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Insanity - Four Decades of U.S. Counterdrug Strategy

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In the four decades since President Nixon first declared war on drugs the U.S. counterdrug strategy has remained virtually unchanged – favoring supply-reduction, law enforcement and criminal sanctions over demand-reduction, treatment and education. While the annual counterdrug budget has ballooned from $100 million to $25 billion, drug availability of most illicit drugs remains at an all-time high. The human cost is staggering – nearly 40,000 drug-related deaths in the U.S. annually. The societal impact, in purely economic terms, is now estimated to be approximately $200 billion per year. And the global illicit drug industry now accounts for 1 percent of all commerce on the planet – approximately $320 billion annually. Legalization is almost certainly not the answer; however, an objective analysis of available data confirms that: 1) the U.S. has pursued essentially the same flawed supply-reduction strategy for forty years; and 2) simply increasing the amount of money invested each year in this strategy will not make it successful. Faced with impending budget cuts and a future of budget austerity, policymakers must replace the longstanding U.S. counterdrug strategy with a pragmatic,science-based, demand-reduction strategy that offers some prospect of reducing the economic and societal impacts of illicit drugs on American society.

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