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## Latin Americans Decry U.S. Drug War

By JOHN TIERNEY

A group of Latin American leaders have called on President Obama to rethink America's campaign against illegal drugs, which they blame for helping to foment crime, corruption and political instability in Latin America while failing to reduce the availability of drugs in America. The criticism appears in a report from the Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy.

The commission was led by three former presidents of Latin American countries: Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil, César Gaviria of Colombia and Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico. They summarize the report in an op-ed article in the Wall Street Journal calling for the decriminalization of marijuana and the application of the public-health lessons learned from the campaign against tobacco. They write:

In order to drastically reduce the harm caused by narcotics, the long-term solution is to reduce demand for drugs in the main consumer countries. To move in this direction, it is essential to differentiate among illicit substances according to the harm they inflict on people's health, and the harm drugs cause to the social fabric.

In this spirit, we propose a paradigm shift in drug policies based on three guiding principles: Reduce the harm caused by drugs, decrease drug consumption through education, and aggressively combat organized crime. To translate this new paradigm into action we must start by changing the status of addicts from drug buyers in the illegal market to patients cared for by the public-health system.

Steve Chapman of the Chicago Tribune discusses some of the report's findings, and Neal Peirce of the Denver Post considers how the Obama administration might respond. Anyone care to predict what changes might occur?