Milestones in the War on Drugs
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1914 Harrison Narcotics Act passed by Congress taxes transfers of cocaine and opiates and restricts transfers to medical channels on government forms.

1915 162 IRS agents placed in Miscellaneous Division of Treasury Department to enforce revenue provisions of Harrison Act.

1922 *United States v. Behrman* decided. Supreme Court denounced doctor's prescription of cocaine for an addict as unlawful "gratification of a diseased appetite for these pernicious drugs."


1930 Federal Bureau of Narcotics established within Department of Treasury.

1937 Marijuana Tax Act passed to restrict marijuana under Harrison Act model.

1956 Narcotics Control Act imposes mandatory prison terms for offenders (later repealed).

1966 Bureau of Drug Abuse Control created with 100 agents to police supply of "dangerous drugs" (amphetamines and barbiturates).

1968 President Johnson submits Reorganization Plan No. 1 to Congress, consolidating FBN and BDAC into Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs under authority of Department of Justice. BNDD has a total of 600 agents.

1970 Comprehensive Drug Abuse and Prevention Act passed by Congress, establishing present framework of five drug schedules and import/export controls.

1971 President Nixon sends message to Congress portraying drug abuse as "a national emergency afflicting both the body and soul of America." The same day he creates by executive order the Special Action Office for Drug Abuse Prevention to oversee treatment, rehabilitation, education and research programs.
1972
BNDD has 1361 agents and a budget of $64 million.

1972
By executive order President Nixon creates Office of Drug Abuse Law Enforcement (ODALE), to focus on street "pushers" and Office of National Narcotics Intelligence (ONNI) under FBI authority.

1972
National Commission on Marihuana and Drug Abuse recommends repeal of penalty for private possession of marijuana. In following years, repeal of penalties for private or public possession is endorsed by AMA, ABA, American Public Health Association, National Council of Churches, National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, National Research Council and others.

1973
President Nixon declares "an all-out global war on the drug menace" and submits Reorganization Plan No. 2, consolidating BNDD, ODALE, ONNI and the Customs Service Drug Investigation Unit into the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) with 2,000 agents. DEA Budget approaches one-half billion dollars.

1976
Supply of cocaine to United States estimated by Government at 14-19 metric tons.

1977
President Carter recommends decriminalization of marijuana.

1979
NIDA household survey reports 9.7 million had used cocaine within the last year, 15.4 million had tried it at least once.

1980
Supply of cocaine to United States estimated by Government at 40-48 metric tons.

1980
Operation Greenback begins to trace money laundering operations. Government indicts 51 defendants and seizes $20,000,000 in currency in first phase.

1981
Posse Comitatus Act — Congress repeals century-old prohibition on military enforcement of civilian laws. Department of Defense administratively implements new interdiction. All branches provide equipment, training and other assistance to Coast Guard, Customs and DEA.

1981
Percy amendment (to Foreign Assistance Act of 1961) repealed. Spraying of herbicides on marijuana crops in source countries now encouraged.

1982
Tax Reform Act amended to facilitate disclosure of IRS file information to other enforcement agencies.

1982
"Artic Penitentiary Act" proposed for federal drug offenders.

1982
CIA brought into War on Drugs by Executive Order.

1982
IRS intensifies Special Enforcement Program aimed at drug offenders.

1982
NIDA household survey reports 11.9 million had used cocaine within past year and 21.6 million had tried it at least once.

Jan. 1982
President Reagan announces formation of South Florida Task Force on Crime under direction of Vice President Bush to fulfill federal government's "special responsibility" to control "massive immigration and epidemic drug smuggling."

Feb. 1982
Task Force begins operations under direction of Vice President Bush, with 337 drug agents from DEA and Customs serving as Joint Task Group.

Mar. 1982
Attorney General orders Director of FBI to assume authority over DEA. FBI given concurrent drug investigative jurisdiction.

Mar. 15-Dec. 31, 1982
GAO report on Task Force operations shows following results as compared to same period in 1981:

- Marijuana seizures: from 1,074,000 to 1,245,000 lbs.
- Cocaine seizures: from 1617 lbs. to 2891 lbs.
- Drug arrests: from 742 to 945.
- Price of cocaine drops and purity rises.
- Marijuana smugglers shift routes away from South Florida.

Mar. 9, 1982
3728 pounds of cocaine seized on a Tampa-Colombia cargo jet.

Mar. 12, 1982
Reagan Administration retracts endorsements for stronger health warnings on cigarette packs.

May 18, 1982
1197 pounds of cocaine seized from a four-engine cattle jet.
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Oct. 1982 President Reagan pledges “unshakable” commitment “to do what is necessary to end the drug menace” and “to cripple the power of the mob in America.”

Nov. 1982 President calls South Florida Task Force “unqualified success.”

Nov. 1982 Carrier Nimitz and escort cruiser USS Mississippi intercept a tug laden with 30 tons of marijuana.

Dec. 1982 Great American Bank (Miami) indicted for laundering $96 million in cocaine money in 14-month period.

Jan. 1983 Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force program in 13 core cities begins with budget of $127 million. By year’s end, OCDETF has staff of 1,000 agents and 200 prosecutors. Goal is to prosecute members of high level drug trafficking organizations and to destroy their operations.

Mar. 1983 NNBIS created in 6 border cities to coordinate drug interdiction efforts.

Apr. 1983 Contingent of ten marines arrives in South Florida to fly and maintain aircraft in support of United States Customs Service.

May 6, 1983 Cocaine Hotline opens (1-800-COCAINE) and receives 1,000 calls a day.

May 31, 1983 Confidential informant encounters Miami police officers on street and leads them to a boat on the Miami River carrying 1500-2000 lbs. of cocaine.

Summer, 1983 Price of cocaine dips to record low ($15,000-$18,000 per kilo) as result of worldwide glut. (1986 price rises to $35,000 per kilo, about two-thirds of 1981 price.)

July, 1983 USS Kidd, a Navy guided missile destroyer, chases and fires upon a marijuana cargo vessel, the first such military/civilian encounter in history.


1987]

Milestones

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Jan. 31, 1984 United States Customs officers find 965 pounds of cocaine during a routine search of a 33-foot pleasure craft, the largest seizure of its kind.

Feb. 1984 Florida Highway Patrol sets up roadblocks at which drug sniffing dogs check cars.

Feb. 4, 1984 Customs agents seize 910 pounds of cocaine from a sailboat.

Feb. 10, 1984 14 packages of pure cocaine wash up on beaches near Vero Beach, Fla.


Mar. 21, 1984 Colombian authorities seize 13.8 tons of cocaine and cocaine base from a cocaine “industrial park” in the jungle.

Mar. 1984 Attorney General reports on activities of OCDETF, including the biggest drug case in United States history, in which Defendants are accused of smuggling over $2 billion worth of cocaine into the United States.

Apr. 3, 1984 Coast Guard cutter makes largest ever seizure of cocaine at sea, 2200 pounds.

Apr. 1984 Government concludes three-year investigation by indicting Joe Bonanno family with importing $1.68 billion worth of heroin into the United States. The Attorney General calls it the “most significant case involving heroin trafficking by traditional organized crime that the federal government has ever developed.”

June 16, 1984 2500 pounds of cocaine found concealed in Panamanian shipment of freezers. As with the 3700 lb. seizure of March 9, 1982, no arrests are made.

June 1984 The Department of Justice reports a 60% increase in the number of wiretaps.

June 19, 1984 1700 pounds of cocaine discovered in containers of roofing tiles in Miami Warehouse.
et al.: Milestones in the War on Drugs

1987

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1987

Milestones

Oct. 1984

Comprehensive Crime Control Act of 1984 passed by Congress authorizes pretrial detention, lengthens drug sentences to 20 years, and increases use of criminal forfeitures.

Dec. 1984

Miami News reports that $3.5 billion per year in cash is deposited in Florida banks. Most of it is believed to be drug money.

Dec. 1984

A Piper Seneca enters United States air space from the Bahamas without filing flight plan. It carries 1,000 lbs. of cocaine.

Feb. 7, 1985

Bank of Boston pleads guilty to felony charge of failing to report $1.22 billion in cash transactions with 9 foreign banks. $300,000 fine assessed.

Feb. 12, 1985

Metro-Dade Organized Crime Commander says South Florida cocaine traffic is worse than ever.

Mar. 1985

IRS reports that United States financial institutions launder about $80 billion per year in drug money.

Apr. 20, 1985

$1.3 million in small bills seized from Piper Navaho at Fort Lauderdale Airport.

May 8, 1985

A local police officer in Everglades City, Florida stops a Winnebago Camper because it rides very low on its suspension. He discovers one ton of cocaine.

May 10, 1985

Department of Justice won 704 motions for pretrial detention (and lost 185) under CCC Act of 1984.

June 1985

Congress expands military role in War on Drugs.

July 17, 1985

Blue Lightning Task Force announced in Miami. Operation to include radar balloons and 60-knot interceptor boats tied into high-tech computerized command post. 1-800-BE-ALERT hotline established for citizen tips.

Aug. 21, 1985

Dept. of Treasury fines Crocker National Bank of San Francisco record fine of $2.25 million for failing to report $3.88 billion in cash transactions during 1980-84 period.

Sept. 27, 1985

Miami police open a drug house in Liberty City. They sell drugs and arrest 83 unwitting customers.

(Not mentioned: Imports of cocaine to U.S. reach 74-90 metric tons.)
July 1984  DEA reveals that it keeps computer files on 1.5 million persons; only 5% are under investigation or suspected.

July 1984  Attorney General announces “largest single seizure of cash bank accounts in any drug case in the history of federal law enforcement.”

Aug. 1984  3,194 persons indicted and 1,068 convicted in OCDET cases to date.

Aug. 8, 1984  Florida Department of Law Enforcement announces campaign against marijuana cultivation. Hotline established.

Aug. 13, 1984  Twin engine plane touches down briefly on unopened section of I-95 in Florida, leaving behind 1200 lbs. of cocaine. No arrests are made.

Aug. 22, 1984  Customs inspectors use detector dogs to uncover 2,754 lbs. of cocaine concealed inside 180 large industrial pulleys from Peru.

Sep. 24, 1984  President signs a proclamation for National Drug Abuse Education and Prevention Week. “We are on the right track,” he says.

Sep. 27, 1984  White House Press Release summarizes accomplishments of War on Drugs: Arrests of the top-level organizers and financiers of the drug traffic have increased 18 percent, from 195 per month in 1981 to about 231 per month in 1984. Total arrests averaged about 1,000 per month.

Convincing for all drug law violators have increased 90 percent, from 485 per month in 1981 to about 921 per month in 1984.

Convincing of top-echelon organizers and financiers have increased 186 percent, from 88 per month in 1981 to about 252 per month in 1984. U.S. seizures of cocaine during the first seven months of 1984 are 216 percent greater than cocaine seizures during all of 1981. Heroin seizures are 67 percent greater and marijuana seizures are 8 percent greater for the first seven months of 1984 than in all of 1981. In the first half of 1984, over 25 metric tons of cocaine were seized in the United States and Latin America, compared to approximately 3.7 metric tons in 1981.


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July 17, 1985  Blue Lightning Task Force announced in Miami. Operation to include radar balloons and 60-knot interceptor boats tied into high-tech computerized command post. 1-800-NEWS-ALERT hotline established for citizen tips.


Sept. 27, 1985  Miami Police open a drug house in Liberty City. They sell drugs and arrest 83 unwitting customers.
United States Marshall's Service reports it has $313 million in seized cash and property in its custody.

Dec. 31, 1985

350,000 people die from effects of cigarette smoking.

Dec. 31, 1985

NORML estimates that marijuana is largest United States cash crop, worth about $14 billion per year. In one 3-day sweep, DEA agents sight over 3000 illegal plots of marijuana.

Jan. 1986

United States Magistrate Peter Nimmoff resigns in partial protest over governmental abuses of power in War on Drugs.

Feb. 1986

Florida Marine Patrol makes its largest cocaine seizure ever — 935 pounds.

Feb. 1986

President Reagan's budget message urges Congress to allow United States to spend an additional $181 million in the War on Drugs in fiscal year 1987.

Mar. 1986

President's Commission on Organized Crime calls for mandatory drug testing of all federal employees and workers hired by federal contractors; intensified military action also urged.

Apr. 18, 1986

Nova Law Center sponsors symposium, The War on Drugs: In Search of a Breakthrough.

Sep. 15, 1986

President Reagan issues Executive Order on a "Drug-Free Federal Workplace." Order requires executive agencies to develop a drug-free workplace, including testing for drug use, rehabilitation for drug users, and employment termination for repeat offenders.

Oct. 1986

Congress passes Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. Provisions include a doubling of funds for the War on Drugs, mandatory minimum prison terms for many drug crimes, and the creation of new offenses (including money-laundering).

Writings by Contributors: A Selective Listing

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P. Reuter & M.A.R. Kleiman, Risks and Prices: An Economic Analysis of Drug Enforcement, in Crime and Justice: An Annual Re-