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The War on Drugs:

The United States government has been engaged in a battle against the proliferation of drugs through American society since President Richard Nixon identified it as a “serious national threat” in 1969. The issue of drug control has a legislative history going much further back than the Nixon administration, but the declaration of the “war on drugs” marked a substantive shift in both the policy and rhetoric used by the federal government. In 1914, Congress passed the Harrison Narcotics Act, the first federal policy regarding drugs, which “restricted the manufacture and sale of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and morphine,” and began to crack down on doctors who were prescribing the drugs.¹ Later, the Narcotics Control Act of 1956 eliminated all judicial discretion to shorten sentences or allow probation for drug-related crimes. The act also restricted the possibility of parole to first time offenders only, and made the sale of heroin to a minor a capital offense.² The Johnson administration, while responsive to the increase in drug use, viewed drug addiction as a mental illness similar to alcoholism, passing the Narcotics Addict Rehabilitation Act of 1966, though drug use remained illegal.³

Following a spike in juvenile arrests and crime related to narcotics in the 1960s, the President called for a coordinated effort between state and federal governments to crack down on their use and sale.⁴ In 1971, Nixon formally declared a “war on drugs” in light of this “national emergency,” and requested funding from Congress to

¹ https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/poverty_prejudice/paradox/htele.html
² https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/poverty_prejudice/paradox/htele.html
³ https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/poverty_prejudice/paradox/htele.html
implement emergency measures. According to The Guardian’s reporting at the time, the President was motivated by the spread of drug use among soldiers fighting in and veterans returning from the Vietnam War, though many thought that Nixon’s new, aggressive policy was motivated by public coverage of ghettos and was a response to the drug culture of the Hippie movement.⁵

In 1970, President Nixon signed the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act into law in order to fill the gaps in existing drug legislation. The Act laid out classifications for various kinds of drugs, banned many of them, and provided for drug abuse research and treatment. Specifically, Title III of the act addresses the import and export of controlled substances as they are classified in Title II.⁶ After declaring his “war on drugs,” President Nixon also expanded the size and scope of federal drug control agencies and advocated for measures that would increase criminal penalties for users and distributors. The Nixon administration oversaw the institution of mandatory minimum sentencing, as well as no-knock warrants to expand the search and seizure of controlled substances.⁷

The election of President Carter marked a brief pause in the anti-drug fervor of the federal government. During his campaign, Carter argued for the decriminalization of marijuana and removal of criminal penalties for the possession of up to one ounce of the substance.⁸ Though he did not support full legalization, the Carter administration’s drug

⁵ http://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/jul/24/war-on-drugs-40-years


control policy focused on the supply-side of the narcotics problem, endorsing interdiction and eradication programs. After support for President Carter’s policy of decriminalizing marijuana (which President Nixon had classified as a Schedule I substance – the most harmful and criminally proscribed category) declined, the War on Drugs continued under the Reagan administration. Panic among parents who worried about the spread of marijuana use among teenagers helped to whip public support for this reinvigorated anti-drug policy. This fear was exacerbated by the media’s sensationalist coverage of crack cocaine use. On October 14, 1982, President Reagan once again declared a “war on drugs,” arguing that drugs posed a threat to national security.

First Lady Nancy Reagan launch a tour of elementary schools across the country to talk to schoolchildren about the dangers of illicit drugs, popularizing the slogan, “Just say no.”

The official policy of the Reagan administration was to focus on the demand-side problems of drug control: “It’s far more effective if you take the customers away than if you try to take the drugs away from those who want to be customers.”

However, the actual policies were much more focused on the supply of drugs, especially with regards to the international drug trade. An examination of the federal budget for drug control programs shows that spending on eradication and interdiction programs jumped from an average of $437

9 https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/poverty_prejudice/paradox/htele.html

13 https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/poverty_prejudice/paradox/htele.html
U.S. Embassy

million a year under Carter to $1.4 billion a year under Reagan, while prevention, education, and rehabilitation programs saw budget cuts.\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{International Actions}

In his 1971 speech to Congress, President Nixon argued for the necessity of international cooperation in successfully fighting the war on drugs:

“In order to secure such cooperation’s, I am initiated a worldwide escalation in our existing programs for the control of narcotics traffic, and I am proposing a number of steps for this purpose…We must recognize that cooperation in control of dangerous drugs works both ways. While the sources of our chief narcotics problem are foreign, the United States is a source of illegal and psychotropic drugs [that] afflict other nations. If we expect other governments to help stop the flow of heroin to our shores, we much act with equal vigor to prevent equally dangerous substances from going into their nations from our own.”\textsuperscript{15}

In order to facilitate this cooperation under the aegis of international law, President Nixon argued for amendments to the Single Convention on Narcotics that would expand and alter the mandate of the International Narcotics Control Board. Most notably, the President argued for the convention to include provisions calling on “signatories to embargo the export and/or import of drugs to or from a particular country that had failed to meet its obligations under the Convention.”\textsuperscript{16} By 1973, the Drug Enforcement Administration had been

\textsuperscript{14}https://web.stanford.edu/class/e297c/poverty_prejudice/paradox/htele.html

\textsuperscript{15}http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3048

\textsuperscript{16}http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=3048
created, and its agents worked to fight the
War on Drugs both at home and abroad.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{17} http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=9252490
US Colombian Relations:

The US has maintained strong diplomatic ties with Colombia, one of the oldest democracies in South America, throughout the 20th century. The relationship was tested in the early 1900s, after President Theodore Roosevelt’s administration became involved in the Panama Revolt. The Colombian government has held its bilateral ties with the United States as a key part of its foreign policy. President Marco Fidel Suarez put forward the Res Pice Polum policy, linking Colombia’s political and economy destiny to the “North Star” (United States), a move strongly supported by coffee exporters. During the 1960s and 1970s, Colombia received large amounts of US assistance intended to help the country managed its external balance of payment as it underwent industrialization and large-scale economic reforms. Much of this assistance was given under President Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress. Unfortunately, Colombia struggled to implement substantial policy changes, and became disillusioned with American support. Colombian lawmakers began to feel as though this only deepened their economic dependence on the United States. Under President Turbay, Colombia initially engaged in a policy of non-alignment by joining their neighbors in denouncing Sandinista guerrillas from Nicaragua as belligerents. However, Nicaragua’s

http://countrystudies.us/colombia/98.htm

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increasingly aggressive territorial claims to islands held by Colombia led Turbay to again seek closer ties to the United States. He joined President Reagan in his anti-communist efforts and echoed criticisms of Cuba and Nicaragua as hotbeds of subversion in Latin America.\(^2\)

The diplomatic relationship between the two countries became increasingly important to the War on Drugs, as Colombia was a leading source of cocaine and marijuana being smuggled into the United States.\(^2\) In 1979, they signed a bilateral extradition treaty, and the US government spent $26 million on a model antinarcotics program in Colombia.

\(^{21}\) [http://countrystudies.us/colombia/98.htm](http://countrystudies.us/colombia/98.htm)

\(^{22}\) [http://countrystudies.us/colombia/98.htm](http://countrystudies.us/colombia/98.htm)
Domestic Concerns:

Given Escobar’s rise to power, the issue of drug trafficking within the US has become more urgent than ever. Indeed, just this year, US law enforcement has seized $100 million worth of cocaine from a Miami International Airport hangar that as been linked to the Medellin Cartel.23 The war on drugs has been one of the top concerns of the President in these past few years, and the situation is becoming increasingly urgent as violence in areas with high levels of drug trade continues. The 1979 shootout at Dadeland Mall in Miami between Colombian traffickers indicates that the Embassy cannot afford to ignore the growing power of cocaine lords in Colombia any longer.24 Our primary domestic concerns relate to securing the border to cut off further trafficking on US land as well as combatting the effects of drug trade in the US, such as rising drug abuse among citizens and violence along the border; in other words, the Embassy must divide its attention between supply-side concerns and demand-side concerns of the drug war.

Supply-Side Concerns: International Drug Trade

Global cocaine trade has been steadily growing in the past few years. While heroin and marijuana have been serious problems as well in the past, cocaine is quickly surpassing these two drugs as the primary drug of choice for traffickers. On 22 November 1975, Colombian police seized 600 kilograms of cocaine from a small plane at an airport in the city of Cali.25 Drug traffickers begin to commit acts of violence throughout the streets of Colombia in response to this seizure, an event that would later be known as the “Medellin

25 Ibid.
Massacre. In the span of one weekend, 40 people are killed by traffickers, and the growing strength of the cocaine industry as well as the Medellin cartel is quickly recognized as a threat to the safety of civilians. As this trafficking spreads to the US, the Embassy must consider what measures they can take to stop the flow of cocaine between Colombia and the US.

The Medellin cartel consists of the Ochoa family, Pablo Escobar, Carlos Lehder and Jose Gonzalo Rodriguez Gacha. These traffickers collaborate in the manufacturing, distribution, and marketing of their cocaine. In the past few years, the cartel has risen to power and enjoyed great success in their trade. The members have reinvested their profits to purchase better equipment, airplanes, and even islands to aid their trafficking route. In 1979, the alliance purchased land on Norman’s Cay in the Bahamas to use as an area for refueling transport planes between Colombia and the US. This island served as a key point in the drug trade route, allowing small cocaine-carrying planes to fly under the US radar and arrive into South Florida. Given the Medellin cartel’s growing influence, the international community must think strategically about the future of Colombia’s drug trade and its potential impacts on global politics.

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
The US has already taken steps to cooperate with the Colombian government to alleviate both countries’ drug dilemmas. As the Medellin cartel rises in power, it has begun to rebel against the Colombian government and Pablo Escobar especially has been a source of violence within Colombian politics. Now that Escobar has been elected to the Congress, this quest for power is likely to only increase, and the Embassy should prepare for subsequent violence in the wake of this ascent. In 1981, the US government and the Colombian government worked to ratify a bilateral extradition treaty. The US also provided $26 million USD in aid to create a comprehensive antinarcotics program. However, if the Medellin cartel’s recent rise to power is any indication, policymakers must consider further options to prevent the spread of cocaine. For example, one of the most important components of US-Colombian drug trade is the Medellin cartel’s use of Norman’s Cay. The US Embassy should look to this area to challenge the drug traffickers’ traditional route. At the same time, delegates must also consider potential political repercussions and obstacles that may stand in the way of


32 Ibid.
successful extradition of traffickers or prevention of intervention.

Demand-Side Concerns: Domestic Drug Trade

Drug use has become a serious problem among US citizens, and the changing conditions in Colombia threaten to further increase the supply of cocaine to users here. In the past years, cocaine has quickly become one of the most popular drugs, and it is poised to become the country’s biggest concern in its ongoing war on drugs. During Carter’s presidency, the US witnessed a significant increase in domestic cocaine use; from 1978 to 1984, cocaine consumption jumped from between 19 and 25 tons to between 71 and 137 tons. The demand for cocaine is estimated to have increased by around 700 percent during those six years. Furthermore, not only is domestic drug use a key concern, but the violent effects of drug trade, such as gang warfare and police shootouts, have become more and more evident in inner cities. In response, the general public is calling for more effective and efficient action from the US government, focusing their attention especially on cocaine usage within the country. Thus, as policymakers consider US-Colombia relations, they must also understand the effects of drug trade on the American public and act accordingly.

With the creation of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in 1973, the US government has already made numerous efforts to curtail drug use and stem the flow of illicit substances from Mexico, and now, Colombia. During President Reagan’s first term, he increased the average annual amount of funding for drug eradication and interdiction programs from an annual average of $437 million during Carter’s presidency to $1.4 billion.

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35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
This past January, in response to the shootout in Miami and the public’s calls for action, President Reagan has created the South Florida Drug Task Force, featuring agents from the DEA, FBI, Navy, Army, and more to mobilize against drug dealers and prevent further violence in the US.\textsuperscript{38} However, it remains to be seen whether this organization will be an effective force against domestic drug violence and trade, especially given the unpromising conclusions of past efforts.

Nonetheless, Reagan believes in focusing on the demand side of the war on drugs, stating in his speech, “It’s far more effective if you take the customers away than if you try to take the drugs away from those who want to be customers.”\textsuperscript{39} In the coming months, he hopes to impose demand side initiatives that involve stricter, harsher punishments for drug users, possibly in the form of a “zero tolerance” stance.\textsuperscript{40} As the Embassy moves forward, delegates should consider the potential effects of such initiatives and developments on the drug trade between the US and Colombia, as well as their impact on bilateral relations in general.

\textsuperscript{38} “Thirty Years of America’s Drug Wars.”

\textsuperscript{39} “The Modern Drug War.”

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.