

Connect the Dots: You Don't Have to be an FBI Analyst to See the Picture

By Eric E. Sterling, June 4, 2002

FBI Director Mueller notes that the absence of a specific warning about Sept. 11, "doesn't mean that...there weren't dots that should have been connected..." The cliché of the season is "connecting the dots." Of course in the real world the dots aren't numbered as they are in a children's puzzle, so you have to look harder.

Dot: In 1998, 1999 and 2000, 30% of the FBI's entire effort was devoted to fighting drugs. More than 20% of the FBI was fighting drugs in 2001.

Dots: Enormous efforts of key border protection agencies are diverted to finding drugs: Customs Service, 35-45%; Immigration, 15%; Coast Guard, 12-18%; Secret Service 11-13%; Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, 60%.

Dot: The Defense Department spends almost \$1 billion a year fighting the drug trade.

Dot: CIA-run air interdiction program shoots down civilian aircraft in Peru killing a missionary and her daughter.

Dot: 1.5 million arrests for drug offenses each year, a majority of them for marijuana possession.

Dot: The drug abuse death rate has more than doubled since 1979, and the number of deaths per year has almost tripled.

Dot: Nearly three million hard core drug addicts remain untreated year after year.

Dot: The average purity of heroin sold in the street has increased 500% since 1981.

Dot: Hospital emergency room admissions for drugs are up 50% in the past decade.

Dot: High school kids reported that drugs like marijuana and heroin were easier to get in 1998 than at any time since 1975.

Dot: U.S. drug users spent \$64 billion on illegal drugs in 2000.

Dot: Drug prohibition proceeds help finance terrorists like the FARC and AUC, the guerrillas and paramilitaries in Colombia. Regulated and licensed businesses, including coffee, alcohol, tobacco, flowers, etc., do not finance terrorists.

Dot: FBI, CIA and law enforcement missed the red flags that were up before September 11.

The picture that emerges is an enormous effort to fight drugs with very expensive law enforcement and intelligence resources. On the key objectives of saving lives, reducing injuries, and keeping drugs out of the hands of kids, the problem gets worse and worse.

The picture is of a policy that has failed to protect us, and diverted the attention of our guardians away from our real enemies.

Interpretation of the picture: It's time to end the war on drugs. It's time to change the law to regulate and control drugs, not empower and enrich criminals and terrorists taking advantage of prohibition. We should license drug users, sellers and manufacturers to reduce deaths, injuries and crime. We should also end failed prevention programs that are pedagogically flawed but politically perfect, and provide drug treatment to the 3 million untreated hard core addicts.

The President's budget for the next fiscal year proposes 9.7% of the FBI effort to be devoted to fighting drugs. It's time for that number to be zero.