

International and National Perspectives on Drug Trafficking

H.H.A. (Tony) Cooper, Esquire
President, Nuevevidas International, Inc.

I would like to begin by observing that when I was asked to come here to talk on this topic, it reminded me of a passage in Alice in Wonderland. The king said to Alice, "What do you know about this business?" Alice said, "Nothing." "Nothing whatever?" persisted the king. "Nothing whatever," said Alice. "That's very important," the king said. That's where we shall start today. It is a subject where a little humility in the matter of knowledge is very important.

When you look at international and national perspectives on drug trafficking, you can see that there are a number of things that are worth talking about. Let me begin with a few observations on the subject of language. Words are powerful things. They serve to convey our thoughts. Language shapes our ideas and the principles on which we base policies. Words help to fix our attitudes. In the realm of social science, we must be careful not to use them promiscuously or imprecisely. While preparing this presentation this morning, I heard a high administration official on the radio talking about the war on drugs. What a misnomer! Drugs, like buildings and other artifacts, are inanimate objects. War is the ultimate deterrent. It is designed to intimidate or force some different course of action after other forms of persuasion and diplomacy have failed. Drugs have no mind of their own upon which such strategies might act. You can no more make war on drugs than you can terrorize the World Trade Center or the Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Let there be no mistake here. It is human beings who produce and market the illicit substances that other human beings abuse. When we speak, loosely, about a war on drugs, we really mean society's struggle against drug traffickers. This is a just war, in the legal sense, a war of self-preservation, and it must be waged, prudently, with all the resources at our disposal.

I have taught a course for the past 20 years on organized crime. It is a very interesting and much misunderstood subject. People learn about organized crime, these days, mainly from Hollywood and TV, from the A&E Channel, and the History Channel. What do they focus on? They focus on people like Bugsy Siegel and Lucky Luciano, Al Capone, and all these other violent people,

so you get a lot of blood and thunder -- you know, the Valentine's Day Massacre and all that good stuff. It makes for good cinema, but it produces a very distorted picture of a serious social ill.

As you know, the current administration in Washington came into office in 1992, and you may recall that one of its most effective campaign slogans was, "It's the economy, stupid." That is what organized crime, and particularly the sordid business of drugs, is all about. *"It's the money, stupid."* If it didn't make money, a great deal of money, nobody would organize to traffic in illicit substances. Money is the lifeblood of organized crime.

The matter of what is an illicit substance goes back a long way in the history of organized crime. Organized crime was organized right from the start, but it was petty until Prohibition. Then when we got Prohibition, it generated enormous sums of money. And after 1933, organized crime had to find ways of investing that money. Of course, we have a wonderful monument to that. An extraordinary laundry built in the desert of Nevada, called Las Vegas, now generates even more money through gambling and entertainment of all kinds. Now, organized crime can scarcely be mentioned in the same breath as that wholesome, ever-expanding megalopolis.

When you look at this, as a business, you can see that substance abuse has many, many facets. It is obviously a medical problem. So we must look at this from a public health perspective. But we look at it also from a sociological perspective, from a law enforcement perspective and, as Willie Simmons so ably demonstrated, from a corporate security perspective. Each of these angles produces its own distinctive responses.

Yet there is this common thread, the economics of the business runs all the way through. When you are talking about the costs to the individual, to society, to the corporation, and the incidental costs of the prevention and treatment for substance abuse, you are talking about money. And the real costs are truly staggering. We can never afford to ignore the root causes of the problem. If the profit were not there, would we have these problems? The hard economic laws supply their own answer.

The problem of substance abuse obviously has international dimensions. Regardless of politics, scarcely a nation remains unaffected. In the Soviet Union, the gross social product more than tripled between 1960 and 1980. But alcohol abuse was extraordinary by any standards. One of the first things that Mikhail Gorbachev did was to institute a very unpopular program to control the substance that was most abused, namely vodka. This was very cheap and easily available, and you have to ask yourself, in a sociological sense, why there was this abuse.

You can look at this international example and you can see that when we talk about doing something about drug abuse, alcohol abuse, whatever abuse you like, basically it is all a matter of practical politics. What do you want to stop? What do you want to prohibit, as a matter of law? And can you, as a practical matter, make that prohibition work?

When you raise the issue of substance abuse, you are talking about supply and demand. Certain countries produce drugs and sell them on the world market. This is not a matter of legal niceties. If there were no market *here*, they wouldn't be bothering to produce illegal drugs there; they would produce nice things like flowers and exotic fruits. There is a market here for these other substances, a lucrative market, and the supplies have moved to meet the perceived demand.

We have tried to handle this problem in various ways. We have a lot of lessons to learn, I fear, in the area of diplomacy. When we deal with sovereign nations, we cannot dictate to these countries. We have a very ticklish relationship, for example, with our nearest neighbor to the south, Mexico. They have always regarded us in their own idiom as being the colossus of the North, and they resent, most strongly, any infringement of their sovereignty. In the early 1990s we were extremely worried about the drug trafficking problem centered upon Colombia. This had reached very serious proportions, and the U.S. wanted to take certain military action there. But what really irritated Colombia more than anything else was the fact that *their* people were dying and being kidnapped by the drug traffickers that the U.S. wanted to process through our own legal system, while we were, at the same time, giving Mayor Marion Barry of Washington, D.C., a mild slap on the wrist for his drug peccadillos. What kind of message did they receive?

For a long while, during the era of the speakeasies, there was illicit production, transport, sale, and consumption of alcohol. Now, of course, you can buy it all on Main Street, or at a corner liquor store or supermarket without fear of anything happening to you on the way out. This is not an argument for legalization -- it is simply a restatement of the effort of market forces. When you look at this, you can see that intervention by the state both on the international and domestic level is important. I don't suggest that we moderate our language or soften our tone with respect to objectives. But what we have to do here is to get a better idea of what we need, what we really want to do, and how we can best accomplish that. Only in that way can we prosecute the war on drug traffickers effectively.

If you can turn off the spigot of money being generated by the production and sale of these illicit substances, then you will destroy the market for them. But you cannot expect universal agreement for such a policy. When you look at countries like Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Mexico, you are talking about countries that really need this money for their own development. Realistically, they have little else of such value to export. When you examine this and say, "Well, we've got to cut this out. We're going to turn off the supply," where do you do it? Do you do it at the source? Do you do it at the transportation level? How do you do it within the context of a friendly foreign policy?

I want to say, briefly, something about that. Deborah Galvin said to you this morning, "Knowledge is power." But power really is of no value until it is used. Drugs are dangerous substances. But they are not dangerous until they reach the hands of the consumer. When you look at this, you quickly realize the importance of transportation. Drugs don't come here by themselves; they are not self-transporting. They come here mainly by aircraft. The commercial aviation industry has spent a great deal of money in helping the government to police this traffic. When you look at this, that is a model for the rest of corporate America in helping to tackle the drug problem. It is clear, too, that only by getting the cooperation of corporate America, and our friends in the international community, are you going to get any successful eradication of this terrible blight.

When you look at this problem comprehensively, you see it has international and national dimensions. It crosses all disciplines, and it calls for cooperation of a highly technical kind. Only in this way can we win the war against those who traffic in drugs.

Q That was a very interesting example, the transportation industry. I'm not very familiar with the other industries in corporate America. Do you have any other examples in addition to the airlines?

A Not where government has taken really draconian measures. Obviously control of drug use and control over transportation of drugs are two separate things. Government tends to control very closely the railway industry, trucking, things of this nature.

The State of California has a very interesting program. I know a great deal about it from the field level. They've got a man who is a highway patrol officer, who is an expert at identifying vehicles that he suspects are carrying drugs as they come through the State of California from the border of Mexico. He has a backup officer who looks after him while he is on the ground. My friend, who is that backup officer, will tell you that the search expert works on this until he finds the drugs. He will often be in 130-degree heat with the tar melting there under the vehicle, taking it apart until he finds secret compartments, and concealed drugs. And he is exceedingly successful.

The problem is, they've only got two officers on this program, and they have to be very discriminating. They have to operate very much within the realm of the law.

When you look at this, it comes down to the dedication of individuals. A program like that really doesn't work as well as it should because the State of California has assigned only two officers to it. It is the dedication of people that makes these programs work. Now I suggest that we could apply that right across the board.

When you look at a successful program, it is not successful because it makes use of some extraordinary principles that are out there. It is successful because human beings translate a principle into something that is tangible. And we do see the results.