

As noted elsewhere in this issue, the prevalence of immigrant gangs is contributing to crime on the American scene. Chief Jim Kouri is 3rd national vice-president of the National Association of Chiefs of Police and a frequent contributor to law enforcement journals.

Are We Truly Winning the War on Drugs?

By Jim Kouri

Who's winning the war on drugs, the good guys or the bad guys? For many Americans the answer appears elusive, even a bit confusing. On the one hand, the federal government makes claims of success through drug enforcement and prevention programs, while on the other drug-related crime and violence continue to plague the nation.

The White House recently reported that:

- There is an 11 percent reduction in drug use in the U.S.
- Casual cocaine use is down by 29 percent.
- Teenage drug abuse is down by 13 percent.
- The number of frequent cocaine users is down a promising 35 percent.

Encouraging news? Yes, but a study conducted by the National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee, and subsequently reported in *Police Times*, suggests the opposite of the federal statistics. According to the NNICC report, there is an increase in the number of drug users in the U.S. in 1991 from 1.6 million to 1.9 million — a significant 300,000 more drug users. The report did show progress with Americans, ages 12 to 17, using less.

The federal anti-drug strategy for the most part focused on cocaine, since, in the years following 1984, in the form of crack, it was the obvious drug of choice for the majority of users. Drug-enforcement officials were thrown a curve when heroin and methamphetamine began making a comeback, especially in smokable forms not requiring IV needles. The war on drugs appears to have widened as a result, especially in the area of interdiction. Southeast Asia joined South America as points of origin and likely targets for enforcement agencies.

But while government officials are optimistic about the so-called drug war, others feel progress is slow coming. Some political leaders, like New York's Congressman Charles Rangel, claim that the statistics released are racially disparate and only reflect drug patterns within the white, middle-class segment of the U.S. population. Rangel believes that not enough is being done to help poor blacks in the nation's inner cities.

Development No. 1

Columbian Heroin and Asian Methamphetamine

To add to the overwhelming problem of substance abuse and its by-products crime and violence, several developments have occurred at the global level — for example: Colombian-grown, processed, and exported heroin; and Asian-manufactured methamphetamine, a stimulant of the central nervous system available in a smokable form known as 'ice.'

It is a given that the Colombian drug gangs are key players in the international cocaine trade, and reports indicate that they are now expanding their markets in Europe. In November, 1992, Philip Caruso, president of the New York Police Benevolent Association, warned that Ireland would be the "key to expansion of [Colombian drug gangs'] business into Europe." Captain Caruso suggested that Ireland operate joint police/military patrols along the Irish coast and strengthen naval and aerial surveillance programs.

While expanding operations for cocaine distribution in Europe, Colombian drug cartels are increasing shipments of heroin into the United States. Police intelligence reports indicate that as far back as 1984, Colombian drug kingpins experimented with growing poppies and extracting the milky paste from which heroin is produced. The Andean foothills of Cauca produced excellent crops of poppy plants and cultivation has increased over the years. The rough, mountainous terrain of the Andes also provides help in hiding processing laboratories.

Be that as it may, the Colombian drug lords are not invincible. U.S.-led drug enforcement activity has seriously crippled the Medellin and Cali cartels, which may explain their eagerness to shift operations to the somewhat "virgin" European marketplace.

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In the case of methamphetamines, which began appearing in Hawaii and parts of California in 1989

(although predictions of epidemic ice abuse have not materialized), the drug is being seen on the East Coast, especially in New York City, where DEA agents seized 900 grams of ice from two Korean traffickers. While most forms of methamphetamine are produced domestically, ice is produced in Hong Kong, Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and the Philippines. The trafficking in ice appears to be controlled by a small group of Asians and affiliated gangs, according to a paper released by the Bureau of Justice Statistics. The principal trafficking groups are the Vietnamese, Filipinos, and Chinese. It is ironic that the drug methamphetamine originated in Japan in 1919, and the Japanese continue to play a large role in that drug's manufacture. This aspect of the global drug trade continues to be investigated.

Development No. 2

The Russians are Coming! The Russians are Coming!

In a story appearing in the *International Drug Report*, Wolfgang Dicke of the German Police Union said there is a large increase in money laundering and drug trafficking from eastern Europe.

On the European front, gangs from former Iron Curtain countries are involved in developing new routes, especially Russian, Polish, and Czech crime gangs. The latest crime figures for Europe indicate there has been a sharp increase in drug-related crime, with France in the forefront. Experts warn that European police forces will experience soaring drug-related crime rates as more drugs hit the streets. Even so-called "soft drugs" have been seen at all-time high levels.

In response to the Russian and eastern European gang threat, 17 nations began meetings and proposed the formation of a European version of the Federal Bureau of Investigation called Europol, with the specific task of targeting and combating drug smugglers. Some police officials oppose the idea however, citing the needless extra layer of bureaucracy such a move would bring about.

Development No. 3

The Cuban Connection: Castro's Drug War

In his article for *The National Review*, paramilitary expert and freelance journalist Martin Arostegui cited dictator Fidel Castro as a major drug trafficker. Castro made a show of the court martials of 14 of his military officers on trumped-up charges of drug-smuggling. According to Arostegui's sources, including General Patricio de la Guardia, Cuba's beloved war hero, the trials of the army officers were a result of a suspected DEA attempt to kidnap Castro's interior minister. Drug-enforcement officials believe the Ministry of the Interior, working with renegade financier Robert Vesco, is deeply involved in recycling drug money to finance international terrorism. There is also evidence of a deeply entrenched Cuban 'mafia' operating in the Caribbean

with close ties to the Colombian gangs. Carlos Lehder, a captured Colombian drug runner, testified before a U.S. federal court about personal meetings he had with Castro and his brother Raul, Cuba's ruthless defense minister.

The Cuban-Colombian connection may broaden with the resurging heroin trade targeted at the U.S. since, in today's marketplace, heroin is more lucrative than cocaine — one kilo of heroin sells for about \$170,000, while a similar amount of cocaine garners only \$16,000.

The American Political Scene

What are our elected officials doing while law-enforcement officers wage a seemingly endless drug war? It seems that several political figures are more adept at cop-bashing than waging any kind of war on crime and drugs. Some of these elected leaders appear to even ignore the pleas of citizens to rid their neighborhoods of drug dealers and other assorted hoodlums. One big city mayor even spent taxpayers' money to pay funeral and burial expenses for a known drug dealer, at the same time pushing for a Civilian Review Board to harass police officers.

During the last presidential election campaign, there was more discourse about the U.S. economy and a non-existent, politically fabricated recession than there was on the subject of crime, violence, and substance abuse. In fact, one of President Clinton's first cabinet appointees was a man more concerned with investigating police officers and departments than dealing with street thugs, let alone international crime gangs.

The Numbers Game

In a disturbing and biting article for *Security Management* magazine, Lt. Col. Timothy Capron, commander of the Nuclear Weapons Training Detachment at the Inter-service Nuclear Weapons School, blasted the use of crime statistics by politicians, much of it manipulation of the numbers. Colonel Capron said, "Crime reports to the FBI were and still are voluntary. This reporting [by local governments], often self-serving, capricious, and arbitrary, was never audited." Capron claims that if a jurisdiction wanted to hire more officers, it would report everything. The department would then receive the funds for more officers, with the political leaders taking their bows. Then the reporting would somehow become less thorough, and, as a result, the statistics would show a decrease in crime.

Colonel Capron's article is a landmark piece since it addresses a subject considered taboo by many.

There have been many other new developments in the drug war. Some are encouraging, while others are discouraging. Who is winning the war on drugs and crime? The jury is still out on that one. ■