

Seventeen Benefits of the War on Drugs

Written by Kevin Carson

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With American drug-use levels essentially the same as – and levels of drug-related violence either the same as or lower than – those in countries such as the Netherlands with liberal drug laws, public support for the War on Drugs appears to be faltering. This was most recently evidenced in the victory of major drug-decriminalization initiatives in Colorado and Washington. Some misguided commentators go so far as to say the Drug War is “a failure.” Here, to set the record straight, are 17 ways in which it is a resounding success.

1) It has surrounded the Fourth Amendment’s “search and seizure” restrictions, and similar provisions in state constitutions, with so many “good faith,” “reasonable suspicion,” and “reasonable expectation of privacy” loopholes as to turn them into toilet paper for all intents and purposes.

2) In so doing, it has set precedents that can be applied to a wide range of other missions, such as the War on Terror.

3) It has turned drug stores and banks into arms of the state that constantly inform on their customers.

4) Via programs such as DARE, it has turned kids into drug informants who monitor their parents for the authorities.

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5) As a result of the way DARE interacts with other things such as zero-tolerance policies and warrantless inspections by drug-sniffing dogs, the Drug War has conditioned children to believe the policeman is their friend, and to view snitching as admirable behavior, and to instinctively look for an authority figure to report to the second they see anything the least bit eccentric or anomalous.

6) Via civil forfeiture, it has enabled the state to create a lucrative racket in property stolen from citizens never charged, let alone convicted, of a crime. Best of all, even possessing large amounts of cash, while technically not a crime, can be treated as evidence of intent to commit a crime – saving the state the trouble of having to convert all that stolen tangible property into liquid form.

7) It has enabled local police forces to undergo military training, create paramilitary SWAT teams that operate just like the U.S. military in an occupied enemy country, get billions of dollars worth of surplus military weaponry, and wear really cool black uniforms just like the SS.

8) Between the wars on the urban drug trade and rural meth labs, it has brought under constant harassment and surveillance two of the demographic groups in our country – inner-city blacks and rural, poor whites – least socialized to accept orders from authority either in the workplace or political system, and vital components of any potential movement for freedom and social justice.

9) In addition, it brings those who actually fall into the clutches of the criminal-justice system into a years-long cycle of direct control through imprisonment and parole.

10) By disenfranchising convicted felons, it restricts participation in the state's "democratic" processes to only citizens who are predisposed to respect the state's authority.

11) In conjunction with shows such as *Law & Order* and *Cops*, it conditions the middle-class citizenry to accept police authoritarianism and lawlessness as necessary to protect them against the terrifying threat of people voluntarily ingesting substances into their own bodies.

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12) Through “if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear” rhetoric, it conditions the public to assume the surveillance state means well and that only evildoers object to ubiquitous surveillance.

13) In conjunction with endless military adventures overseas and “soldiers defend our freedoms” rhetoric, it conditions the public to worship authority figures in uniform, and predisposes them to cheerfully accept future augmentations of military and police authority without a peep of protest.

14) It creates enormously lucrative opportunities for the large banks – one of the most important real constituencies of the American government – to launder money from drug-trafficking. HSBC, Bank of America, and Wachovia have made billions laundering drug money – Wachovia raking in almost \$400 billion. You can be sure that if there were a serious threat of cocaine and heroin legalization in Washington, the hit squads – funded by those who profit from the illegal drug trade – would be out in force.

15) Thanks to major drug-production centers such as the Golden Triangle of Southeast Asia, the opium industry in Afghanistan, and the cocaine industry in South America, it enables the CIA – the world’s largest narco-trafficking gang – to obtain enormous revenues for funding black ops and death squads around the world. This network of clandestine intelligence agencies, narco-traffickers, and death squads, by the way, is the other major real constituency of the American government.

16) Revenues from Drug War-created black markets come in handy when Congress refuses to appropriate funds for morally abhorrent operations. According to journalist Gary Webb, whose carefully documented accounts were suppressed or marginalized by the corporate media, the American domestic traffic in crack cocaine was used to clandestinely fund the Contras.

17) The drug-producing and -trafficking interests created by the Drug War make useful allies when the U.S. wants to overthrow and install governments. The Taliban regime in Afghanistan was serious about stamping out opium production, and alienated the large share of the population that supplemented its income by cultivating poppies. The Northern Alliance protected opium production within its territories. After the U.S. installed the Northern Alliance as government in Afghanistan in late 2001, Afghanistan quickly became the world’s center of opium production once again.

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The Drug War would indeed be a failure if its real function was to reduce drug consumption or drug-related violence. But the success or failure of state policies is rightly judged by the extent to which they promote the interests served by the state. The Drug War is a roaring success when empowering the state and conditioning the public to unquestioning obedience.

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