
Documentation

Meese: 'No neutrals in the war on drugs'

Attorney-General Edwin Meese discussed the perspectives of the U.S. War on Drugs with reporters from Ibero-America in a press conference in Washington, D.C., broadcast live by Worldnet television on Aug. 27. Here are excerpts:

Meese: We have been focusing on a number of facets of the battle against narcotics, in this country and throughout the world. . . . A rather new approach to narcotic enforcement has been an attempt to take the profits out of narcotics trafficking, and in this regard particularly, we have been working on the forfeiture of the property of the narcotics traffickers after they've been convicted. This has been particularly successful.

In addition to this, of course, we have a major eradication campaign going on. . . .

Finally, we've been making major efforts against money laundering, the subsidiary financial transactions that accompany narcotics trafficking, both to take the profit out of it, as I mentioned earlier, and to put in jail those people who participate with the traffickers, through the laundering of the money that they receive through their illicit activities. . . .

One of the things that we're looking towards in future months here will be a stepped up campaign of financial investigations and against money laundering, both within the United States and on an international basis. . . .

We think that the cooperation that has recently existed, for example, with Colombia and with Peru in some joint exercises, has been an example of how nations can work together and, at the present time, for example, we are expanding a communications network involving six countries, including Colombia, which will enable us together to track suspected narcotics smugglers, whether they're in boats or operating out of planes or whatever their means of transportation may be. . . .

Edgardo Ramirez, President of the National Commission against the Illicit Use of Narcotics, Venezuela: After the Quito Pact [Aug. 10, 1984], we consider that all crimes related to drug trafficking and consumption are international crimes, that go beyond crimes against public health, because they threaten the sovereignty and the integrity of the American peoples. Has the United States thought of holding a

conference with the armed forces of our Latin American countries, to be able to combat drugs with the armed forces, both in the Caribbean area as well as in the rivers of our territories?

Meese: You have made a very good suggestion, and I think it would be a natural follow-on to the conference that was held on narcotic activities. I think, perhaps, the next step might be another meeting of the attorneys general, or ministers of justice, the people primarily responsible for police activity against narcotic trafficking, and then perhaps either at that meeting or at a subsequent series of meetings within the countries, the ways in which the military might help out in this effort could be explored.

Because the military relationship, the relationship between the military and police, is so different from country to country, I think it would take a little more study before saying that a conference of military leaders themselves would be a good idea. . . .

Walter Martinez, journalist from Venezuela: As we have spoken of the military, I would like to say that in Caracas a meeting is now ending of the 15 navies of the continent. . . . This conference is trying to see how to coordinate the actions of the navies in the fight against drug trafficking. It is obvious this crime is more and more technical. Now the drug traffickers even have jet planes. . . .

Meese: Well, without going into secret military information, let me say that this is a problem on which we are now working with the military authorities, the Department of Defense, in our own country. One of the problems is that often these small planes are able to fly at altitudes and in a manner that eludes radar that we have protecting the boundaries of our country. But we are now working with plans for additional radar, additional surveillance planes, some airborne radar, and some balloon-mounted radar, so that we can improve the capabilities of detecting these low-flying aircraft within the boundaries of the United States. . . .

Q: As drug trafficking is managed by powerful international organizations, which is beyond the capacity of some countries to stop, are you confident that positive results can be obtained from the discussion of the subject in international fora?

Meese: Yes. I think, just as you suggest, that because of the power of some of these narcotic trafficking groups and the fact that they do operate throughout several nations and between nations, it is important that the countries operate together. . . . But, most of all, it means that the societies within our countries, the people in our countries, have got to exert the will to battle against the narcotic traffickers. This has to be an overall campaign. It can't just be waged by government alone. People have to become involved. Citizens have to become involved. We have to realize that in the war against drugs, there are no neutrals. . . .