
DOD Role in Drug Control

[The Fall, 1989, issue of *The DISAM Journal* (pp. 15-18) contained a DOD policy statement entitled "Department of Defense Guidance for Implementation of the President's National Drug Control Strategy," which was issued by Secretary of Defense Richard B. Cheney on September 18, 1989. The following is an elaboration of that statement as presented by Secretary Cheney in a news briefing conducted at the Pentagon also on September 18, 1989. The Secretary is introduced below by Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs) Pete Williams.]

Williams. Good morning ladies and gentlemen. This is a single-subject briefing on the subject of the Department of Defense plans to implement the President's national drug control strategy. Secretary Cheney will speak, give his comments to you, and then be available for questions. . . .

Cheney. Thank you, Pete. I do have a brief statement to make, and then I'll be happy to respond to questions.

For the past several years, the Department of Defense has been embarked on a program to counter the problem of illegal drugs entering the United States. Since taking on that mission we've committed more than 72,000 flying hours and 7,000 ship days in support of the anti-drug effort. Just recently, we established Joint Task Force Four in the Caribbean and Joint Task Force Five in the Pacific to help stem the flow of drugs from the south and west. We are also expanding the coverage of radar at our borders.

One of the main foreign policy goals of this Administration and this President is to reduce the flow of illegal drugs into the United States and, if possible, to eliminate it. Two weeks ago, the President issued his national drug control strategy. Today, I want to explain in greater detail how the Department of Defense will do more to fit into that strategy.

Our specific mission in the Department of Defense is to protect national security. There can be no doubt that international trafficking in drugs is a national security problem for the United States. Therefore, the detecting and countering of the production and trafficking of illegal drugs is a high-priority, national security mission of the Department of Defense.

Under the leadership of President Bush, there is now a recognition that the drug problem is not just for the department alone to fight. The President knows that the only way to deal with the drug problem is to combine interdiction with treatment, education, prevention, and enhancement to law enforcement. We need to also make clear that the Defense Department is not a law enforcement agency. We do not enforce domestic criminal laws, nor can we solve society's demand problem. But there is much that we can do without usurping the police role.

We will work on the drug program at every phase—at the sources, in the delivery pipeline, and to further support federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. In countries where the plants are grown and the raw materials are converted into drugs, we can provide economic and security assistance, training, and operations support for host country forces, and assistance to law enforcement agencies of those countries to stop the export of drugs.

We will work hard to stop the delivery of drugs on the way to the United States and at our borders and ports of entry. Deploying appropriate elements of the armed forces with the primary mission to cut off the flow of drugs should, over time, help to reduce the flow of drugs into the country. At the very least, this will immediately complicate the challenge of getting illegal drugs into America, increasing the cost and the risk of drug smuggling.

Here at home we will help law enforcement agencies and the National Guard with their training, reconnaissance planning, and logistics. We will step up our efforts to stop drug use by department personnel, a program that has reduced drug abuse by more than 80 percent in the last eight years.

As you know, the President has directed the department to act as the lead agency in providing better communications and intelligence cooperation among agencies of the federal government in fighting the drug problem.

I believe that our military forces have the capability to make a substantial contribution toward interdiction, and I am asking them to make the necessary preparations to carry out that responsibility.

While it would be up to the commanders-in-chief to provide the precise details for carrying out the President's drug mission in their areas, I have given them the general direction in which the department should move to achieve a more forward-leaning posture.

GENERAL DIRECTION

I am asking the Atlantic Command to prepare a plan for a substantial Caribbean counter-narcotics task force, with appropriate planes and ships to help reduce the flow of drugs from Latin America.

I am asking the Forces Command for a plan to deploy appropriate forces to complement and support the counter-narcotics work of U.S. law enforcement agencies and cooperating foreign governments. That effort will focus especially on the southern border with Mexico.

I am asking NORAD to plan to increase detecting and monitoring of illegal drug traffic to the U.S.

I have asked the Southern and Pacific Commands as well to plan to combat the production and trafficking of illegal drugs in conjunction with cooperating host countries in their areas of responsibility.

I have also asked the civilian and military leaders of the department to immediately find ways to better support the President's national drug strategy, including ways to increase the effectiveness of host country forces.

I have proposed several steps, consistent with national policy, available resources, and our national values and law. These actions include studying the possibility of installing mobile radars in countries where drugs are grown and processed; exploring the opportunities to train counter-narcotics forces of cooperating foreign countries, including the greater use of mobile training teams; arranging to detail military personnel to federal law enforcement agencies to provide liaison, help train, and do planning as appropriate; continuing and expanding, where appropriate, our support of the counter-narcotics effort of the National Guard as it provides support for the states; and reviewing the potential for the department to provide temporary overflow facilities when federal, state, or local authorities need more jail and prison space.

The Department of Defense is an enthusiastic participant in the nation's drug control effort. We have significant resources at our disposal. We can make a substantial contribution to our national effort if we use our assets intelligently and efficiently. The guidance I am issuing today is intended to make that happen.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. Mr. Secretary, many of the complaints in the building [i.e., the Pentagon] center on the fact that the military is being asked to do more with less. How can you respond to that?

A. The President has made it clear that this is an important priority for him; I've made it clear that it's an important priority for me; Congress has made it clear that they feel very strongly that we need to be more actively involved in the counternarcotics effort. There is money being added to our budget for that purpose, if you look at the actions of the Senate Appropriations Committee just this past week.

There is no question but what this involves some tradeoffs and some choices. We'll have a much better feel for exactly what kind of tradeoffs we're talking about once we see the detailed plans coming in from the commanders-in-chief. But I think as in all of our other missions, the department has to make choices. We cannot do everything we would like to do all of the time. We have limited resources. The point of the directive that I've issued today is to make it clear to everyone in the department—civilian and military alike—that this is a high-priority, national security mission for us and that, therefore, it deserves a greater allocation of resources in terms of time and energy and effort and perhaps equipment and troops and personnel than has been true in the past.

Q. Have you put a cost on this . . .? And secondly, how will this affect the military's ability to do its other job, providing for the national defense of the country?

A. First of all, we don't have a specific cost figure at this point because we don't have any detailed plans back from the commanders-in-chief. I think the important thing is for us to get back in the detailed proposals that they are now working on. Then we'll have to make some judgements about what's feasible within our budget, what money is available now, and what additional resources may be required.

With respect to our ability to perform our other missions, I don't see this as in any way in conflict with our basic mission of defending the country. I think when you have reached a point where you have the kinds of problems that we see today in our society as a result of illegal narcotics trafficking, when we have in Panama a country that today is basically governed by a man who's been indicted as one of the drug traffickers; when you have the government of a friendly country, Colombia, seriously threatened by the cartel, financed in this case by billions of dollars provided by Americans who used drugs illegally, I think you've got what, in my mind, is clearly a serious national security problem. On that basis, I think it deserves the kind of attention we plan to give it.

Obviously, again, you have to make some tradeoffs. It may be, for example, that we'll find that deploying resources and assets in this area, whether it's in the Caribbean or perhaps in assisting law enforcement agencies along the southern border, means those units will not be available for other purposes, probably training and exercises. But there are some benefits.

For example, if you go to NORAD, where I was a couple of weeks ago, talk with our folks out there, they like very much having the role of being actively involved in the interdiction efforts as it relates to illegal air traffic coming into the United States. It gives them a real target to work, and the same skills they require in their normal, basic, national security assignment are very appropriate in this regard. So I think you can't make a clear-cut choice. I cannot say, though, that this will not mean that it's more difficult for us to do some of our other things. Our basic mission is still to defend the country. That will continue, and this is an added responsibility.

Q. Mr. Secretary, it has been DOD policy to cooperate in interdiction missions and so forth if it coincided with training. Is that still going to be the policy, or are you going to go beyond training?

A. I think we'll go beyond training.

Q. How quickly do you expect to see results from this program, and how will you measure success?

A. Again, I guess I would like to come back to the proposition that there is no quick, easy answer to the drug problem. It is a problem that's been with us for a long time. It's gotten worse lately. If we're going to be successful in dealing with the drug problem in the country, it will be because we have a broad-gauged strategy that addresses the production in the host countries, the problem of transiting the drugs into the United States, and then the problem of consumption within the United States itself. We are not responsible for all of these phases, but we have contributions we can make in each one of those phases.

The Department of Defense, I think, ought to be judged in terms of its ability to cooperate in the overall effort that the President has laid out for us. It's going to take years. Its going to take the cooperation of millions of Americans. It's going to take the best efforts of law enforcement agencies and the military and educational facilities and rehabilitation centers and all of the other elements in our society that have to contribute to this effort. And it's going to take a fundamental change in public attitude.

Q. Number 1, are you for or against shooting down aircraft that fail to heed warnings to land and are suspected of carrying drugs? Number two, what more would you have our active duty military doing on the ground in other countries who ask for our help? In other words, where would you draw the fire break between advising and participating?

A. We have no authority to shoot down aircraft coming into the United States. We haven't sought such authority, and I think you have to be very careful about proceeding on that basis. Obviously, the first time you made a mistake you would have severe problems.

I am not eager to see that kind of authority granted to us to shoot down aircraft that are simply unidentified. I think there may be other ways. We can find a better control and access to the United States, that there are various and sundry regulatory schemes that we can come up with to make it easier for us to do our mission. But the idea that we would go out and willy-nilly shoot down unidentified aircraft strikes me as not a very good one.

With respect to drawing the line in terms of U.S. military personnel on the ground in foreign countries, I think there's a very clear line out there right now. There has been no request from any host country, any Latin American country for example, for the active use of American combat personnel. There have been requests which we are meeting in Colombia and elsewhere for training and operational assistance in terms of communications, intelligence, etc. We're doing that.

The President's policy is very clear on this point, though. Our U.S. military personnel are not to accompany host country troops on operations. We aren't flying their helicopters for them. We are not traveling with their units as advisors into the field when they're out on operational assignments. That is a fairly clear guideline. I think it's an appropriate division of responsibility. I think this effort is only going to be successful over the many years that are going to be required if the host countries, producing countries, aggressively address the problem in their own societies that lead them to produce illicit drugs for the U.S. market.

We also have an obligation though, to make certain that we deal with the demand problem here at home as well. But I don't see at this point any need to go beyond what's laid out in the Colombian model, for example, where we are very actively and aggressively involved, but short of having our people involved in combat or accompanying them on missions.

Q. Mr. Secretary, a number of those in Congress want more vigorous acts, and they speak in terms of the potential of sealing off at least the southern border, the most troublesome border for the entrance of drugs into this country. Do you see any feasible way to do that at any kind of expenditure that would be acceptable or even tolerable to you?

A. Again, let's await the specific proposals and plans that the commanders-in-chief have been asked to submit. General (Colin) Powell [Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff] is actively working on a plan that would more actively use U.S. forces in the continental United States to assist in that mission on the southern border. You have to be careful, though, because of the status with respect to *posse comitatus* [i.e., the Posse Comitatus Act (18 U.S.C 1385) which prohibits the military from enforcing civilian laws].

We do not have, and have not asked for, and do not wish to have, the authority to function as a law enforcement agency. Our role there will be to support existing law enforcement agencies in doing their mission, but right now, the only sort of U.S. military involvement in that area is what National Guard Units have asked and had approved through the department. I think we can do more in terms of our communications and intelligence capability, providing transportation and assistance of various kinds to those units. But let's look specifically at the plan once it comes back.

Q. Let me follow up briefly on that. The President wants to increase funds for the interdiction effort—I think it's \$313 million for Fiscal Year 1990. I realize that you shied away from giving even a ballpark figure, but is that the quantity generally of funds available that we're talking about in this effort? Or are you talking about a wholesale diversion of funds from what was thought to be other military purposes into this effort to complement them?

A. It's very difficult for me to put a specific dollar figure on it when we've not yet seen the plan. I don't want to do that here today. I think the relative level of effort compared to what has been done in the past will be significantly greater.

Q. Mr. Secretary, will you advise the Andean countries not to make requests for troops? And, if such a request were forthcoming, what would your response be? Would you be against it?

A. That's a hypothetical question, and I don't find it useful to answer hypothetical questions about circumstances under which we might or might not respond to a request which we might or might not receive at some point in the future. Obviously, those kinds of decisions about the commitment of U.S. troops are made by the President of the United States. I would advise him, were he to receive such a request, and I'll reserve my advice for the President.

Q. Your plan calls for fairly heavy interdiction. The President's drug plan really does not. There's not much extra spending for interdiction on the grounds, apparently, that it hasn't been that effective in the past. In view of that, why this emphasis on interdiction?

A. This is not exclusively an interdiction package. I think the impression is that in years past we've had policies that dealt only with interdiction. We didn't deal with the demand side in the United States, and we didn't have any really successful cooperative programs overseas. Now, thanks in part to the courage of President Barco in Colombia, for example, you've got a very aggressive program under way. The United States and this department are moving very, very aggressively to support that effort. We've already provided some \$14 million in assistance.

There's another \$16 million in the pipeline that will go over the next few weeks, and over the next couple of months we'll have provided \$65 million identified for the President in terms of assistance.

I think with respect to interdiction that we can help. It's not the sole solution to the problem. I hope that our interdiction efforts will be more successful in the future in part because we've got more aggressive efforts now under way in the host countries and a greater willingness for them to cooperate with our efforts. I think they're, frankly, probably more interested in cooperating now because it appears finally that the United States is beginning to address the demand side as well here at home.

None of those areas, none of the policies that deal with only one of those areas, is going to solve the problem. By the same token, you're not going to solve the problem if we ignore any one of them.

The interdiction role is most appropriate for the Department and has been assigned to us [not only] by the President, but also by the Congress. Specific statutory language says the Department of Defense will be the lead agency in performing the interdiction mission. That's the mandate of the Congress of the United States. I've got the obligation to carry it out.

Q. Was interdiction a problem because of a lack of resources in the past? And now with more, are you saying that interdiction will be effective in the future?

A. I hope it will be more effective in the future than it's been in the past, and we're going to do our best to make it so.

Q. Have the Andean countries been more lenient as far as the role the U.S. special forces can play in their territory?

A. What's required any time you have one of these relationships develop is a willingness on the part of the host country to have a U.S. military presence in the form of training teams, for example. Those individuals and units then go and perform those missions under guidance established by me at the direction of the President. That guidance specifically provides that they will not accompany the host country units on operational missions. This is in the national security decision directive that the President signed out with respect to our aid to the Andean nations, and that is the policy.

Q. Mr. Secretary, you said earlier that the Department of Defense is an enthusiastic participant in the drug enforcement program. Is that your evaluation, or is that the expression from your commanders who have been reluctant in the past to get the armed forces into this.

A. First of all, I think in any department this large you're going to have a wide variety of opinions on any given issue. There has been, though, this constantly repeated refrain I've seen in the press about the military is reluctant, [repeat] the military is reluctant. I haven't found that to be the case. In fact, what my experience has been is that when you provide firm guidance as to what our policy and objectives are, the President provides firm guidance, as he has in this case, then the response of our military leadership is to respond very affirmatively in figuring out how to get on with the job in the best way possible. That's been my experience here.

Senior military personnel, members of the Joint Chiefs, the Joint Staff, have been consulted extensively as we've pulled together the specific guidance and direction that we're releasing today. They will continue to be heavily involved in the process. I am sure that just as you can find differences among the civilians in the department, you can find differences among the military in the department about exactly how we should proceed and how actively we ought to be involved.

The point is that I set the policy for the department. That policy is provided to you today in the directives that have been presented. There is no doubt in my mind but what our military commanders will in fact perform that mission to the very best of their ability.

Q. Approximately how many of our armed forces personnel will be sent to the Andean countries to implement the strategy? And, have you suggested any kind of cap on that?

A. We haven't suggested any kind of a cap. You deal with individual responses that come in in terms of the kind of assistance that needs to be provided. There is no hard and fast number on it. SOUTHCOM basically coordinates these kinds of requests. But clearly we're talking about, if you add up all of Latin America together—not just the three Andean countries that are the most directly involved—you're talking about a few hundred people that at any given time are involved down there in these kinds of activities.

But there is no ceiling, there is no cap. There is a desire to be as helpful as possible. And as the requests come in and we move to meet them, you'll be the first to know that those requests are in fact being met. We're not trying to keep a secret from anybody. We have an active program of support for the host countries in terms of their efforts to stamp out the illegal drug trade. I hope we'll be successful in that effort.