Chapter-VI

CONCLUSION

The drug use, abuse and trafficking is not new to the United States. It is an age old problem but it did not come into prominence until the 1960s, when it became acute. The United States tried to control this problem by passing various laws. Major federal anti-narcotics efforts began in 1909 with the enactment of Opium Exclusion Act, barring imports of opium except for medicinal purposes. The Hague International Opium Convention of 1912 produced the first international agreement. Thus the modern movement for the suppression of narcotics trafficking began with the United States involvement in the Philippines as the first step by the US Federal Government was the enactment of the Harrison Act of 1914 completely banning the sale of cocaine and opiates, which was followed by the Narcotic Drugs Import and Export Acts of 1914 and 1922, the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937, the Opium Poppy Control Act of 1942, the Boggs Act of 1951, and the Narcotics Control Act of 1956.

These laws were mostly limited only to domestic control of drugs. The "war on drugs" was started by President Nixon. Before he assumed office, the United States had
concluded that the best strategy in the war against drugs was to control the production and trafficking, to deny the users the supply of drugs. The focal points of this new emphasis were Mexico and Turkey. Nixon's policy achieved success and the supply of drugs from these two countries was cut down substantially. At the same time, allegations were levelled against the Nixon Administration for misappropriation of drug campaign for political purposes. The response of the Ford and the Carter Administrations was 'lukewarm'.

President Nixon initiated war on drugs. The Reagan Administration gave it a concrete shape. President Reagan in the real sense of the term internationalized the drug campaign. He attached a great deal of importance to controlling drug trafficking in his foreign policy with the drug producing and transshipment countries.

During the US presidential campaign of 1980, the Republican candidate Ronald Reagan slightly touched the drug issue but only to one drug: i.e., marijuana. He did not refer either to cocaine or to heroin which were more dangerous drugs. But he ended his presidency with considerable achievement in the suppression of the drug production, processing and trafficking. The main objectives
of his drug policy was two pronged: to reduce the availability of these drugs: elimination of the drugs themselves before they reached the borders of the United States; and elimination of the traffickers who produced drugs for the US market.

After coming into power, President Reagan realized the drug use rather abuse was no longer limited to single group of people but became so widespread that there was hardly any social group which was completely free of the abuse. Obviously, drugs were taken by those who were rich and successful in life as well as those who had not been able to do so well and sought relief from their pain and frustrations. There has been an unprecedented flow of drugs into the United States. Illicit flow of drugs established a nexus between the drug intake and the rise in crime. These were the reasons which forced President Reagan to speak more against drugs than his predecessors. No other administration signed more anti-narcotics treaties, enacted legislation, spent more money to stem the flow of drugs into the United States. Fighting drug abuse and trafficking was a priority concern. To urge this battle he established a system for White House supervision and coordination to implement his federal strategy. Nine cabinet departments and over 30 federal agencies were involved in this broad effort. John
C. Whitehead, Deputy Secretary of State, speaking on August 14, 1986, before the Sub-Committee on Foreign Operation of the Senate Committee on Appropriations said:

As the President’s recent statements make clear, let there be no mistake that this administration is fully committed to stopping the flow of illicit narcotics into our country....International narcotics control is central to the pursuit of our foreign policy objectives. We have and will continue to use every opportunity to convey the message to our friends in the international community on the need for greater efforts in controlling narcotics traffic.

One of the greatest achievements during President Reagan’s Presidency was the change in the attitude of drug producing countries. Previously, Latin American countries considered the drugs to be the problem of the rich countries. They were reluctant to cooperate. It was only in 1980s that drug abuse and drug related corruption and violence in the producing countries forced its leaders to think that it was no more the problem of wealthy nations alone. It was rather an international problem because no small or big country, no rich or poor country could save itself from the evil impact of drug production, processing and trafficking. It needed international cooperation and

solution. The number of cooperating countries with the United States in checking this menace rose from two to fourteen.

Drugs affected Latin American countries politically, economically, socially and psychologically. Governments at all levels had been corrupted, challenged and destabilized. Economies were subverted or became dependent upon narco-dollars. Traditional social structures were threatened by new narcotics elites which sought to buy and intimidate their way into social respectability. Drug abuse became a serious health problem. National images were transformed in the eyes of the outside world. These things left Latin American countries with no alternative, except to cooperate with the United States drug control programmes.

While President Nixon initiated war on drugs by giving emphasis to heroin, the Reagan Administration treated cocaine, marijuana and heroin as equally dangerous drugs. Cocaine remained a major concern between the United States and Latin American countries during this period.

President Reagan laid main stress on supply side, in controlling the supply of drugs from drug producing countries. The United States pursued drug eradication and substitution of drug crops, law enforcement, interdiction
and drug education and awareness programmes entrusted to
different agencies i.e., the INM, the AID, the DEA etc.. In
1981, after the amendment of the Posse Comitatus Act, the
administration assigned to the military the task of
assisting civilian law enforcement agencies in combating
drug menace. This was done more so after the enactment of
the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. The Department of Defense
(DoD) started assisting in the effort to interdict drugs by
providing the aircraft, ships, radar, command control,
communications and intelligence system, and manpower
resources necessary to mount a comprehensive attack on the
narcotics traffickers who threatened the United States.
While the armed forces helped, interdiction remained
primarily the responsibility of civilian administrative
agencies. The military services only supported certain
aspects of the programme but did not run any themselves and
played a secondary role.

The United States expended considerable diplomatic
energy on pressing Colombia, Bolivia and Peru and a few
other countries, the major cocaine producing and
transshipment countries to curb illicit drug cultivation and
refining. It also provided funding, technical assistance and
personnel for drug control programmes in these counties. In
1983, the US Congress linked foreign aid to drug control
performance. Countries which failed to take adequate steps to control illicit drug production, processing, trafficking and money laundering may pose certain specified economic and military assistance and trade preferences, such as sugar quotas or Caribbean initiative benefits.

Again in the Anti Drug Abuse Act of 1986 Congress tied foreign aid to drug control efforts of the recipient countries. In the last two years of the Reagan Administration, the United States withheld $17.4 million in aid from Bolivia, primarily because coca crop eradication targets were not met. Washington also imposed severe sanctions against Colombia, including the lengthy customs checks for travelers and products arriving from there. The fault of Colombia was that one of its judges released the kingpin of Colombian drug cartel Jorge Luis Ochoa, whose extradition had been requested by the United States.

The United States policy towards Latin America in general and towards Colombia in particular had a very narrow approach. It showed no sensitivity to the domestic, political, economic and social conditions. The United States imposed sanctions against this Latin American country, which did a lot in comparison to any other country. If few people in the government, judiciary or in police were
in league with the drug cartels, it did not mean that all Colombians were with the cartels. On a number of occasions, Colombian press and people stood with the government and arose against the drug barons. By imposing embargo on delicate goods like flowers, the US only deprived people of their livelihood and forced them to be a part of drug industry.

Though Colombia did a lot to control drug trafficking and went to the extent of extraditing top drug trafficker Carlos Lehder, thereby exposing their political economic systems to grave risk but these steps could not satisfy American people fully. Many Colombian and Western diplomats openly said that "the war against drug traffickers can’t be won, because the judicial system is no match for the resources and power of the drug bosses with their planes, billions of dollars, sophisticated weaponry and high technology." 2

The double standard of the US government became apparent when American officials admitted publicly the full-fledged cooperation of Colombia. It was clear from the

statement of Secretary of State George Shultz. While addressing a group of Bolivians and members of the press in La Paz on August 8, 1988 he noted the success in Colombia: "to date in 1988, Colombian military and law enforcement units have seized 15 tons of cocaine hydrochloride (HCL) or equivalent; 680 cocaine HCL laboratories have been destroyed, compared to 183 for the period in 1987". 3

The US sanctions backfired in Colombia and prompted the Barco’s Government to emphasize the need for a multilateral, rather than a purely bilateral approach to the drug problem.

It becomes clear that Washington did not pursue a drug diplomacy applicable to every country but restricted it largely to countries in Latin America. It did not seriously consider cutting off economic and military aid to Pakistan even when that country happened to be the world’s largest heroin producer; or stopped supplying stinger missiles to the Afghan mujahiddins who cultivated opium. Obviously, there were other higher priorities than narcotics control.

Therefore, the Reagan Administration pursued a policy of international drug trafficking control by adopting the

drug diplomacy in this region. Threat of Communism and insurgency were not severe problems in the area except in Peru, whose Shining Path, the Maoist guerrilla movement, wanted to change the established democratic political system by its own brand of socialism.

The cocaine industry was a powerful antagonist. Having cultivated extensive ties with the economic and political power structure of the Andean countries, it posed a formidable challenge for the US policy. Though the Reagan Administration assigned more financial and human resources to anti-drug programmes worldwide than any of his predecessor. Nevertheless, given the scope of the problem, it was assumed that assistance provided was inadequate.

President Reagan stressed on supply side control. Destroying drugs at their source was an integral part of American anti-drug strategy. The United States recognized that it could not do this job alone, because of either the political or resource constraints. That was why the United States imposed sanctions against countries which did not meet with the norms fixed by the State Department.

While the United States considered drug production, processing and trafficking as a law and order problem, the Latin American countries regarded it as a socio-economic
problem. Drugs were the source of income, employment and foreign exchange in these countries. Any attempt of these Governments to control drug production and trafficking impeded by corruption and violence. These governments did not have adequate resources at their disposal which could match the sophisticated well equipped armies and arsenals of the drug cartels. At a number of times, there were reports when narco-dollars dragged the government out of economic crisis. There were speculations that on few occasions government in this hemisphere was running by the drug industry. At this juncture, the US might have given some debt concessions and enhanced foreign aid to Latin American countries facing violence and resistance from their own people because they were trying to please America.

It was doubtful that diplomatic sanctions against selected Latin American countries would have made any impact except having negative outcome, which could cause a weak democratic government like Peru and Bolivia to fall and replaced by military government or socialist government. Such development would have been counter productive in combating the drug trade. Confrontation in most respects, would have brought meagre results and jeopardized the US security concerns in a strategic region.
It must be acknowledged that the US efforts meet with greater success in Mexico than in any other country of South America. There were four main reasons for this success. Firstly, unlike many drug producing countries the Mexican government chose to crack down on marijuana and poppy growers and traffickers. Secondly, the Government exercised greater degree of political and military authority over its territory than most other governments could claim. Thirdly, revenue from drug production constituted a smaller portion of foreign exchange earnings of the country. Finally, the Central Government never allowed the drug producing sectors of the economy to acquire a legitimacy and authority of its own.

In Asia, the drug producing regions known as the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent, were of very serious concern for the Reagan Administration. They were the major producers of heroin which has known capacity to addict consumers and thereby generate multibillion dollars sale. Cocaine was rivaled only by heroin. President Reagan pursued his policy of drug control only in Thailand, Burma and Pakistan. The policies towards these countries became even more important for the United States because it had no political equations with other major opium producing countries like Laos, Iran and Afghanistan. Mainly three
agencies were assigned the responsibility of international narcotics control programmes in Thailand and Pakistan i.e., the INM, the DEA and the AID. In Burma the main agency was the INM, because it wanted to keep its status of nonaligned intact by extending cooperation to an organization under the United Nations rather than to one of numerous American agencies. Total control of opium production seemed to be beyond the reach of the United States. Even if control was achieved in countries assisted by the United States, other countries outside American influence became major producers.

The US AID imposed a poppy clause in Pakistan and Thailand, but corruption and weak narcotics laws were major hurdles. The clause provided that the US would provide development assistance to poppy growing areas only so long as poppy was not grown. In Burma, lack of armed forces mobility was a problem and the United States provided airplanes to overcome the problem. But it was soon discovered that the Burmese government was using the help to crush the insurgency in the country. These countries cooperated with the US drug control programmes, however, the Communism in this region was a major concern of the Reagan Administration. These countries were in proximity to the former Soviet Union and other communist countries. President Reagan gave priority to check communism and insurgency over
the drug menace.

During the first term of President Reagan the role of the Congress was quite passive. It became active only after the enactment of the Anti Drug Abuse Acts of 1986 and 1988. According to these acts President's certification was required in order to get assistance from the United States and drug trafficking was declared as a national security concern. Death penalty and stress on the control of drug demand in the United States were the provisions of the latter. The post of 'drug Czar' was created to coordinate all anti-drug measures.

President Reagan's successor President George Bush carried on the narcotics control programmes with the same vigour but it was not fully effective. The goal set by President Bush to make America free from drugs by 1995 also seems to be unrealistic.

There is no doubt that by the beginning of the eighties, the world had come to recognize that the drug problem was not the problem of the rich countries alone. Combating the menace required global effort. There was no way the problem could be brought under control by unilateral or bilateral effort. If the production of drugs was cut down in one country, it shot up in another. Traffickers could be
arrested and death sentences could be awarded to them but others eager to make a fast buck took their place. Greater the risk of being caught, greater the profit. The farmers who got ten times the price for their poppy or coca crop were unlikely to cultivate banana, or coffee. If drug meant destruction for some, it meant money and good things of life for others. What marked the Reagan Administration’s policy was growing impatience when the policies did not produce the desired results. Nor did it matter to it what would follow if the small Latin American countries with fragile democratic governments appeared to succumb to the pressures of the United States or how it would affect the sensitivity of the people when their government were accused of corruption and dishonorable conduct. Respect for autonomy and national sovereignty of other countries were never high in the Reagan Administration’s agenda.

Referring to Operation Intercept undertaken in 1969, Gordon Liddy, then a Special Assistant to Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, wrote in his memoirs: "It was an exercise in international extortion, pure, simple and effective, designed to bend Mexico to our will." 4 Bending

other countries to the will of the United States was also the essence of Reagan Administration's policy. The objectives of his anti-drug policies were shared by the world but not the ways those objectives were being achieved. The US provided financial assistance to countries implementing the anti-drug programmes. But the assistance was not enough to wean away peasants from drug crops. The policy of destroying the supply at the source placed the burden on the source countries. The emphasis on cutting the demand was lacking. Recent statements emanating from Washington would now suggest a shift in this policy.

The goal of a drug free America remains unrealized. However, President Reagan was highly successful in making people realize the gravity of the problem.