

STEPS FOR RECOVERY

THE DRUG WAR ON OUR DOORSTEP

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As the 2010 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR) by the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs draws near, it's important to take a look at what exactly the drug war in our neighboring country of Mexico means to our government and to us. As a nation we want to put a stop to the illegal use of merchandising of wholesale drugs and the violence connected to drug cartels, but as individuals we are the number one buyer in this lucrative drug trade.

Since 2004, more than 200 Americans have died due to violence from drug cartels, and since 2007, a reported 9,903 people have been killed in the drug war, and that number continues to rise. This month alone, more than a dozen people have been killed in Tijuana by drug cartels. "Four people were decapitated, at least 10 people were killed in drive-by attacks (three of those were teenagers killed by automatic weapons), and five people were kidnapped, including two security guards and a prominent businessman."

Stories of teenagers and families being shot down by gunfire or decapitated are found alongside numerous reports of firebombing of buildings and cars nearly every week. The killings are creative and cruel and do not discriminate against child or adult.

On March 25, 2009, U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, stated that "Our [America's] insatiable demand for illegal drugs fuels the drug trade," emphasizing the obvious role the U.S. plays in this war.

The Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), which evaluates and restricts any illegal or unauthorized entrance of materials to our country, has been, and continues, to do its part. However, further drug-trafficking control is needed. The U.S. government has subsequently set up counter-narcotics law enforcement through the Drug Enforcement Administration to stop the trafficking of narcotics; this is a hands on approach to the problem in which the program is meant to train law enforcement to investigate, arrest and prosecute drug dealers involved with selling and bringing of narcotics into U.S. territory. This war is a financial strain on both the U.S. and Mexico as a large supply of weaponry and man power is needed to mandate control along the border. 45,000 troops have already been deployed by Mexican President, Felipe Calderon, spreading them across problem areas where trafficking is proven to be at its peak. However, even with this strategy from both Mexico and the U.S., crime and violence is spreading north and closer to home. Much of the drug violence occurs in Mexico, in cities such as Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez and Nuevo Laredo, but also more frequently at the U.S.-Mexico Boarder.

Violence and crime associated with Mexican drug and smuggling cartels is being seen more and more at the boarder and such nearby states as Texas and Arizona have seen crime increase in this past year.

In the 1990's, the Clinton Administration took a different approach to this growing problem. The Rand Drug Policy Research Center did a study which showed that the best way to resolve the cause of the problem is by addressing the root issue, which is drug and addiction in the U.S. Through treatment and education programs, addiction should be eradicated at home, cutting the demand for narcotics smuggling internationally and ending the violence attributed to it, but the Bush Administration did not agree with such a tactic and change has yet to be seen under the Obama Administration. Instead, the attention and money has been focused on law enforcement and the idea of fighting fire with fire. More than ten years have gone by and drug cartels have increased in size and power, as more organized groups try to take over the drug market. The 2010 INCSR will determine if much has changed in Mexico in the past year and if the tactics under way right now have made an impact, but most importantly what the Obama Administration's new game plan for the New Year will be. Maybe

it's time for a new approach: taking away the hand that feeds, for instance.

Regardless, we've all heard this simple story so many times before, temptation versus logic. We know we should support our government, support the health of our body and mind, and we know what the right choice is, and yet the need and demand for drugs prevails. We know now that it's not simple, change has to come from us all in order to make a difference but as Americans, we can at least do our part. The problem does have a solution, and it is to stop the addictive battle we've created within ourselves which has manifested into a very real war, too close to home.