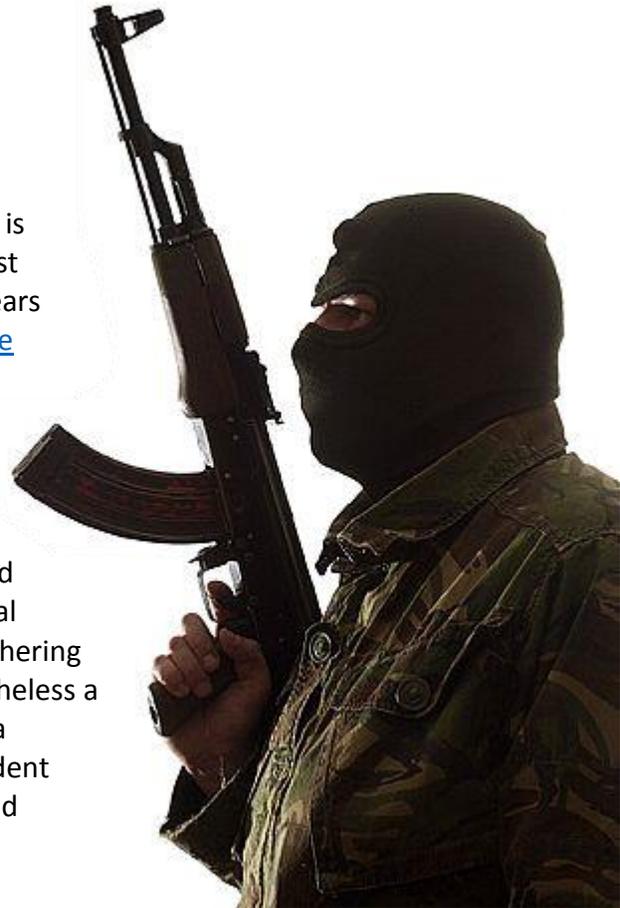


The Illicit Narcotics and Terrorism Connection

by SafeMontana Staff

Introduction

The U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) has traditionally focused its initiatives on drawing attention to the dangers caused by the use of illicit drugs with a series of public service announcements, such as the 'This is your brain on drugs' campaign. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, they changed gears unveiling a [series of ads truthfully correlating the illicit narcotics trade as financing source for global terrorism](#). The message of ONDCP is simply: 'when you support the drug trade by the purchase of illicit narcotics you are supporting terrorism.' This proposition might not fit well with the marijuana legalization crowd who conjure up images of peaceable recreational marijuana users 'keeping to themselves and bothering no one' in their bid for drug legalization. Nevertheless a cursory survey of the myriad evidences reveals a number of startling facts. Chiefly there is an evident correlation between the illicit narcotics trade and terrorism.



Illicit trade in Coca, Cannabis and Opiates: Global Terrorism's Beneficiary

"A major source of [terrorism] funding. . . comes from trade in illegal drugs such as heroin, hashish, cocaine, and methamphetamines," notes investigative journalist Rachel Ehrenfeld in her study *Funding Evil: How Terrorism is Financed*, the findings of which ran contrary to an earlier U.N. research study published in January 2003 which overlooked the correlation between the narcotics trade and terror financing.¹ Not surprisingly, the narcotics and terrorism correlation continues to be downplayed in spite of efforts by researchers and the U.S. government to publicize the correlation between terrorism and narcotics trafficking in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.² Narcoterrorism entails a triangle trade of illicit narcotics, cash profits

¹ Rchael Ehrenfeld, *Funding Evil: How Terrorism is Financed and How to Stop It*, Rev. Ed. (Chicago, IL: Taylor Trade Pub., 2003, 2005), 3-4; c.f. Rand Beers, "Narco-Terror: The Worldwide Connection Between Drugs and Terror," U.S. Department of State Archive, Mar. 13, 2002. <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/inl/rls/rm/8743.htm>

² Join Together Staff, "DEA Exhibit Linking Drugs and Terrorism Criticized," *Partnership for Drug-Free Kids*, Aug. 14, 2006. <http://www.drugfree.org/join-together/dea-exhibit-linking-drugs-and-terrorism-criticized/>

from illicit drugs, which are then utilized to procure illicit armaments, explosives and munitions funding.³

The Sinaloa Cartel (i.e., known in Spanish as *El Cártel de Sinaloa* or *CDS*), one of the most powerful cartels in the Americas, is both diversified and vertically integrated, producing and exporting marijuana, heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine and crack-cocaine. The Sinaloa Cartel may control as much as one-half of the illicit trade coming out of Mexico. Its origins lie in the historic export of Mexican grown cannabis to the United States. As the Colombian cocaine boom grew in the 1980s, the U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Navy began patrolling the Caribbean, and in turn, the Colombians went in search of an alternate trafficking conduit to the United States and Canada, and found it in Mexico.

The Mexican cartels pose an on-going “insurgency” in Mexico and terroristic violence is all too commonplace.⁴ According to the *New York Times*, narcoterrorism has claimed more than 50,000 lives in Mexico since 2006.⁵ Add to that, many Americans have been casualties of the cartels, such as the murder of U.S. Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry who was killed by a rip crew on the U.S.-Mexican border in 2010.⁶ In October 2008, two assailants thought by investigators to be linked to the cartels fired weapons and tossed a grenade into the facilities of the U.S. Consulate in Monterrey, Mexico.⁷ In March 2010, employees at U.S. Consulate in Ciudad Juárez were murdered after leaving a children’s birthday party.⁸ On April 9, 2010, another grenade tossing event occurred at the U.S. Consulate at Nuevo Laredo.⁹ In May 2012, nearly 49 decapitated torsos were found dumped on the side of a road in Monterrey with the obvious effect of intimidating locals as they were left to be discovered.¹⁰ A former Mexican intelligence agent explained, “They are psychopaths sure, but I believe there is method in this madness. They are fighting to defend their reputation for brutality and the image of control in the territories they claim,” in an obvious

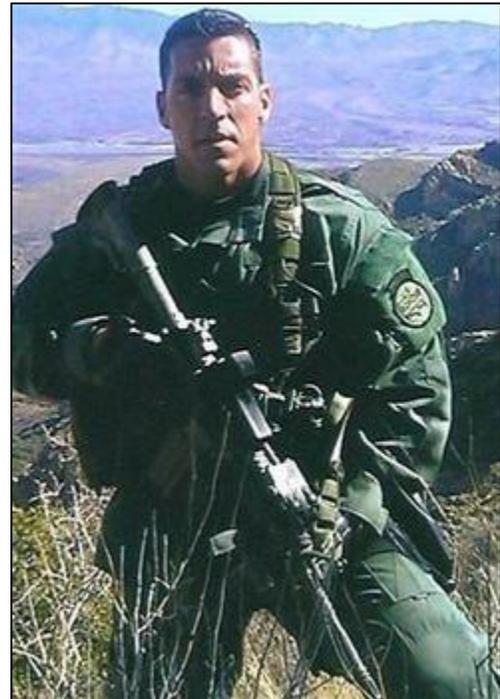


Figure 1 - U.S. Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry of the BORTAC (i.e., Border Patrol Tactical Unit) was as casualty of narcotics traffickers on the U.S.-Mexican border in 2010.

³ LaVerle Berry, Glenn E. Curtis, Rex A. Hudson, Nina A. Kollars, "A Global Overview of the Narcotics-Funded Terrorist and Other Extremist Groups," Library of Congress, May 2002. https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/NarcsFundedTerrs_Extrems.pdf

⁴ Brian Michael Jenkins, "New challenges to U.S. Counterterrorism Efforts," The Rand Corporation (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Institute, 2012), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/2012/RAND_CT377.pdf

⁵ Patrick Radden Keefe, "Cocaine Incorporated," *New York Times*, June 15, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/17/magazine/how-a-mexican-drug-cartel-makes-its-billions.html?_r=0

⁶ Michael Kiefer, "2 convicted in murder of Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry," *Arizona Republic*, Oct. 1, 2015. <http://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona/2015/10/01/guilty-verdict-border-patrol-agent-brian-terry-killing-trial/73144850/>

⁷ Malcolm Beith, "Are Mexico's Drug Cartels Terrorist Groups?" *Slate*, April 15, 2010. www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/foreigners/2010/04/are_mexicos_drug_cartels_terrorist_groups.html

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Jo Tuckman, "Mexican drug cartel massacres have method in their brutal madness," *The Guardian*, May 14, 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/may/14/mexico-drug-cartel-massacres-analysis>

show of intimidation to the civilian populace, state authorities, and cartel rivals.¹¹

In 2012 testimony from a Rand Institute policy analyst before the Government Affairs Committee of the U.S. Congress, it was noted that:

Mexico's violence is notable not merely for the scale of killing but for its deliberately savage quality. Kidnappings, mass killings, and mass graves are common. Victims are brutally tortured and often beheaded. Messages are sent pinned to corpses. The purpose is terror, but the violence exceeds what is required to eliminate rivals and intimidate authorities. A subculture of barbarity has emerged in parts of the country where violence is normalized, even celebrated. To crack the power of these criminal barons and restore government authority when police were unable to, Mexico's president sent in the army.¹²

The Sinaloa Cartel's footprint has put it in unlikely places, such as the remote makeshift farm in the North Woods of Wisconsin utilized to cultivate marijuana and was tended by Mexican migrant farmers and an entourage of guards armed with AK-47 assault rifles.¹³ Drug crime in North Dakota, home to the Bakken oil field, has increased by 27% from 2013 to 2014, and the Sinaloa Cartel has made a concerted effort to control this lucrative market.¹⁴



Figure 2 Militant groups, such as Boko Haram, receive funding from sale of cocaine smuggled from Latin America into Europe.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Brian Michael Jenkins, "New challenges to U.S. Counterterrorism Efforts," The Rand Corporation (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Institute, 2012), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/testimonies/2012/RAND_CT377.pdf

¹³ Patrick Radden Keefe, "Cocaine Incorporated," *New York Times*, June 15, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/17/magazine/how-a-mexican-drug-cartel-makes-its-billions.html?_r=0

¹⁴ JP Carroll, "North Dakota Oil Boom Attracts Mexican Cartels," *Daily Caller*, Dec. 15, 2015, <http://dailycaller.com/2015/12/15/north-dakota-oil-boom-attracts-mexican-cartels/>

In 2012, the Final Report of the Institute of Politics National Security Student Policy Group at Harvard University's Institute of Politics at the JFK School of Government, recommended that policymakers legally defining the Mexican drug cartels as "terrorist organizations," and they pointed to evidence of their nefarious activities for this justification.¹⁵

The Narcotics Trade Fuels Global Terrorism

Dr. James Piazza, a scholar at Penn State University, studied the relationship between the availability of illicit narcotics, such as coca and poppy plants, and terrorist attacks. Piazza concluded that in 170 countries around the world, higher production levels of coca and opiates contributed to higher profits for the illicit narcotics trade, which in turn correlates with higher levels of terrorist violence. When violent organized crime syndicates have more money, they spend more of it financing violence. It's a melancholy fate.¹⁶

It's not just violence by the drug cartels in Mexico that's a source of concern. Al-Qaeda has made recourse to the illegal drug trade as a means of financing its terrorism operations and forcibly subjugating, terrorizing, and killing civilian populations.¹⁷ U.S. Marine General John Kelly, commander of the U.S. Southern Command, has stated publicly that Al-Qaeda raises "lots of money" by a cooperative venture granting key Latin American drug cartels a conduit to traffic cocaine into Europe from Latin America to West Africa's Maghreb region and across the Mediterranean – and this partnership explicitly connects key Latin American cartels and the radical Islamist terrorist organization.¹⁸

In 2015, it was revealed by Mexican federal authorities that an ISIS camp was set up a few miles from the American border, as state officials discovered documents in Arabic and Urdu, and "plans" of Fort Bliss, home of the U.S. Army's 1st Armored Division. Through a partnership with "coyotes" in the Juárez Cartel which engage in human smuggling, ISIS find a conduit for smuggling its



Figure 3 - Opiates from Afghanistan fuel a growing heroin trade directed towards Europe

¹⁵ William Dean, Laura Derouin, Mikhaila Fogel, Elsa Kania, Tyler Keefe, James McCune, Valentina Perez, Anthony Ramicone, Robin Reyes, Andrew Seo, Minh Trinh, Alex Velez-Green, Colby Wilkason, Ben Sprung-Keyser, "The War on Mexican Cartels: Options for U.S. and Mexican Policy-Makers," Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Institute of Politics, September 2012. http://www.iop.harvard.edu/sites/default/files_new/research-policy-papers/TheWarOnMexicanCartels_0.pdf

¹⁶ James A. Piazza, "The illicit drug trade, counternarcotics strategies and terrorism," *Public Choice*. Dec. 2011, Vol. 149, Issue 3, 297-314.

¹⁷ Rachel Ehrenfeld, "Drug trafficking, kidnapping fund al Qaeda," CNN, May 4, 2001. <http://www.cnn.com/2011/OPINION/05/03/ehrenfeld.al.qaeda.funding/>

¹⁸ Edwin Mora, "U.S. General: Al-Qaeda working with Latin American drug cartels," *Breitbart*, Oct. 8, 2014, <http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2014/10/08/u-s-general-al-qaeda-working-with-latin-american-drug-cartels/>

operatives across the desert and into New Mexico and Texas.¹⁹

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, known as FARC, (i.e., an abbreviation of their long-form Spanish name, *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarios de Colombia*) is a major player in drug trafficking to the U.S. from Colombia.²⁰ "Drug trafficking is a highly lucrative enterprise generating billions of dollars in profit that terrorist organizations can easily tap into," wrote Steven C. McCraw, Assistant Director, Office of Intelligence, FBI. "The ties between international terrorist organizations and drug trafficking varies greatly from organization to organization. . . However, drug trafficking profits are the FARC's principal source of funding."²¹ FARC's original reason for being was the overthrow the established order in Colombia in order to supplant it with a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship. In its destabilization campaign against the Columbian government, the FARC conducts terror bombings, extortions, assassinations, kidnappings for ransom, and engages in armed confrontations with the police and military forces of both Columbia and Panama. Its terror victims have included American nationals.²² The FARC have engaged in protection rackets as well, "However, drug trafficking profits are the FARC's principal source of funding."²³

In 2015, FARC has pushed for a cease-fire, and some lay analysts may take it as an abandonment of its revolutionary cause. As a practical matter in turning its efforts away from insurgency directed towards the Columbian government, the FARC is devoting its operations to being a major player among the Latin American cartels and wants to avoid disruption to its logistical network. Having forged a purported \$50 billion partnership with the Sinaloa Cartel in Mexico, the FARC exercises de facto control over southern Panama, and both northwestern and southern Columbia, and it utilizes this territory as a conduit for drug-trafficking, and 'taxes' the competing cartels for logistical access through its territory. The proceeds of its illicit operations continue to fuel kidnappings for ransom, illicit arms smuggling, and terrorist violence.²⁴

The Taliban in Afghanistan have relied upon the illicit trade in opiates, and U.S. military withdrawal has stoked fears that Afghanistan may devolve into a narco-state.²⁵ With the logistical networks from Afghanistan passing through ISIS-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria may prove to be an explosive threat in the region.²⁶ In 2015, Russia's Federal Drug Control Service stated ISIS is poised to earn \$50 billion through its heroin

¹⁹ "ISIS Camp a Few Miles from Texas, Mexican Authorities Confirm," *Judicial Watch*. April 14, 2015. <http://www.judicialwatch.org/blog/2015/04/isis-camp-a-few-miles-from-texas-mexican-authorities-confirm/>

²⁰ "Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)," *National Counter-Terrorism Center*, <http://www.nctc.gov/site/groups/farc.html>

²¹ Steven C. McCraw, "Testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee," Washington, DC, May 20, 2003. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/international-drug-trafficking-and-terrorism>

²² Steven C. McCraw, "Testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee," Washington, DC, May 20, 2003. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/international-drug-trafficking-and-terrorism>; John Otis, "The FARC and Columbia's Illegal Drug Trade," November 2014, *The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*.

²³ Steven C. McCraw, "Testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee," Washington, DC, May 20, 2003. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/testimony/international-drug-trafficking-and-terrorism>

²⁴ Sylvia Longmire, "FARC-Sinaloa Cartel Partnership Worth \$50 Billion, says former Columbian President," *Breitbart*, Dec. 28, 2015. <http://www.breitbart.com/texas/2015/12/28/farc-sinaloa-cartel-partnership-worth-50b-says-former-colombian-president/>

²⁵ Rob Crilly, "American watchdog says Afghanistan risks becoming 'narco-state,'" *The Telegraph*, Jan 15, 2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/10573168/American-watchdog-says-Afghanistan-risks-becoming-narco-state.html>

²⁶ Liam Deacon, "Islamic State plans to flood Europe with heroin. Could make £33 billion [US\$50 Billion] as oil revenues hit by air strikes," *Breitbart London*, Nov. 29, 2015. <http://www.breitbart.com/london/2015/11/29/isis-plans-to-flood-europe-with-heroin-could-make-33-billion-as-oil-revenues-hit-by-air-strikes/>

distribution into European markets.²⁷ Tom Keatinge of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) observes, "If you look at the routes that opium take from Afghanistan, there is a lot of territory controlled by ISIS and therefore they will be making money out of it."²⁸ The United Nations has recognized the threat of terrorist organizations monopolizing the drugs supply, in a recent briefing, having declared ". . .the magnitude of the numbers involved make the relationship worrisome."²⁹ Narco-terrorism is thus a real threat to the U.S. and western industrialized nations.

Drug legalization is not the answer

A preponderance of evidences confounds the libertarian position on complete decriminalization and deregulation of controlled substances as a bit of idealistic naïvety and well-wishing. As James Piazza suggests, the more profitable the cartels become, the more apt they are to are to finance violence and terrorism.³⁰ "Drug trafficking," observes the 2011 World Drug Report, "the critical link between supply and demand, is fueling a global criminal enterprise valued in the hundreds of billions of dollars that poses a growing challenge to stability and security, [noting there are] more and more acts of violence, conflicts and terrorist activities fueled by drug trafficking and organized crime."³¹

The reality is in states with 'successful' marijuana legalization initiatives like Colorado (with its superficially regulated and taxed product) have signaled a trend towards lax law enforcement towards illicit narcotics in general. The legal variety of marijuana incidentally costs far more than the market rate on the street for marijuana cultivated in Mexico's Sierra Madre Mountains. Facing competitive pressures, drug traffickers opted to flood the market with more illicit narcotics — and more potent (and by implication harmful) strains of marijuana so as to differentiate itself from the overpriced, state-regulated variety — but also aggressively pushed more hardcore drugs such as crack and 'crystal meth' in ever cheaper variant products. Clearly traffickers are endeavoring to drive demand by increasing supplies of illicit narcotics, thus lowering the cost of a number of their spinoff products below that of legalized marijuana. With



Figure 4 – According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, Marijuana refers to the dried leaves, flowers, stems, and seeds from the hemp plant, Cannabis sativa. The plant contains the mind-altering chemical delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and is addictive.

²⁷ Jeremy Culley, "ISIS heroin to flood UK: Jihadis in £33bn-a-year cash EXPLOSION from drug smuggling," *The Daily Star*, Nov. 28, 2015. <http://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/477892/ISIS-heroin-drug-trafficking-airstrikes-Russia-Iraq-UK-Europe-terror-Paris-attacks-Syria>

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ James A. Piazza, "The illicit drug trade, counternarcotics strategies and terrorism," *Public Choice*. Dec. 2011, Vol. 149, Issue 3, 297-314.

³¹ Pamela Falk, "U.N.: Afghan's \$61B drug trade funding terrorism," CBS News, Jun. 23, 2011. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/un-afghans-61b-drug-trade-funding-terrorism/>

a supposedly 'legal' dime bag going for \$50 to \$70 in Colorado, the illicit narcotics traffickers have a comparative advantage.

As cartels move to gain a foothold in the more permissive western states, in turn, they can widen the scale of their narcotics operations, and further expand. With the major cartels having achieved record profits amid momentous economies of scale across their production and logistical operations, comes recurrence to the wisdom that the illicit drug problem remains a supply-side problem. Government interdiction remains necessary to disrupt the ever increasing supply of illicit narcotics. It is the nature of the beast that an ever growing supply of illicit narcotics fuels addiction raising demand. Amid the disconcerting trend of lax law enforcement and the specter of legalization, the cartels have ample incentive to continually flood the market with illicit narcotics — low-priced alternatives to regulated-and-taxed marijuana in California, Colorado, Oregon and Washington State. The cartels are taking full advantage of trends towards more societal permissiveness towards gateway drugs like marijuana — thus obtaining new consumers and creating a new generation of addicts.

Yet the conventional libertarian position is that legalization will take the profit out of the trade, and then hypothetically mitigate against its associated violence. Yet when faced with competition from domestically produced marijuana, the cartels responded by disruptive innovation — multiplying the production of new cheaper variants of opiates and meth in an effort to counter-act the availability of legalized marijuana in western states such as Colorado. According to the Rand Institute more violent turf wars among criminal syndicates have ensued in the wake of cannabis legalization in western states such as California — and this is a fact that stands athwart the contrary hypothesis of legalization advocates which points towards less violence.³²

"Legalization of marijuana for recreational use has given U.S. consumers access to high-quality marijuana, with genetically improved strains, grown in greenhouses." Raul Benitez-Manaut, a narcotics trade expert at Mexico's National Autonomous University That's why the Mexican cartels are switching to heroin and meth."³³ Decriminalization of marijuana so far from reducing the accessibility of so called 'hardcore drugs' has in actuality fueled their availability amid competitive pressures faced by the cartels to disrupt, innovate and stay competitive. When coupled with a more slipshod law enforcement strategy against the drug trade in general, marijuana legalization signals a general trend of societal permissiveness towards the illicit narcotics trade.

A two-tiered solution: public awareness to mitigate against demand and supply-side interdiction to disrupt & diminish the illicit narcotics supply

Combating narcoterrorism requires a two-tiered strategy. First one must make recourse

³² Beau Kilmer, Jonathan P. Caulkins, Brittany Bond, Peteur Reuter, "Reducing Drug Trafficking Revenues and Violence in Mexico: Would Legalizing Marijuana in California Help?" (Santa Monica, CA: The Rand Institute, International Programs and Drug Policy Research Center, 2010) http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2010/RAND_OP325.pdf

³³ "Losing marijuana business, Mexican cartels push heroin and meth," *The Washington Post*, January 11, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/losing-marijuana-business-mexican-cartels-push-heroin-and-meth/2015/01/11/91fe44ce-8532-11e4-abcf-5a3d7b3b20b8_story.html

to governmental supply-side interdiction in recognizing that a glut of illicit narcotics dumped on to the American market leads to an increase in drug abuse, more revenues for narco-terrorist organizations, and consequently, an increase violence. Second one must recognize that proper education about the perils of drug abuse and illicit narcotics trafficking remains a necessity. Greater public awareness about the peril posed by drug abuse and an improved understanding that narcotics trafficking serves as the handmaid of global terrorism can strike a blow at the demand for illicit drugs. The widespread dissemination of this knowledge among the masses is requisite to counteract the problem. It's not enough to disrupt the major drug traffickers by interdiction, but rather it requires a concerted effort to win the hearts and minds of individuals. Americans and Montanans alike need to face the stark reality that by consuming and purchasing illicit drugs, one is inadvertently supporting violence and terrorism.

All decent Americans and Montanans were understandably shocked by the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Today people should bear the grim reality that the purchase of illicit narcotics (to include marijuana / hashish) continues to serve as a means of financing global terrorist networks. All things considered, it is imperative that individuals fathom the issues at stake when advocating a libertine, laissez-faire drug policy that favors the illicit distributors of narcotics and global terrorist organizations. These nefarious narco-terrorist entities increasingly work together hand-in-glove, and the lines of distinction between them is blurred. In their direct embrace of terrorist violence and their support of global terrorist networks, drug cartels pose a clear and present danger to the national security of the United States of America and all free peoples.