

# Drug Terror Link Shows Sloppy Thinking of Drug War Advocates

**By Kevin B. Zeese, President, Common Sense for Drug Policy**

A recent Pew Poll found that only 15 percent of the public believes the drug war can succeed - about the same percentage that believes Elvis is still alive. During the Super Bowl the "drug czar" kicked off the most expensive federal media campaign attempting to link drug use with terrorism.

Why is the Office of National Drug Control Policy spending \$3.5 million on advocacy ads when half the people who want drug treatment can't get it? Is it because the drug war is losing public support or because the FBI, Customs and DoD, who had been major agencies in enforcing the drug laws, have diverted resources to terrorism since September 11?

The ads are an escalation in the selling of the administration's war on drugs. Indeed, the advertisements seemed more like an effort to reinvigorate the culture war around drug issues through fear of terrorism rather than a sincere effort at preventing American youth from using drugs.

In addition to relying on fear to promote its policy the advertisements make another mistake commonly found in the drug debate: failing to distinguish between problems caused by drugs and problems caused by the illegality of drugs.

Millions of Americans spend billions of dollars on Ritalin for youth, Prozac and Viagra for adults, and caffeine, nicotine or alcohol, but none of these drug dollars fuel terrorism. Thus, it is not the drugs but the illegality of the drugs that creates profits for terror - profits that also fuel organized crime, corruption and violence around the globe.

The past is once again prologue. During my grandparent's day, people understood that it was the alcohol prohibition of the 1920s that fueled crime, violence and corruption. But today, policy makers and the media often miss the distinction between the effects of drugs and the effects of drug laws. Yet, failure to make this distinction feeds social ills made worse by drug prohibition, e.g. corruption of police by drug money, extremely high incarceration rates especially of minorities and the rapidly escalating tax burden of the drug war. These are all problems created by drug prohibition, not by drug use - blaming the user would be like blaming beer drinkers during prohibition for the violence of Al Capone.

The drug cash slush fund, which the United Nations estimates to be an annual \$400 billion industry, has been tied to violence throughout its history - sometimes by our own government. In the early 1970s drug trafficking fueled the war in Southeast Asia; in the 1980s the Iran-Contra Affair allowed drug profits to pay for weapons for war in Nicaragua.

Indeed, it has been known for years that the drug war is the primary source of funds for terrorists; Interpol made that point six years ago. But we have kept doing more of the same, and as a result, there has been a growing drug cash slush fund for violent drug cartels and terrorists.

Simplistic sloganeering about drugs - highlighted by the drug czar's ad campaign - makes our communities less healthy, less safe and less free. So long as we fail to recognize that it is the drug laws that fuel terrorism and not drug use we will continue to fuel terrorists and other criminals. Once we realize that the cause of this crime cash flow are the drug laws, then we can recognize that with a stroke of a pen we can change the laws and take away a major source of terrorist funding.

Once we change the paradigm of drug control to a public health approach to treat drug abuse, investment in youth to prevent drug abuse and regulation to create a controlled drug market, then we can not only stop funding terrorism but support programs of proven effectiveness. Polls indicate that a large majority of Americans recognize that the drug war is not working. Perhaps drug czar's propaganda campaign will lead to clearer thinking and highlight the urgency of the need for a new approach to drug control