

Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

What happened to the War on Drugs?

Ever wonder what happened to the President's great War on Drugs? Two years ago, leading banks in the United States were getting nailed by the Treasury Department for gross violations of the Bank Secrecy Act in accepting billions of dollars in cash deposits over \$10,000, and Treasury officials were publicly saying this was laundering of drug money.

One year ago, following the death from cocaine of University of Maryland basketball star Len Bias, President Reagan went on national TV with his wife, to announce a major "War on Drugs" offensive. This year, Reagan's initiative has petered out to court battles over mandatory drug testing and little else.

Meanwhile, the trial of one of Bias's teammates brought testimony that the slain star was not only a victim of cocaine, but a peddler himself. The U.S. has become "self-sufficient" in marijuana production, and narco-terrorists are threatening coups in Burma and other Asian and Ibero-American countries.

Three of the top names in the administration's War on Drugs, John Walker, Jr. at Treasury, Jon Thomas at State, and Dr. Carlton Turner at the White House, have all left.

Remarks made at the Foreign Press Center June 10 by Ann Wroblewski, Thomas's replacement as Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics Affairs, revealed the extent to which the teeth have been pulled out of the effort.

While speaking positively of some allies of the U.S. in the War on Drugs—like Mexico and Panama, which have come under fire from Con-

gress, in particular—Wroblewski's softness on questions of "state sponsored narco-terrorism" and money-laundering reveals a retreat from more aggressive stands once taken by administration spokesmen.

She flatly refused to concede that there is any evidence of state-sponsored drug trafficking, although when this reporter brought the issue up, she was inundated by questions on this issue by other reporters, and finally conceded that in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa Valley of Lebanon, Syrian soldiers seem to be aiding the export of opium and hashish. She added that there "is no control on opium production" in either Afghanistan or Iran, but would not say more.

She claimed that the "Bulgarian connection" has been shut down. "The days of them operating in that fashion are over," she said, adding that the Bulgarians are starting to cooperate with the United States by giving samples of seized drugs to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) for analysis.

She ducked the question of money laundering altogether, answering instead about progress in asset-stripping of traffickers.

She downplayed the significance of extradition treaties with the United States, saying that "it is more important that there is an effective justice system in the nations that capture the traffickers, than that they simply extradite them all to the U.S."

The "fire in the belly" of the War on Drugs is gone, even if Wroblewski could point to the fact that 20 nations are now engaged in crop-eradication programs now, compared to only two in 1981. In recent times, there was an urgency to nailing the big-time pushers. That meant getting them to the United States, where the laws are stiff enough to put them away for a long time, and not piously talking about the

need to improve the judicial systems in other countries.

Congress's role in sabotaging the war

Congress is not blameless in undermining the War on Drugs, and even causing some of the better warriors to toss in their towels. Besides slashing funding for the effort, some congressmen have done their best to throw a monkey-wrench into cooperative efforts between the DEA and key allies such as Panama and Mexico.

For example, "Operation Pisces" has been an effective joint program between the United States and Panama, and the DEA has praised Panama's tough anti-drug measures, including stiff new laws against bank money laundering. But those self-righteous congressmen, like Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), who were yelling last year that Panamanian Defense Forces chief Manuel Antonio Noriega was a drug pusher, are now bellowing because Noriega changed the bank laws there!

The same kind of treatment has been accorded Mexico, although Wroblewski said that for many years in the late 1970s-early 1980s, Mexico was the world model for its anti-drug efforts and cooperation with the DEA. The United States is as much to blame as Mexico for the problems of the last two years, she said, because the U.S. was preoccupied with stopping cocaine trafficking from other countries, while Mexico was undergoing a serious economic recession.

However, she said that good relations in the War on Drugs have been reestablished, and the United States certified Mexico as "cooperating with the U.S. on drug control" last March. "Mexico-bashing is not useful in the debate," she said.