The following discourse is taken from Chapter Four of Noam Chomsky's book entitled "Deterring Democracy" and first published in 1991. In it, the author reveals the large gap between the realities of today's world and the image of it that is presented to the public by a complacent media. Media that never so assisted the U.S. government by maneuvering public opinion to the point of believing in the necessity of a "war on drugs".

To fit the part, a menace must be grave, or at least portrayable as such. Defense against the menace must engender a suitable martial spirit among the population, which must accord its rulers free rein to pursue policies motivated on other grounds and must tolerate the erosion of civil liberties, a side benefit of particular importance for the statist reactionaries who masquerade as conservatives. Furthermore, since the purpose is to divert attention away from power and its operations - from federal offices, corporate boardrooms, and the like - a menace for today should be remote: "the other", very different from "us", or at least what we are trained to aspire to be. The designated targets should also be weak enough to be attacked without cost; the wrong color helps as well. In short, the menace should be situated in the Third World, whether abroad or in the inner city at home. The war against the menace should also be designed to be winnable, a precedent for future operations. A crucial requirement for the entire effort is that the media launch a properly structured propagandacampaign, never a problem.

A war on drugs was a natural choice for the next crusade. Thereis, first of all, no question about the seriousness of the problem; we turn to the dimensions directly. But to serve the purpose, the war must be narrowly bounded and shaped, focused on the propertargets and crucially avoiding the primary agents; that too was readily accomplished. The war is also structured so that in retrospect, it will have achieved some of its goals. The major objective of the Bush-Bennett strategy was a slow regular reduction in reported drug use. The test is to be the Federal Household Survey on Drug Abuse, which, a few weeks before the plan was released, showed a decline of 37 percent from 1985 to 1988 (1). The stated objectivethus seemed a rather safe bet.

The war was declared with proper fanfare by President Bush in early September 1989 - or rather, re-declared, following the convention established twenty years earlier by President Nixon
when he issued the first such dramatic declaration. To lay the ground properly for the current phase, Drug Czar William Bennett announced that there had been a remarkable doubling in frequent use of cocainesince 1985 - "terrible proof that our current drug epidemic has far from run its course" - and that we are faced with"intensifying drug-related chaos" and an "appalling, deepening crisis"; a few months later, the White House called a news conference to hail a new study "as evidence that their national drug strategy was succeeding and that narcotics use was becoming 'unfashionable among young Americans', Richard Berkereported in the New York Times. So the drug warriors, in the truest American tradition, were stalwartly confronting the enemy and overcoming him.

There are, however, a few problems. The decline in 1989 simply continues a trend that began in 1985-6 for cocaine and in 1979 for other illicit drugs, accompanied by a decline in alcohol consumption among the elderly, though there was no "war on alcohol". Cocaine use declined sharply in 1989, with a drop of 24 percent in the third quarter, prior to the declaration of war, according to government figures. Bennett's "doubling" is a bit hard to reconcile with the figures on decline of cocaine use, but a few months after the shocking news was announced with proper fanfare and impact, the paradox was revealed to be mere statistical fakery. On the back pages, we read further that a study by the State Department Bureau of International Narcotics Matters contradicted Bennett's claims that "the scourge is beginning to pass", thanks to his efforts (2).

As required, the war is aimed at "them", not "us". Seventy percent of the Bush-Bennett drug budget was for law enforcement; if the underclass cannot be cooped up in urban reservations and limited to preying on itself, then it can be imprisoned outright. Countering criticism from soft-hearted liberals, Bennett supported "tough policy" over "drug education programs": "If I have the choice of only one, I will take policy every time because I know children. And you might say this is not a very romantic view of children, not a very rosy view of children. And I would say "You're right". Bennett is somewhat understating his position when he says that punishment is to be preferred if only one choice is available. In his previous post as Secretary of Education, he sought to cut drug education funds and has expressed skepticism about their value (3).

The flashiest proposal was military aid to Columbia after the murder of presidential candidate Luis Carlo Galan. However, as his brother Alberto pointed out "the drug dealers' core military power lies in paramilitary groups they have organized with the support of large landowners and military officers". Apart from strengthening "repressive and anti-democratic forces", Galan continued, Washington's strategy avoids "the core of the problem" - that is, "the economic ties between the legal and illegal worlds," the "large financial corporations" that handle the drug money. "It would make more sense to attack and prosecute the few at the top of the drug business rather than fill prisons with thousands of small fish without the powerful financial structure that gives life to the drug market" (4).
It would indeed make more sense, if the goal were a war on drugs. But it makes no sense for the goal of population control, and it is in any event unthinkable because of the requirement that state policy protect power and privilege, a natural concomitant of the "level playing field" at home.

As Drug Czar under the Reagan Administration, George Bush was instrumental in terminating the main thrust of the real "war on drugs". Officials in the enforcement section of the Treasury Department monitored the sharp increase in cash inflow to Florida (later Los Angeles) banks as the cocaine trade boomed in the 1970s, and "connected it to the large-scale laundering of drug receipts" (Treasury Department brief). They brought detailed information about these matters to the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and the Justice Department. After some public exposes, the government launched Operation Greenback in 1979 to prosecute money-launderers. It soon foundered; the banking industry is not a proper target for the drug war. The Reagan Administration reduced the limited monitoring, and Bush "wasn't really too interested in financial prosecution," the chief prosecutor in Operation Greenback recalls. The program was soon defunct, and Bush's new war on drugs aims at more acceptable targets. Reviewing this record, Jefferson Morley comments that the priorities are illustrated by the actions of Bush's successor in the "war against drugs". When an $8 billion surplus was announced for Miami and Los Angeles banks, William Bennett raised no questions about the morality of their practices and initiated no inquiries, though he did expedite eviction notices for low-income, mostly Black residents of public housing in Washington where drug use had been reported (5).

There may also be some fine-tuning. A small Panamanian bank was pressurized into pleading guilty on a money-laundering charge after a sting operation. But the US government dropped criminal charges against its parent bank, one of Latin America's major financial institutions, based in one of the centers of the Columbian drug cartel (6). There also appear to have been no serious efforts to pursue the public allegations by cartel money-launderers about their contacts with major US banks.

The announced war on drugs has a few other gaps that are difficult to reconcile with the announced intentions, though quite reasonable on the principles that guide social policy. Drug processing requires ether and acetone, which are imported into Latin America. Rafael Perl, drug-policy adviser at the Congressional Research Service, estimates that more than 90 percent of the chemicals used to produce cocaine comes from the United States. In the nine months before the announcement of the drug war, Colombian police say they seized 1.5 million gallons of such chemicals, many found in drums displaying US corporate logos. A CIA study concluded that US exports of these chemicals to Latin America far exceed amounts used for any legal commercial purpose, concluding that enormous amounts are being siphoned off to produce...
heroin and cocaine. Nevertheless, chemical companies are off limits. "Most DEA offices have only one agent working on chemical diversions", a US official reports, so monitoring is impossible. And there have been no reported raids by Delta Force on the corporate headquarters in Manhattan (7).

Reference to the CIA brings to mind another interesting gap in the program. The CIA and other US government agencies have been instrumental in establishing and maintaining the drug racket since World War II, when Mafia connections were used to split and undermine the French labor unions and the Communist Party, laying the groundwork for the "French connection" based in Marseilles. The Golden Triangle (Laos, Burma, Thailand) became a major narcotics center as Chinese Nationalist troops fled to the region after their defeat in China and, not long after, as the CIA helped implement the drug flow as part of its effort to recruit a mercenary "clandestine army" of highland tribesmen for its counterinsurgency operations in Laos. Over the years, the drug traffic came to involve other US clients as well. In 1989 General Ramon Montano, chief of the Philippine constabulary, testified in a public hearing in Manila that drug syndicates operating in the Golden Triangle use the Philippines as a transshipment point to other parts of Asia and the West, and conceded that military officers are involved, as a Senate investigation had reported. The Philippines are on their way to "becoming like Columbia", one Senator observed (8).

The effect was the same as the CIA shifted its attention to the terrorist war against Nicaragua and the Afghan resistance against Soviet occupation. The complicity of the Reagan-Bush administrations in the drug rackets in Central America as a part of their Contrasupport operations is by now well known. Pakistan is reported to have become one of the major international centers of the heroin trade when Afghan manufacturers and dealers "found their operations restricted after the Soviet invasion in 1979", and moved theenterprise across the borders (South). "The U.S. government has for several years received, but declined to investigate, reports of heroin trafficking by some Afghan guerrillas and Pakistani military officers with whom it cooperates", the Washington Post reported well after the drug war was charging full steam ahead. United States officials have received first-hand accounts of "extensive heroin smuggling" by leading Afghan recipients of US aid and the Pakistani military establishment, who gave detailed information to the press in Pakistan and Washington. "Nevertheless, according to U.S. officials, the United States has failed to investigate or take action against some (read "any") of those suspected". US favorite Gulbudin Hekmatyar, the terrorist leader of the fundamentalist Hizbe-Islami Party, is reported to be deeply implicated in drug trafficking. Other reports indicate that the Afghan rebels are being "debilitated by increasingly fierce local battles for the lucrative heroin trade" (9).

As in Asia, US allies in Central America are also caught up in the drug traffic. Only Costa Rica has a civilian government (despite pretenses), and its Legislative Assembly's Drug Commission
has provided information about these matters. Former president Daniel Oduber was cited for accepting a campaign contribution from James Lionel Casey, a US citizen in prison in Costa Rica on charges of drug trafficking. The Commission recommended that Oliver North, Admiral John Poindexter, former Ambassador Lewis Tambs, former CIA station chief Joe Fernandez, and General Richard Secord "never again be allowed to enter Costa Rica", the Costa Rican press reported in July 1989, blaming them for "opening a gate" for arms and drug traffickers as they illegally organized a "southern front" for the Contras in Costa Rica. A rural guard Colonel was charged with offering security for drug traffickers using airstrips - probably including those used for supplying Contras in Nicaragua, the Commission President told reporters. Oliver North was charged with setting up a supply line with General Noriega that brought arms to Costa Rica and drugs to the US. The Commission also implicated US rancher John Hull. Most serious, the Commission reported, was "the obvious infiltration of international gangs into Costa Rica that made use of the (Contra) organization", on requests "initiated by Colonel North to General Noriega," which opened Costa Rica "for trafficking in arms and drugs" by "this mafia", in part as an "excuse to help the contras" (10).

There are good reasons why the CIA and drugs are so closely linked. Clandestine terror requires hidden funds, and the criminal elements to whom the intelligence agencies naturally turn expect a quid pro quo. Drugs are the obvious answer. Washington's long-term involvement in the drug racket is part and parcel of its international operations, notably during the Reagan-Bush administrations. One prime target for an authentic drug war would therefore be close at home.

These facts are too salient to have been ignored completely, but one has to look well beyond the media to become aware of the scale and significance of the "Washington connection" over many years. The public image conveyed is very different. A typical illustration is a story by New York Times Asia correspondent Steven Erlanger, headed "Southeast Asia Is Now No. 1 Source of U.S. Heroin". The story opens with the statement that "The Golden Triangle of Southeast Asia, whose flow of drugs the United States has been trying to control for 25 years, is once again the single-largest source of heroin coming into America..". Why has the Golden Triangle been such a problem to US officials since 1965, a year that carries some associations, after all? The question is not raised, and there is no mention of the role of the United States government and its clandestine terror agencies in creating and maintaining the problem that "the United States has been trying to control". The US figures merely as a victim and guardian of virtue. Discussion about drugs between US and Thai officials is becoming more "forthright" and "even, at times angry," Western diplomats say, Thailand having become the main smuggling and shipment center for the Golden Triangle.

Not coincidentally - though no hint appears here - Thailand was also designated as the focal point for US military, terror, and subversion operations in the secret planning to undermine the 1954 Geneva Accords a few weeks after they were adopted over US objections, and after that, served
as the major base for US bombing operations and clandestine war, as well as a source of mercenary forces for Indochina. "We're trying to get across to the Thais that drugs are an international problem and that Thailand is a target too", a diplomat said. That, however, is the limit of the US role in Thailand generally or the Golden Triangledrug operations specifically, as far as the Times is concerned(11). The media rallied to the narrowly conceived drug-war with their usual efficiency and dispatch. The President's decision to send military aid to Columbia and the September 5 declaration of war against "the toughest domestic challenge we've faced in decades" set off a major media blitz, closely tailored to White House needs, though the absurdities of the program were so manifest that there was some defection at the margins. Several (unscientific) samples of wire service reports through September showed drug-related stories surpassing Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East combined. Media obedience reached such comical proportions as to elicit sarcastic commentary in the Wall Street Journal, where Hodding Carter observed that the President proceeded on the basis of "one lead-pipe cinch": that the mediawould march in step.

"The mass media in America", he went on, "have an overwhelming tendency to jump up and down and bark in concert whenever the White House - any White House - snaps its fingers(12). The short term impact was impressive. Shortly after the November 1988 elections, 34 percent of the public had selected the budget deficit as "George Bush's No. 1 priority once he takes office". Three percent selected drugs as top priority, down from previous months. After the media blitz of September 1989, "a remarkable 43% say that drugs are the nation's single most important issue", the Wall Street Journal reports, with the budget deficit a distant second at 6 percent. In a June 1987 poll of registered voters in New York, taxes were selected as the number 1 issue facing the state (15 percent), with drugs far down the list (5 percent). A repeat in September 1989 gave dramatically different results: taxes were selected by 8 percent while the drug problem ranked far above any other, at a phenomenal 46 percent. The real world had hardly changed; its image had, as transmitted through the ideological institutions, reflecting the current needs of power (13). A martial tone has broader benefits for those who advocate state violence and repression to secure privilege. The government-media campaign helped create the required atmosphere among the general public and congress. In a typical flourish, Senator Mark Hatfield, often a critic of reliance on force, said that in every congressional district "the troops are out there. All they're waiting for are the orders, a plan of attack, and they're ready to march". The bill approved by Congress widens the application of the death penalty, limits appeals by prisoners, and allows police broader latitude in obtaining evidence, among other measures.

The entire repressive apparatus of the state is looking forward to benefits from this new "war", including the intelligence system and the Pentagon (which, however, is reluctant to be drawn into direct military actions that will quickly lose popular support). Military industry, troubled by the unsettling specter of peace, scents new markets here and is "pushing swords and weapons in the drug war", Frank Greve reports from Washington. "Analysts say sales for drug-war work could spell relief for some sectors, such as commando operations, defense intelligence and counterterrorism", and Federal military laboratories may also find a new role. Army Colonel John
Waghelstein, a leading counter-insurgency specialistsuggested that the narco-guerilla connection could be exploitedto mobilize public support counterinsurgency programs and to discredit critics:

A melding in the American public’s mind and in Congress of this connection would lead to the necessary support to counter the guerilla/narcotics terrorists in this hemisphere. Generating that support would be relatively easy once the connection was proven and an all-out war was declared by the National Command Authority. Congress would find it difficult to stand in the way of supporting our allies with the training, advice and security assistance necessary to do the job. Those church and academic groups that have slavishly supported insurgency in Latin America would find themselves on the wrong side of the moral issue. Above all, we would have the unassailable moral position from which to launch a concerted offensive effort using Department of Defense (DOD) and non-DOD assets (14).

In short, all proceeded on course.

THE CONTOURS OF THE CRISIS

A closer look at the drug crisis is instructive. There can be no doubt that the problem is serious. "Substance abuse," to use the technical term, takes a terrible toll. The grim facts are reviewed by Ethan Nadelmann in Science magazine (15). Deaths attributable to consumption of tobacco are estimated at over 300,000 a year, while alcohol use adds an additional 50,000 to 200,000 annual deaths. Among fifteen-to-twenty-four-year-olds, alcohol is the leading cause of death, also serving as a "gateway" drug that leads to use of others, according the National Council on Alcoholism (16). In addition, a few thousand deaths from illegal drugs are recorded: 3562 deaths were reported in 1985, from all illegal drugs combined. According to these estimates, over 99 percent of deaths from substance abuse are attributed to tobacco and alcohol.

There are also enormous health costs, again primarily from alcohol and tobacco use: "the health costs of marijuana, cocaine, and heroin combined amount to only a small fraction of those caused by either of the two licit substances," Nadelmann continues. Also to be considered is the distribution of victims. Illicit drugs primarily affect the user, but their legal cousins seriously affect others, including passive smokers and victims of drunken driving and alcohol-induced violence; "no illicit drug...is as strongly associated with violent behavior as is alcohol," Nadelmann observes, and alcohol abuse is a factor in some 40 percent of roughly 50,000 annual traffic
The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 3800 nonsmokers die every year from lung cancer caused by breathing other people's tobacco smoke, and that the toll of passive smoking may be as many as 46,000 annually if heart disease and respiratory ailments are included. Officials say that if confirmed, these conclusions would require that tobacco smoke be listed as a very hazardous carcinogen (class A), along with such chemicals as benzene and radon. University of California statistician Stanton Glantz describes passive smoking as "the third leading cause of preventable death, behind smoking and alcohol. (17)"

Illegal drugs are far from uniform in their effects. Thus, "among the roughly 60 million Americans who have smoked marijuana, not one has died from a marijuana overdose," Nadelmann reports. As he and others have observed, federal interdiction efforts have helped to shift drug use from relatively harmless marijuana to far more dangerous drugs.

One might ask why tobacco is legal and marijuana not. A possible answer is suggested by the nature of the crop. Marijuana can be grown almost anywhere, with little difficulty. It might not be easily marketable by major corporations. Tobacco is quite another story. Questions can be raised about the accuracy of the figures. One would have to look into the procedures for determining cause of death, the scope of these inquiries, and other questions, such as the effects on children of users. But even if the official figures are far from the mark, there is little doubt that William Bennett is right in speaking of "drug-related chaos" and an "appalling, deepening crisis" - largely attributable to alcohol and tobacco, so it appears.

Further human and social costs include the victims of drug-related crimes and the enormous growth of organized crime, which is believed to derive more than half of its revenues from the drug trade. In this case, the costs are associated with the illicit drugs, but because they are illicit, not because they are drugs. Thesame was true of alcohol during the Prohibition era. We are dealing here with questions of social policy, which is subject to decision and choice. Nadelmann advocates legalization and regulation. Similar proposals have been advanced by a wide range of conservative opinion (the London Economist, Milton Friedman, and so on), and by some others.

Responding to Friedman, William Bennett argues that after repeal of Prohibition, alcohol use soared. Hence legalization cannot be considered. Whatever the merits of the argument, it is clear that Bennett doesn't take it seriously, since he does not propose reinstituting Prohibition or banning tobacco - or even assault rifles. His own argument is simply that "drug use is wrong" and...
therefore must be barred. The implicit assumption is that use of tobacco, alcohol, or assault rifles is not "wrong", on grounds that remain unspoken, and that the state must prohibit and punish what is "wrong". Deceit, perhaps? (18).

Radical statist s of the Bennett variety like to portray themselves as humanists taking a moral stance, insisting on "the difference between right and wrong". Transparently, it is sheer fraud.

THE NARCOTRAFFICKERS

Social policies implemented in Washington contribute to the toll of victims in other ways, a fact illustrated dramatically just as the vast media campaign orchestrated by the White House peaked in September 1989. On September 19, the US Trade Representative (USTR) panel held a hearing in Washington to consider a tobacco industry request that the US impose sanctions on Thailand if it does not agree to drop restrictions in import of US tobacco. Such US government actions had already rammed tobacco down the throats of consumers in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, with human costs of the kind already sketched.

This huge narcotrafficking operation had its critics. A statement by the American Heart Association, American Cancer Society and American Lung Association condemned the cigarette advertising in "countries that have already succumbed to the USTR crowbar of tracle threats," a campaign "patently designed to increase smoking by ... young Asian men and women who see U.S. men and women as role models". US Surgeon General Everett Koop testified at the USTR panel that "when we are pleading with foreign governments to stop the flow of cocaine, it is the height of hypocrisy for the United States to export tobacco". Denouncing the trade policy "to push addicting substances into foreign markets" regardless of health hazards, he said:

"Years from now, our nation will look back on this application of free trade policy and find it scandalous". Koop told reporters that he had not cleared his testimony with the White House because it would not have been approved, and said he also opposed actions under the Reagan Administration to force Asian countries to import US tobacco. During his eight years in office, ending a few days after his testimony, Koop backed reports branding tobacco a lethal addictive drug responsible for some 300,000 deaths a year.

Thai witnesses also protested, predicting that the consequence would be to reverse a decline in
smoking achieved by a fifteen-year campaign against tobacco use. They also noted that US drug trafficking would interfere with Washington's efforts to induce Asian governments to halt the flow of illegal drugs. Responding to the claim of US tobacco companies that their product is the best in the world, a Thai witness said, "Certainly in the Golden Triangle we have some of the best products, but we never ask the principle of free trade to govern such products. In fact we suppressed (them)." Critics invoked the analogy of the Opium War 150 years ago, when the British government compelled China to open its doors to opium from British India, sanctimoniously pleading the virtues of free trade as they forcefully imposed large-scale drug addiction on China. As in the case of the US today, Britain had little that it could sell to China, apart from drugs. The US sought for itself whatever privileges the British were extracting from China by violence, also extolling free trade and even the "great design of Providence to make the wickedness of men subserve his purposes of mercy toward China, in breaking through her wall of exclusion, and bringing the empire into more immediate contact with western and Christian nations" (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions). John Quincy Adams denounced China's refusal to accept British opium as a violation of the Christian principle of "love thy neighbor" and "an enormous outrage upon the rights of human nature, and upon the first principles of the rights of nations". The tobacco industry and its protectors in government invoke similar arguments today as they seek to relive this triumph of Western civilization and its "historic purpose" (19).

Here we have the biggest drug story of the day, breaking right at the peak moment of the government-media campaign: the US government is perhaps the world's leading drug peddler, even if we put aside the US role in establishing the hard-drug racket after World War II and maintaining it since. How did this major story fare in the media blitz? It passed virtually unnoticed—and, needless to say, without a hint of the obvious conclusion (20).

The drug traffic is no trivial matter for the US economy. Tobacco exports doubled in annual value in the 1980s, contributing nearly $25 billion to the trade ledger over the decade according to a report of the Tobacco Merchants Association, rising from $2.5 billion in 1980 to $5 billion in 1989. Tobacco provided a $4.2 billion contribution to the trade balance for 1989, when the deficit for the year was $109 billion. Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky took note of these figures while testifying in support of the tobacco companies at a Senate hearing. The president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, commenting on the benefits to the US economy from tobacco exports, "cited the removal of overseas trade barriers, primarily in Japan, Taiwan and South Korea" as a contributory factor (21).

We see that it is unfair to blame the huge trade deficit on the policies of the Reagan-Bush administrations without giving them credit for their efforts to overcome it by state intervention to increase the sale of lethal addictive drugs.
As the drug war proceeded, opposition to tobacco exports began to receive some attention. In April 1990 Dr. James Mason, Assistant Secretary for Health, declared that it was "unconscionable for the mighty transnational tobacco companies - and three of them are in the United States - to be peddling their poison abroad, particularly because their main targets are less-developed countries". A few weeks later, however, he cancelled a scheduled appearance before a congressional hearing on the matter, while the Department of Health and Human Services "backed away from its past criticism of efforts to open new markets for American cigarettes around the world. The Department said that "the issue was one of trade, not health", Philip Hilts reported in the New York Times. A Department spokesman explained that Dr Mason's appearance was cancelled for that reason. Citing the trade figures, another official described Mason's criticism of tobacco exports as "an unwelcome intrusion on the Administration's efforts to open new cigarette markets" - particularly in Thailand, Hilts reported further. Meanwhile US Trade Representative Carla Hills dismissed Thai protests about US imperialists thrusting cancer sticks upon them, saying, "I don't see how health concerns can enter the picture if the people are smoking their own cigarettes" (22).

Or, by the same logic, smoking their own crack. In our passion for free trade, then, we should surely allow the Medellin cartel to export cocaine freely to the United States, to advertise it to young people without constraint, and to market it aggressively.

Others continued to voice objections. In an open letter to Colombian president Virgilio Barco, Peter Bourne, who was Director of the Office of Drug Abuse Policy in the Carter Administration, wrote: "perhaps nothing so reflects on Washington's fundamental hypocrisy on the (drug) issue as the fact that while it rails against the adverse effects of cocaine in the United States, the number of Colombians dying each year from subsidized North American tobacco products is significantly larger than the number of North Americans felled by Colombian cocaine".

The Straits Times in Singapore found it "hard to reconcile the fact that the Americans are threatening trade sanctions against countries that try to keep out U.S. tobacco products" with US efforts to reduce cigarette smoking at home (let alone its efforts to bar import of illicit drugs) - a surprising failure to perceive the clear difference between significant and insignificant nations, to borrow some neoconservative rhetoric (23).

The American Medical Association also condemned trade policies that ignore health problems, estimating that some 2.5 million excessive or premature deaths per year are attributable to tobacco - about 5 percent of all deaths. At a World Conference on Lung Health in May 1990,
former Surgeon General Koop, noting that US tobacco exports had risen 20 percent the preceding year while smoking dropped 5 percent in the US, again called the export of tobacco "a moral outrage" and denounced it as "the height of hypocrisy" to call on other governments to stop the export of cocaine "while at the same time we export nicotine, a drug just as addictive as cocaine, to the rest of the world". In Taiwan, Koop said, the government had been able to cut smoking drastically by an antismoking campaign, until Washington threatened trade sanctions in 1987, leading to a 10 percent rise in smoking. "America better stop being a drug pusher if we expect to have any credibility in our war on drugs," Congressman Chester Atkins said at a news conference. Public health experts warned of a "global epidemic" from tobacco-related deaths as a result of the surge in overseas sales, now one-sixth of US production, predicting that the death toll will rise to twelve million annually by mid twenty-first century. Speaking for the government, the USTR spokesman repeated that the matter is simply one of free trade: "Our question is basically one of fairness". Coverage was again slight (24).

Thatcher's England was not far behind. The alternative press reported a London Sunday Times expose of a multimillion dollar marketing drive by British American Tobacco (BAT) to sell cheap and highly addictive cigarettes in Africa - an easy, regulation-free market with levels of tar and nicotine far above those permitted in the West. A corporation letter to the country's head of medical services stated that "BAT Uganda does not believe that cigarette smoking is harmful to health... (and) we should not wish to endanger our potential to export to these countries which do not have a health warning on our packs". A British cancer specialist described the situation in the Third World as similar to that in England in the early years of the century, when one in ten men was dying of lung cancer. He estimated that in China alone fifty million of today's children will die through tobacco-related diseases (25).

If such estimates are anywhere near accurate, the reference to the Opium Wars is not far from the mark, and it might be fair to warn of the blurring of the boundary between narcotrafficking and genocide.

SOCIAL POLICY AND THE DRUG CRISIS

Serious concern over the drug crisis would quickly lead to inquiry into a much wider range of government policies. US farmers can easily be encouraged to produce crops other than tobacco. Not so Latin American peasants, who, with far fewer options, turned to cocaine production for survival as subsistence agriculture and profits from traditional exports declined. In the case of Columbia, for example, suspension of the international coffee agreement in July 1988, initiated by US actions based on alleged unfair trade violations, led to a fall of prices of more than 40 percent within two months for Columbia's leading legal export (26).
Furthermore, US pressures over the years - including the "Foodfor Peace" program - have undermined production of crops for domestic use, which can not compete with subsidized US agricultural exports. US policy is to encourage Latin America to consume the US surplus while producing specialized crops for export: flowers, vegetables for yuppie markets - or coca leaves, the optimal choice on grounds of capitalist rationality. The Council on Hemispheric Affairs comments that "only economic growth in Latin America, the promotion of financing of alternate legal crops and a decrease in U.S. demand will provide a viable alternative" to cocaine production (27).

As for US demand for illegal drugs, middle-class use has been decreasing. But the inner city is a different matter. Here again, if we are serious, we will turn to deep-seated social policy. The cocaine boom correlates with major social and economic processes, including a historically unprecedented stagnation of real wages since 1973, (28) an effective attack against labor to restore corporate profits in a period of declining US global dominance, a shift in employment either to highly skilled labor or to service jobs, many of them dead-end and low-paying; and other moves towards a two-tiered society with a large and growing under-class mired in hopelessness and despair. Illegal drugs offer profits to ghetto entrepreneurs with few alternative options, and to others, temporary relief from an intolerable existence. These crucial factors receive occasional notice in the mainstream. Thus, a specialist quoted in the Wall Street Journal comments that "what is new is large numbers of inner-city people - blacks and Hispanics - sufficiently disillusioned, a real level of hopelessness. Most northern European countries have nothing remotely comparable" (29).

In a British television film on drugs, a political figure draws the obvious conclusion: "We cannot police the world. We cannot stop (heroin) supplies. We can only limit the demand for it by producing a decent society that people want to live in, not escape from" (30).

With their contributions to growth and punishment of the underclass, the Reagan-Bush administrations helped to create the current drug crisis, yet another fact that merits headlines. And the current "war" may well exacerbate the crisis. Meeting with congressional leaders, Bush outlined his proposals for paying the costs of the drug plan, including elimination of almost $100 million from public housing subsidies and a juvenile justice program. The National Center on Budget priorities estimated that the Bush program would remove $400 million from social programs (31). The misery of the poor is likely to increase, along with the demand for drugs and the construction of prisons for the superfluous population.
THE USUAL VICTIMS

The Columbian operation illustrates other facets of the drug war. The military aid program for Columbia finances murderous and repressive elements of the military with ties to the drug business and landowners. As commonly in the past, the current US drug programs are likely to contribute to counterinsurgency operations and destruction of popular organizations that might challenge elite conceptions of "democracy".

These prospects were illustrated at the very moment when the President made his grand Declaration of a all-out war on the drug merchants, featuring aid to the Columbian military, in September 1989. As the media blitz peaked, the Andean Commission of Jurists in Lima published a report on the Columbian military entitled "Excesses in the Anti Drug Effort". "Waving as pretext the measures adopted against drug trafficking," the report begins, "the military have ransacked the headquarters of grass root organizations and the homes of political leaders, and ordered mass arrests." A series of illustrations follow from the first two weeks of September 1989. On September 3, two days before President Bush's dramatic call to battle, the army and the Department of Security Administration (DAS) ransacked homes of peasants in one region, arresting forty laborers; the patrols are lead by hooded individuals who identify targets for arrest, townspeople report. In a nearby area house searches were aimed principally against members of the Patriotic Union (whose leaders and activists are regularly assassinated) and the Communist Party, some alleged to have "subversive propaganda" in their possession. In Medellin, seventy activists and civic leaders were arrested in poor neighborhoods. Elsewhere at the same time, two union leaders, one an attorney for the union were assassinated and another disappeared. Other leaders received death threats. Hired assassins murdered three members of the National Organization of Indigenous People, injuring others, while unidentified persons destroyed a regional office (32).

These are examples of the regular behavior of the forces to whom President Bush pledged US aid and assistance, published just at the moment of the domestic applause for his announcement - but not available to the cheering section that pays the bills.

Ample publicity was, however, given to the capture in mid September of twenty-eight people charged with being leftist guerillas working with the drug cartel, and to claims by the Columbian military that guerilla organizations had formed an alliance with the Medellin drug traffickers and carried out bombings for them.
The Columbian military in Medellin charged that staff members of the Popular Education Institute (LPC) arrested in a raid by security forces, were members of a guerilla organization hired as terrorists by the cartel. Unreported, however, was the conclusion of the Andean Commission of Jurists that the charges are "clearly set-up by the military forces which are looking to discredit the popular work (of) the IPC," a community-based organization working in popular education, training and human rights. The staff workers arrested - all those present at the time, including the director - were held incomunicado and tortured, according to the Colombian section of the Andean Commission. The Colombian Human Rights Committee in Washington reported increasing harassment of popular organizations as new aid flowed to the military in the name of "the war on drugs". Other human rights monitors have also warned of the near inevitability of these consequences as the US consolidates its links with the Colombian and Peruvian military, both of whom have appalling records of human rights violations (33).

The New York Times reports that senior Peruvian military officers say that they will use the new US money "to intensify their campaign against the guerillas and try to prevent the smuggling of chemicals" (mainly from US corporations, which suggests another strategy that remains unmentioned). US officials concur with the strategy, though they profess to be uneasy that it "is steering clear of the growers and traffickers". In Bolivia, also a recipient of US military aid and hailed as a great success story, the military does not match its Peruvian and Colombian colleagues in the scale of state terror, but there was no US reaction to the declaration of a state of emergency by the President of Bolivia, followed by the jailing of "hundreds of union leaders and teachers who he said threatened his Government's anti-inflation policies with their wage demands" (34). This is not, after all, Nicaragua under the Sandinistas, so passionate concern over human rights issues would have no purpose.

It should be borne in mind that human rights have only an instrumental function in the political culture, serving as a weapon against adversaries and a device to mobilize the domestic public behind the banner of our nobility, as we courageously denounce the real or alleged abuses of official enemies.

In this regard, human rights concerns are very much like the facts of past and present history: instruments to serve the needs of power, not to enlighten the citizenry. Thus, one would be unlikely to find a discussion in the media of the background for the state terrorism in Colombia that the Bush Administration intends to abet. The topic is addressed in a discussion of human rights in Colombia by Alfredo Vasquez Carrizosa, president of the Colombian Permanent Committee for Human Rights. "Behind the facade of a constitutional regime", he observes, "we have militarized society under the state of siege provided" by the 1886 Constitution. The Constitution grants a wide range of rights, but they have no relation to reality. "In this context poverty and insufficient land reform have made Colombia one of the most tragic countries of Latin America". Land reform, which "has practically been a myth", was legislated in 1961, but
"has yet to be implemented, as it is opposed by landowners, who have had the power to stop it" - again, no defect of "democracy", by Western standards. The result of the prevailing misery has been violence, including La Violencia of the 1940s and 1950s, which took hundreds of thousands of lives. "This violence has been caused not by any mass indoctrination, but by the dual structure of a prosperous minority and an impoverished, excluded majority, with great differences in wealth, income, and access to political participation."

The story has another familiar thread. "But in addition to internal factors", Vasquez Carrizosa continues, "violence has been exacerbated by external factors. In the 1960s the United States, during the Kennedy administration, took great pains to transform our regular armies into counterinsurgency brigades, accepting the new strategy of the death squads". These Kennedy initiatives "ushered in what is known in Latin America as the National Security Doctrine,...not defense against an external enemy, but a way to make the military establishment the masters' of the game... (with) the right to combat the internal enemy, as set forth in the Brazilian doctrine, the Argentine doctrine, and the Columbian doctrine: it is the right to fight and exterminate social workers, trade unionists, men and women who are not supportive of the establishment, and who are assumed to be Communist extremists. And this could mean anyone, including human rights activists such as myself (35)."

The president of the Columbian Human Rights Commission is reviewing facts familiar throughout Latin America. Military-controlled National Security states dedicated to "internal security" by assassination, torture, disappearance, and sometimes mass murder, constituted one of the two major legacies of the Kennedy Administration to Latin America; the other was the Alliance for Progress, a statistical success and social catastrophe. The basic thrust of policy was established long before, and has been pursued since as well, with a crescendo of support for murderous state terror under the Reagan Administration. The "drug war" simply provides another modality for pursuit of these long-term commitments. One will search far for any hint of these fundamental truths in the drum-beating for a war of self-defense against the terrible crimes perpetrated against us by Latin American monsters.

As the first anniversary of the drug war approached, the House Government Operations Committee released a study concluding that US anti-drug efforts had made virtually no headway in disrupting the cocaine trade in Peru and Bolivia, largely because of "corruption" in the armed forces of both countries. This "corruption" is illustrated by the stoning of DEA agents and Peruvian policemen by local peasants led by Peruvian military personnel, and the firing by Peruvian military officers on State Department helicopters when they approached drug-trafficker facilities - in short, by the well-known fact that "the drug dealers' core military power lies in paramilitary groups they have organized with the support of large landowners and military officers," the beneficiaries of US aid, exactly as Alberto Galan pointed out at the moment when his brother's murder provided the pretext to set the latest "drug war" into high gear (36).
The domestic enemy is likely to be subjected to the same kind of treatment as the poor abroad. In keeping with the general commitments of neoconservatism, the drug war seeks to undermine civil liberties with a broad range of measures, such as random searches based on police suspicion, aimed primarily at young Blacks and Hispanics. The attack on civil rights has aroused some concern, though not because of the increased abuse of the underclass. Rather, it is the threat to individual rights from the drug war as it shifts to “middle-class whites who are casual drug users” (John Dillin, reporting on the threat to civil liberties in the lead story of the Christian Science Monitor). "As middle America comes under scrutiny", Dillin continues, "critics expect a growing outcry about violations of civil liberties" (37).

Power can defend itself. In practice, the capitalist ethic treats freedom as a commodity: a lot is available in principle, and you have what you can buy.

The links between the drug war and the US intervention sometimes reach a remarkable level of cynicism. Thus, Columbia requested that the US install a radar system near its south border to monitor flights from its neighbors to the south, which provide the bulk of the cocaine for processing by Colombian drug merchants.

The US responded by installing a radar system, but as far removed from drug flights to Colombia as is possible on Columbian territory: on San Andres Island in the Caribbean, 500 miles from mainland Columbia and remote from the drug routes, but only 200 miles off the coast of Nicaragua. The Columbian government accused the Pentagon of using the fight against drugs as a ruse to monitor Nicaragua, a charge confirmed by Senator John Kerry's foreign affairs aide. He added that Costa Rica had "requested radar assistance against small flights moving cocaine through the country and was given a proposal" by the Pentagon. Lacking technical experts, Costa Rican officials asked for an evaluation from the British Embassy, which informed them that the US proposal had no relevance to the drug traffic but was designed to monitor the Sandinistas. In its study of the drug cartel, Kerry's Senate Subcommittee on Terrorism, Narcotics and International Operations had reported that foreign policy concerns, including the war against Nicaragua, "interfered with the U.S.'s ability to fight the war on drugs", delaying, halting and hampering law enforcement efforts to keep narcotics out of the United States - a polite way of saying that the Reagan Administration was facilitating the drug racket in pursuit of its international terrorist project in Nicaragua and other imperatives, a standard feature of policy for decades. The current war adds another chapter to the sordid story (38). This too escapes the front pages and prime-time television. In general, the central features of the drug crisis received scant notice in the media campaign. It is doubtful that the core issues reach beyond a fraction of 1 percent of media coverage, which is tailored to other needs.
The counterinsurgency connection may also lie behind the training of Columbian narcotraffickers by Western military officers, which received some notice in August 1989 when, a few days after the Galan assassination, retired British and Israeli officers were found to be training Columbian cocaine traffickers, including teams of assassins for the drug cartel and their right-wing allies. A year earlier, a July 1988 Columbian intelligence report (Department of Security Administration: DAS) entitled "Organization of Hired Assassins and Drug Traffickers in the Magdalena Medio" noted that "At the training camps, the presence of Israeli, German and North American instructors has been detected". Trainees at the camp, who are supported by cattle ranchers and farmers involved in coca production and by the Medellin cartel, "apparently participated in peasant massacres" in a banana region, the report continues. After the discovery of British and Israeli trainers a year later, the Washington Post, citing another DAS document, reported that "the men taught in the training center (where British and Israeli nationals were identified) are believed responsible for massacres in rural villages and assassination of left-leaning politicians". The same document states that one Israeli-run course was abbreviated when the instructors went "to Honduras and Costa Rica to give training to the Nicaraguan contras". The allegation that US instructors were also present has not been pursued, or to my knowledge reported in the press (39).

Israel claimed that Colonel Yair Klein and his associates in the Spearhead security operation, who were identified as trainers in an NBC film clip, were acting on their own. But Andrew Cockburn points out that Klein's company publicly insisted that they always worked "with the complete approval and authorization of our Ministry of Defense". They also trained Contras in Honduran and Guatemalan officers; one associate of Klein's, an Israeli colonel, claims that they trained every Guatemalan officer above the rank of captain, working on a contract arranged by the state-owned Israel Military Industries. "The Americans have the problem of public opinion, international image", the marketing director of Spearhead explained. "We don't have this problem". Therefore, the dirty work of training assassins and mass murderers can be farmed out to our Israeli mercenaries. In the London Observer, Hugh O'Shaughnessy reported that in a letter of March 31, 1986 signed by Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin of the Labor Party, in the journal's possession, Rabin gave Spearhead official authorization for "the export of military know-how and defense equipment," stipulating further that "It is necessary to receive a formal authorization for every negotiation" (40).

The Israeli press reports that Colonel Klein and his associates used a network of ultra-orthodox American Jews to launder the money they received for their services in Colombia. It claims further that Klein held a position of high responsibility and sensitivity as Commander of the War Room of the Israeli General Staff.
An Israeli reserve general reported to be involved in the Israeli-Columbia affair attributed the flurry of publicity to US government revenge for the Pollard spycaper and "an American trick contrived in order to remove Israel from Columbia," so that the US can run the arms supply there without interference (41).

Jerusalem Post columnist Menachem Shalev raised the question: "Why the moral outrage" over this affair? "Is it worse to train loyal troops of drug barons than it is to teach racist killers of Indians, Blacks, Communists, democrats, et cetera?" A good question. The answer lies in the US propaganda system. Current orders are to express moral outrage over the Columbian cartel, the latest menace to our survival. But Israel's role as a US mercenary state is legitimate, part of the service as a "strategic asset" that earns it the status of "the symbol of humandecency" in New York Times editorials (42).

THE BEST LAID PLANS...

When the Bush plan was announced, the American Civil Liberties Union at once branded it a "hoax", a strategy that is "not simply unworkable" but "counter-productive and cynical" (43). If the rhetorical ends were the real ones, that would be true enough. But for the objective of population control and pursuit of traditional policy goals, the strategy has considerable logic, though its short-term successes are unlikely to persist.

Part of the difficulty is that even the most efficient propagandasystem is unable to maintain the proper attitudes among the population for long. The currently available devices have none of the lasting impact of appeal to the Soviet threat. Another reason is that fundamental social and economic problems cannot be swept under the rug for ever. The temporarily convenient program of punishing the underclass carries serious potential costs for interests that really count. Some corporate circles are awakening to the fact that third world within our own country will harm business interests (Brad Butler, former chairman of Proctor & Gamble). According to Labor Department projections, over half the new jobs created between 1986 and the year 2000 must be filled by children of minorities, who are expected to constitute one-third of the workforce before too long. These jobs require skills - including computer literacy and other technical knowledge - that will not be gained in the streets and prisons and deteriorating schools (44).

As in South Africa, business will sooner or later come to realize that its interests are not well served under Apartheid, whether legal or de facto. But a reversal of longstanding policies that reached the level of seriolls social pathology during the Reagan-Bush years will be no simple
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12. in NYT, September 6; Carter, in WSJ, September 14, 1989.


See also A. Lewis, in NYT, September 24, 1989, noting the absurdity of Bennett's argument.


20. in AP, September 1-9, 20. The Wall Street Journal and Christian Science Monitor took the hearings, omitting the major points, however. See the sharp editorial in the Boston (~obc, September 24, 1989; and Alfexander Cockburn, in Nation, October 30, 1989.


24. AP, NYT, June 27, also briefly noting the World Conference on Lung Health a month earlier; AP, May 21; R. Scherer, in CSM, May 23; B. Lehman, in BG, May 22, 1990.


28. See G. Dvid, Real Wages are on a Steady Decline, in Los Angeles Times, July 16, 1989.


