



## Despite Mounting Regional Pressure, Obama Vows More Drug War

Obama responded to the calls by promising to continue waging the unconstitutional war. Analysts and leaders, meanwhile, [said](#) the growing rebellion showed that the U.S. government was becoming increasingly isolated and irrelevant in the region. Despite the administration's efforts to quash the debate, calls for seeking out alternatives to the drug war dominated the headlines throughout the hemisphere.



A century after the first international anti-drug convention agreement was signed by governments around the world, analysts suggested that the tide might be beginning to turn. More and more leaders in Latin America and across the globe are openly questioning the [United Nations-mandated](#) and U.S. government-led war — its price tag has been over \$1 trillion paid just by U.S. taxpayers, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of lives lost around the world.

Before the hemispheric summit in Cartagena, Colombia, this week, prominent leaders from the region [demanded](#) that the subject of legalization be placed on the agenda. Earlier this year, popular Guatemalan President Otto Pérez Molina — a widely respected former military general with a long history of battling communism — declared the drug war a failure. The issue was clearly not going away.

Along with Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos, Pérez Molina said the war needed to be reconsidered. The new Guatemalan President — widely viewed as tough on crime — [suggested](#), among other proposals, legalizing the use and transportation of narcotics. Other leaders timidly joined the growing chorus as the hemispheric summit approached.

Obama responded by dispatching “Homeland Security” boss Janet Napolitano and Vice President Joe Biden to the region. They reportedly [warned](#) Latin American leaders to stay the course, promising that American taxpayers would be providing even more funds to governments that cooperate. The debate, however, only grew faster.

Before the summit began, Colombian President Santos re-emphasized his position. “Sometimes we pedal and pedal and pedal, and we feel like we are on a stationary bike,” the summit host [complained](#), suggesting the decriminalization of drug use. “I think the time has come to simply analyze if what we are doing is the best we could be doing, or if we can find an alternative that would be more effective and less costly to society. This is a topic of extreme political sensitivity.”

The people of Colombia, he noted, want the issue on the table because the country has suffered more



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bloodshed and chaos from the war than probably any other nation in the world. The massive profits resulting from the policy of prohibition have funded and armed a vicious Marxist insurgency that has terrorized Colombians for decades.

As the summit was about to get underway, former Mexican President Vicente Fox [spoke out forcefully](#) as well. "Prohibitions don't work, and the last remaining frontier of prohibition is drug, and we should question ourselves why drugs," he was quoted as saying, noting that the problem was "killing" the people of Mexico, as well as harming tourism and foreign investment. "This war on drugs is totally lost... We cannot keep going as we are today."

According to Fox, complete legalization of all drugs everywhere is the only answer to stopping the murderous cartels and the out-of-control cycle of violence. Plus, he said, it is not the government's responsibility to ensure that people do not use particular substances anyway — "it's a personal, individual decision."

"When you go against the same wall for five years and nothing changes, but it's getting worse, you have to do something. And leaders have to recognize when you have to change," Fox continued, calling the war immoral and unethical. "We need peace, and we need peace as soon as possible."

Since the Mexican military got directly involved in the drug war several years ago, some 50,000 Mexicans have been killed in the conflict — many of them simply innocent bystanders. Corruption, kidnappings, murder, and destruction have soared since then as well. So has drug use. But criticism of the war is exploding too.

"I think it's really significant that countries aligned with the US are taking these positions," Cynthia McClintock, director of George Washington University's Latin American Studies program, [told](#) Al Jazeera. "From Guatemala in particular, it was totally unexpected." McClintock said the recent statements by Latin American leaders hinting at possible defection from the drug war represent "the beginning of a paradigm shift."

Obama, however, is now actively [seeking to expand the U.S. armed forces' role in the battle](#) — both at home and abroad — and he wants other governments to get on the bandwagon. But while he said it was acceptable to discuss the issue, the President made it clear before, during, and after the summit that the administration would not budge.

"I think it is entirely legitimate to have a conversation about whether the laws in place are doing more harm than good in certain places," Obama [said](#). "I personally, and my administration's position is, that legalization is not the answer." At the summit itself, he reiterated that position even more forcefully, claiming that "the United States will not be going in this direction."

Obama also announced that his administration would be increasing the amount of U.S. tax dollars unconstitutionally showered on Latin American governments for use in the never-ending war — presumably borrowed from the communist Chinese regime or printed by the Federal Reserve. It was not immediately clear whether Congress would be consulted.

Columnists across the hemisphere — from the [United States](#) and [Mexico to South America](#) — lambasted Obama's unwillingness to consider alternatives to violence and war in dealing with drug problems. But the pressure is mounting all around him — and it is now coming from liberals, libertarians, and even conservatives.

In the United States itself, drug legalization is quickly becoming a hot topic. One of the most important



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presidential candidates in the race, Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas), has been calling for an end to the federal “war” for decades — at least in part because it is [so clearly unconstitutional](#) and the federal government is drowning in debt. His activism has helped put the issue back in the spotlight while sparking widespread debate.

Top conservatives such as influential televangelist Pat Robertson, meanwhile, have [called for decriminalizing cannabis](#). An influential group of current and former law-enforcement officers, judges, and prosecutors known as [Law Enforcement Against Prohibition](#) has also helped shift the debate, recently calling on Americans to support the efforts of Latin American leaders to end the war.

The public is clearly warming to the idea as well. For the first time in decades, more than half of Americans support legalization of marijuana, according to [polls](#). Meanwhile, surveys show that some 75 percent of Americans [realize the “war on drugs” has been a failure](#).

And states are now taking action also. More than 15 have already [nullified unconstitutional federal statutes](#) purporting to criminalize the medicinal use of marijuana. And Colorado may soon become the first state to [completely legalize the plant](#) even for non-medical purposes if a popular referendum succeeds.

Obama, however, is fighting back — hard. Despite promising to stop wasting taxpayer resources trying to override state laws and persecute sick people who rely on marijuana to treat their ailments, his administration has waged war on the medicinal cannabis industry with even more ferocity than former President George W. Bush.

But critics [are getting fed up](#). A bipartisan coalition of state lawmakers from jurisdictions where medical marijuana is legal recently blasted the administration in an open letter for terrorizing the public and sick people with a “zealous and misguided war.” An alliance of non-profit groups sent a similar letter condemning Obama’s war, too.

The administration claims ending the federal drug war is not the answer. However, analysts and the public largely agree that it has failed. Obama’s critics and supporters, then, want to know what the President believes the solution might be.

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*Photo: President Barack Obama, right, shakes hands with Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos at the CEO Summit of the Americas in Cartagena, Colombia, April 14, 2012*



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