Drug Traffickers." *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 March: 1.

Harmon, R.E.; Malave, R.A.; Miller, C.A.; and Nadolski, W.K. (1993) "Counterdrug Assistance: The Number One Priority." *Military Review* 73 (March): 26–35.

Hundley, T. (1990) "U.S. Drafts Military in Drug Battle." *Chicago Tribune*, 11 February: 1.

Jehl, D., and Ostrow, R.J. (1990) "Plan to Force Suspected Drug Planes to Land Expected." *Los Angeles Times*, 15 May: A 19.

Jehl, D., and Ostrow, R.J. (1992) "Pentagon Said to Reject Drug Role Sought by White House." *Los Angeles Times*, 27 January: A 1.

Joint Chiefs of Staff (1993) *Joint Counterdrug Operations, Joint Pub 3-07.4 (Final Draft).*

Kleiman, M. (1990) "Snowed In." *The New Republic*, 23 April: 14–16.

Levine, H.G., and Reinarman, G. (1991) "From Prohibition to Regulation: Lessons from Alcohol Policy for Drug Policy." *Milbank Quarterly* 69: 461–94.

Majority Staffs of the Senate Judiciary Committee and the International Narcotics Control Caucus (1993) *America's Drug Strategy: Lessons of the Past. . . . Steps Toward the Future.*

Matthews, W. (1992) "Military Seeks Lesser Drug-War Role." *Army Times*, 24 February: 22.

McAllister, J.E., and Hatchett, R. (1993) *Conference Summary: The Role of the Military in the War on Drugs.* Carlisle Barracks, Penn.: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute.

Moore, M.H. (1991) "Drugs, the Criminal Law, and the Administration of Justice." *Milbank Quarterly* 69: 529–60.

Morrison, D.C. (1992) "Police Action." *National Journal*, 1 February: 267–70.

Murray, C. (1990) "How to Win the War on Drugs." *The New Republic*, 21 May: 19–25.

National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee (1993) *The NNICC Report 1992: the Supply of Illicit Drugs to the United States.* Washington, D.C.: The Drug Enforcement Agency.

Office of National Drug Control Policy (1989, 1990, 1991) *National Drug Control Strategy.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Office of National Drug Control Policy (1992a) *National Drug Control Strategy.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Office of National Drug Control Policy (1992b) *Price and Purity of Cocaine: The Relationship to Emergency Room Visits and Deaths, and to Drug Use Among Arrestees.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Office of National Drug Control Policy (1993) *Breaking the Cycle of Drug Abuse: 1993 Interim National Drug Control Strategy.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Office of National Drug Control Policy (1994a) *National Drug Control Strategy: Reclaiming Our Communities From Drugs and Violence.* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Office of National Drug Control Policy (1994b) *National Drug Control Strategy: Budget Summary*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Oliver, C. (1990) "Rumors of War." *Reason* (March): 6.

Ostrow, R.J. (1993) "Reno Questions Funding of Drug Interdiction Efforts." *Los Angeles Times*, 8 May: A 2.

Pine, A. (1994) "Pentagon is Scaling Back Its Drug-Fighting Activities." *Los Angeles Times*, 2 April: A 14.

Reuter, P. (1988) "Can the Borders be Sealed?" *The Public Interest* 92: 51–65.

Reuter, P., and Cave, J. (1988) *The Interdictor's Lot: A Dynamic Model of the Market for Drug Smuggling Services*. Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation.

Reuter, P.; Crawford, G.; and Cave, J. (1988) *Sealing the Borders: The Effects of Increased Military Participation in Drug Interdiction*. Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation.

Rydell, C.P., and Everingham, S. (1994) *Controlling Cocaine: Supply Programs Versus Demand Reduction*. Santa Monica, Calif.: The RAND Corporation.

United States General Accounting Office (1990) *Drug Interdiction: Funding Continues but Program Effectiveness is Unknown*, Report GGD-91-10. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

United States General Accounting Office (1993a) *Drug Control: Increased Interdiction and Its Contribution to the War on Drugs*, Report T-NSIAD-93-4. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

United States General Accounting Office (1993b) *Drug Use Measurement: Strengths, Limitations, and Recommendations for Improvement*, Report PEMD-93-18. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

United States General Accounting Office (1993c) *Drug Control: Heavy Investment in Military Surveillance Is Not Paying Off*, Report NSIAD-93-220. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

United States Office of Management and Budget (1993) *Federal Drug Control Programs Budget Summary Fiscal Year 1994*.

Wilson, J.Q. (1983) *Crime and Public Policy*. San Francisco: Institute for Contemporary Studies.

Wilson, J.Q. (1990) "Against the Legalization of Drugs." *Commentary* (February): 21–28.

Wilson, J.Q., and DiIulio, J.J., Jr. (1989) "Crackdown." *The New Republic*, 10 July: 21–25.

Zimring, F.E., and Hawkins, G. (1992) *The Search for Rational Drug Control*. New York: Cambridge University Press.