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## Drug Policy Paradox: We pay the most to Columbia and Mexico. They do stop drugs but send drugs back, killing kids.

By Robert Weiner and Griffin Cobb

Drug policy paradox: We pay the most to Colombia and Mexico. They do stop drugs-- but still send the most drugs back killing America's children.

Drug organizations continue to thrive because every time a leader of the cartel is killed, another picks up the mantle. Every administration also likes to talk about how they made the "biggest bust ever", but they do not talk about the cycle that goes on forever regardless.

Violence is again rising in Mexico after the country's special forces on February 22 killed Jalisco New Generation Cartel Kingpin and founder Nemesio Rube'n Oseguera Cervantes, formerly known as "El Mencho." Yet [The Washington Posts](#) raves that it "represents a major show of force by the country's military as President Donald Trump continues to pressure the United States' southern neighbor to do more to fight its drug trafficking organizations."

On February 3, 2026, Donald Trump met with the President of Colombia, Gustavo Petro, to address the ongoing back-and-forth media battle between the two. Before this meeting, Donald Trump discussed one of the main topics on the agenda for this meeting, countertrafficking, with him stating, "because tremendous amounts of drugs come out of his country."

President Trump stated that he and Petro came out of the conversation "with a positive and optimistic view." Petro called for Trump to go after the kingpins of the drug selling organizations, even giving him a few names. This brings the US a step forward in building a relationship with Colombia to stop these cartels, which are thriving off our coastal cities.

South Florida has long borne the consequences of the South American Drug Trade, with their major ports being used by the cartels of Latin America, using coastal cities, including Palm Beach and Miami, to move drugs into our communities. In 2023, [the Miami-Dade Medical Examiner](#) reported 338 deaths where fentanyl was present and 422 deaths where cocaine was present. Also, Florida lost more than 7,000 people to drug overdoses in 2024-- most involving fentanyl. In Palm Beach County alone, [528 lives were cut short in 2024](#), and according to the [DEA and the Department of State](#), Mexico is the illicit source of fentanyl in our country as of 2025. There was a drop in overdoses in the Palm Beach and Miami region, but a large amount of fentanyl has still been found in these communities.

Trump says he really wants to do something about the drug problem in our country: he "is committed to ending the addiction crisis and ensuring every American can access the help they need." Here is his conundrum: Colombia and Mexico are the primary sources of illegal drugs entering the United States, despite being the countries doing the most to combat it with our help to reduce the flow. This has been a death spiral for generations, since the supplies and the cartel suppliers are virtually unlimited, with the amount of money people make up and down from the drug trade. The [US Government Accountability Office](#) highlighted that the United States has provided Mexico over \$3 billion in assistance from 2008-2023. Also, we gave [Colombia](#) over \$740million for counter-narcotics fighting in 2023 alone. Donald Trump cannot continue this cycle of aid and must take a hand on approach to end this tiering drug crisis in our country.

Under Plan Colombia, led by then-U.S. Drug Czar Barry McCaffrey from 1996-2001, the United States worked directly in conjunction with the Colombian government to combine aerial eradication with crop substitution. The results were measurable: crack cocaine entering the United States fell by roughly two-thirds, cocaine by about half, and crime rates plummeted. Bill Clinton said to the cabinet after meeting with McCaffrey that "Barry wants a billion for Colombia" to follow through with this plan. That was then. This is now.

With fentanyl and even more powerful synthetic opioids on the rise, nowhere is this paradox felt more acute than in Palm Beach County, Miami, and the broader South Florida region. This crisis has defined U.S. drug policy for a generation, with little to show for it. Fentanyl is no longer just a law enforcement challenge; it is a full-scale public health emergency.

Trump is trying to combat this problem, but unless Colombia and the United States go back to aerial eradication of fields instead of shooting down fishermen's drug boats, it will not work. Partnership was the answer in the 90s, and it remains the same now.

Americans cannot expect a 100% end to overdoses and crime in our country, as we do not see a full stop in heart attacks, cancer, and diabetes. However, partnership could again lead to the dramatic reductions that we saw in the 1990s under the Clinton administration.

Drug policy to this point has been a spiral of failure. One of the most searing memories of our time in the drug policy office was going to Mexico in late 1996 to say that we were going to work with the new government, which is committed to fighting drugs, and holding a news conference with [Gen. Jesus Rebollo](#) on Feb 23, 1997. A week later, he was busted as a member of the Juarez drug cartel. The corruption in Mexico is a funnel to vile, and the same is true today, with the corruption persisting.

So, the answer is support for government actions through aerial eradication and not pouring money into these countries that are filled with corruption. This is an urgent matter with [Barry McCaffrey](#) stating " that aerial eradication has been stopped in Colombia and as a

result, in the last 10 years, cocaine production has tripled." Also, in the United States we need to create rehabilitation centers in all major prisons to lower the use of drugs in our communities and the prisons themselves to combat these rising numbers.

In 2000, At the end of Bill Clinton's tenure, we had a conversation with him about discussing the problem that two-thirds of arrestees test positive for illegal drugs. He agreed that there needs to be massive drug treatment in prisons to stop the recidivism, along with the increase of crime and re-upping of drugs within the country. However, he then completed his tenure in office.

The sad truth is that little has been done to promote drug prevention and treatment programs in prison. These programs would be a vital step toward stopping crime and drugs in the United States.

These policies are being implemented at the state level. In Rhode Island, the medical journal *JAMA Psychiatry* found that [overdose deaths dropped by nearly two-thirds](#) among recently incarcerated people in the first year they began offering all three FDA-approved addiction medications to incarcerated people and continued care after release. A program like this could benefit Florida and many others nationwide to better our communities.

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