

The futility of drug supply interdiction policies

By Byron A. Ellis - September 26, 2011



The Mexican efforts in fighting the supply of illicit drugs demonstrate without a doubt that supply interdiction policies do not work. As long as there is demand for illicit drugs, suppliers will meet the demand. Therefore, the problem is not the supply, but rather the demand for illicit drugs.

If there were no demand for illegal drugs, the price would fall and the market would not support as many suppliers. Thus, illicit drug interdiction policies that target the supply and ignore the demand will fail.

In 1998, Ellis argued in *The Black World Today* (7/1/98) that supply interdiction policies had limited effects and that the illicit drug problem was an economic problem. He noted that outlays spent each year on supply interdiction were wasteful expenditures. Furthermore, he stated that supply interdiction policies are ineffective.

The focus, therefore, should be on demand interdiction policies. Thus, the Calderón administration approach is the wrong approach and has adversely affected the Mexican people.

Drug using nations have astutely transferred the cost of drug interdiction to supplier and transshipment nations. However, supplier and transshipment nations are not the root cause of the drug problem. The root cause is the demand for drugs from addicted nations.

Ellis in his 1998 article noted that effective demand interdiction policies by user nations would raise the actual users' cost, but would reduce the market price of illicit drugs. He noted, "...a high user's cost is particularly significant to the well to do suburbanite user."

A high user's cost involving incremental non-criminal penalties, starting with state medical supervision, notification to employers, and ending with the seizure of users' property could modify users' behavior. User nations could also decriminalize the distribution, sale and use of illegal drugs; they could also implement a nationwide random employment drug-testing program.

It is important, however, that demand interdiction policies incorporate drug treatment and education. Additionally, it should not be used to overcrowd the justice and prison systems.

Suppliers and transshipment nations should let drug using nations bear the cost of their citizens' drug addiction behaviors.

In the case of Mexico, transferring the cost back to user nations would reduce the unnecessary deaths caused by the supply interdiction policy.

With a free flow of illicit drugs from supplier and transshipment nations, user nations will be forced to implement demand interdiction policies or bear the cost of their citizens' behaviors.