

**Voice of America drug workshop: Attorney General  
Thornburgh speaker: international drug trafficking,  
extensive Q&As, April 8, 1989 (41:09)**

>> Moderator: Here in Washington, the attorney general of the United States, Dick Thornburgh, is spearheading the United States' effort to stop the flow of illegal drugs by cracking down on the drug cartels. Mr. Thornburgh is a former governor of Pennsylvania and a U.S. attorney. And when he was U.S. attorney, he took on many tough cases, prosecuting drug traffickers and organized-crime figures. He personally argued the government's successful drug-testing case before the U.S. Supreme Court. He's been honored by the Federal Drug Enforcement Administration for his work to eliminate drug abuse. Last year, Mr. Thornburgh represented the United States at the U.N. Drug Convention in Vienna, and he signed on behalf of the U.S. guidelines providing a framework to strengthen international cooperation in curbing drug trafficking everywhere. Mr. Thornburgh, in testimony before two Senate committees here in Washington, urged the Senate to ratify the document. The attorney general has to leave for an appointment shortly after 2:00. He is going to speak for about 10 minutes and then will answer any questions that you may have. It is my great pleasure to introduce to you the attorney general of the United States, Mr. Richard Thornburgh.

[ Applause ]

>> Thornburgh: Thank you, sir.

[ Clears throat ]

Thank you very much. I'm pleased to be here today, and I want first to thank you for accommodating my schedule. I know I was originally slated to meet with you yesterday morning, but appropriately enough, my schedule had to be adjusted so that I could meet with President Bush and President Salinas of Mexico and the Mexican attorney general, Enrique Alvarez, my counterpart, to discuss drug trafficking and the problems that are involved in mounting an international effort in this regard. I'm delighted to be with you today and share with you some views from the United States Department of Justice about the truly international problem of drug trafficking and drug abuse. I have, in fact, visited many of the countries that are represented here today and met with my counterparts in those countries and other countries to establish the kind of cooperative network that is necessary to deal with a problem that reaches across international borders. We here in the United States are, of course, the number-one consumers of illegal

drugs. The appetite which American citizens have developed for these illicit substances is a substantial part of the problem that exists around the world, and I think President Bush has clearly acknowledged that in enunciating last month a strategy which is designed not only to carry forward the effort through law enforcement to deal with the supply of illegal drugs, but to attack the demand side, as well, calling upon not only those of us in government, but in the private sector and the shapers of American values to recognize the enormous cost we pay for the great appetite that we have developed in this country for these drugs.

Notwithstanding the fact that we are major contributors to the problem, it is important to recognize that like the plagues of old, this, what President Bush properly identifies as the scourge of drug abuse and drug trafficking, has become an international problem. No one country can deal with this problem by itself or within its own borders. It is necessary to fashion the kind of cooperative network that is, indeed, coming into being under the recognition that the drug traffickers and their money-laundering operations and the violence and corruption that has been generated by their activities in countries around the world pose a real threat to the stability of those countries. As President Salinas said yesterday, the Mexican government regards the drug problem as a matter of its national security, and more and more countries are coming to recognize this.

I believe that one of the most promising developments in the implementation of this recognition of the international nature of the drug problem was the signing in Vienna last December of a United Nations Drug Convention drafted by over 100 nations from all corners of the earth, representing various political and ideological point of views, but all concentrated on effective methods to deal with drugs. This Convention is unique because it represents the first law-enforcement effort to deal with the drug problem. It binds the signatory nations to closer cooperation in exchanging evidence, in extradition, in entering into mutual legal assistance treaties, in doing away with the veil of bank secrecy that often frustrates money-laundering investigations and attempts to seize the assets and forfeit the profits of the drug traffickers. In short, it provides a comprehensive blueprint and binds each of the signatory nations to implement that blueprint in a way that has never been undertaken before in this effort against drugs. There are also some features of the United Nations Drug Convention that address particular problems -- the creation of offenses against the dealing in precursor and necessary drugs -- chemicals without which illegal drugs could not be manufactured or

transshipped, the enlistment of common carriers in the effort to deal with the drug problem, giving authorities the right to intercept on the high seas and, in appropriate cases, to seize vessels that are used in illicit drug trafficking.

What we now see is the beginning of the process of adoption and ratification of the Convention in countries around the world. It is before the United States Senate. President Bush and I have urged our Senate to act quickly upon it so that as other nations ratify the Convention, and it becomes an accepted part of our arsenal of weapons in the drug fight, we'll be able to stand shoulder to shoulder with the nations represented here today and your counterparts around the world in carrying forth the drug-enforcement -- law-enforcement effort.

But as I said at the beginning, it is important for all of us to recognize that there are two sides to this equation and that all the law-enforcement efforts in the world are not going to succeed if we don't begin to change the values that have somehow given some legitimacy to the notion that a drug-dependent lifestyle is an admissible lifestyle, and that is going to require a much more sophisticated and difficult effort. Begins, of course, with young people, with telling them the dangers and educating them with respect to what health and other hazards are inherent in using drugs -- the fact that they may stunt their opportunities, indeed, cause themselves health and serious harm up to and including the loss of their lives through these poison substances. It also involves creating an infrastructure of community support through prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation programs. And as we are undertaking in the United States, the notion of making the drug user themselves accountable for the enormous cost that society pays for the depredations that are visited upon it by this drug trafficking.

Let me mention only one statistic from the United States that I think underscores the enormous cost that we are paying for the scourge of drugs in this country. In our federal prison system today, 47% of those incarcerated are in prison because of drug-trafficking offenses, and yet our prisons are overcrowded, and President Bush has asked for a billion and a half additional new dollars to expand our prison capacity. One needn't ruminate for long to see what could be done with those dollars if they were not necessary to accommodate the influx of those involved in drug-trafficking offenses. And the federal prisons, mind you, are largely populated by major dealers and traffickers, not by small-time traffickers or by individual users of drugs. This gives you some size -- some sense of the size and dimension of the drug

problem in these United States and the challenge we face not only in law enforcement, where my responsibilities lie, but as a nation and as a society in dealing with this scourge.

I'm sure that in many of the countries represented here today, similar problems exist. And if they don't, take no comfort because, like the plagues of old, these plagues of drug trafficking and drug abuse will eventually be at the doorstep of the people of your countries. I don't mean that as a wish, because I would wish otherwise, but I mean it as a prediction based in fact and a call to the leaders of all the countries represented here and others concerned about this problem to continue the good start that has taken place in cooperating in law enforcement, in sharing information, in establishing a firm resolve. Finally, I would like to take note of the fact that the Supreme Court of Colombia today, I am informed, has upheld the emergency decree of President Virgilio Barco providing for extradition of drug defendants to the United States for trial and upholding the confiscation decrees that have deprived these drug traffickers of the enormous wealth they've accumulated within that country. There are some amendments, in effect, that the Court made with regard to the disposition of the seized assets, but by and large, we regard this as yet another positive development in the very courageous efforts undertaken in a country that has truly paid the maximum price for the ravages of drug trafficking.

And now the real reason I'm here, of course, is to share your views, to answer your questions, and I thank you again for giving me the opportunity to visit. Yes?

>> Question: Yes, Mr. Attorney General, you said that a plague of both drug problems will soon get to almost all countries. In many African countries, right away there are no drug problems, but what road do you propose for these countries in the international -- in the international engagement now to prevent and fight drugs?

>> Thornburgh: I had the chance to meet with my counterpart, the attorney general from Nigeria, last week, and identified the impact that the drug-trafficking trade has on that country, which is twofold. And I suggest the day will not be far when even countries that are not affected with a current drug-abuse problem will have to deal with these two aspects. One is being transshipment areas, routes, for drugs that come from other parts of the world and are bound for either the United States or for Western Europe, where drug trafficking, or drug abuse, is a major problem. And secondly, in the money-laundering aspects -- using the financial systems of countries that might not normally be

thought of as being involved in the drug problem to launder the funds. Because all these kinds of transactions are in cash, which are not usable to the drug traffickers. They have to be converted at the other end of the money-laundering pipeline into assets that are not readily identifiable as coming from drugs. So I'd suggest in your country, as well, that an alert government will be looking for these signs -- couriers, transshipment coming through the country with drugs bound for other parts of the world, and proceeds of illicit drug trafficking attempting to be laundered through your financial system. Yes?

>> Question: I'm a journalist.

[ Microphone feedback ]

I work for a Chilean paper. In my country, we are very worried about -- We are turning into a transship country by now, this year. I would like to question if you have had official talking with my country, with my government, to ratify the treaty since just one country did it. We were told that the Bahamas subscribed it, just that country. What is going on with my country?

>> Thornburgh: I haven't had any meetings with my counterparts in Chile, but I know that the State Department International Narcotics office has had some conversations. I can't give you a current report on that, but I would invite you to contact the Public Affairs office at the State Department to give you some further background on that. Yes?

>> Question: My name is Bardetrea. I work for the Hamburg-Munich Post in West Germany, Hamburg. Sir, I'd like to know have you got -- can you give us any information, any details, on how either South American or U.S.-American drug traffickers are preparing the European market, through which channels they go? And in particular, I'd like to know which role the big harbors of Rotterdam and Hamburg play in this game.

>> Thornburgh: We have carried out regular discussions with the law-enforcement leadership of the European community to ensure that we share with them intelligence that we acquire and that they cooperate with us in the kinds of efforts that I previously described. We had seen during the early part of this year, before the crackdown in Colombia, increasing shipments of Colombian-controlled cocaine into the Western European community. The best indications were that the entrepôt for these shipments was through the Iberian Peninsula and through Spain and Portugal, but that doesn't mean that other ports of entry -- Marseilles in France and

the Northern European ports -- weren't also being utilized. These are businesses. They are multinational business operations that, indeed, dwarf many of the legitimate operations, and they are going to operate as any other business does to take advantage of opportunities that are presented to themselves. And in each of the ports of entry in the European community, the challenge is, through appropriate customs and other law-enforcement efforts, to ensure that major drug shipments, either of cocaine from South America or from heroin from Southeast Asia or other parts are not coming into the country. But one, I think, should recognize that, like any business organization, these drug kingpins are going to be flexible in their operations, they are going to take advantage of opportunities that are presented to them, and that it is very difficult to tell precisely what they are using by way of transshipment routes. Unlike ocean liners or other commercial shippers, they don't publish schedules respecting where they are shipping, and that's where the ingenuity of those of us in law enforcement is taxed to the extreme by sharing intelligence and seeing what patterns develop in their distributive process. So that if I were to say to you today that Hamburg or Bremen or wherever was not being utilized at this very moment, it would be no consolation because I couldn't assure you that shifting patterns of distribution might not cause them to be used within a week or so, and that's what puts the enormous burden on law enforcement to cover all the possibilities so that we're ready for any eventuality. Yes?

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Question: Sir, since being here, I've been hearing a lot of emphasis placed on South and Latin America in respect of the drug trade, in particular with cocaine. However, being from Jamaica and a Caribbean country, I am deeply concerned about that here because Jamaica, in particular, I believe it has been, to a great extent, the crimes often of Jamaicans with the posses that have helped to stir all this emotion within the U.S., and I'm wondering what effort is being directed towards dealing with the problem in the island, more so that Jamaica itself has become a transshipment port.

>> Thornburgh: Well, I speak with some hesitation about U.S. efforts in any other country because we must respect the sovereignty of other countries with whom we deal in the drug war, and we seek to establish a cooperative environment where we can share information and intelligence with our counterparts in those countries so that they can mount an effective internal struggle. Colombia is a different situation because of the fact that the judicial and prosecutorial system there has almost been

neutralized by threats and intimidation. But we have had a very close working relationship with Jamaican authorities, for example, in dealing with the posses that controlled some of the crack-cocaine distribution in many metropolitan areas in this country. Just about a year ago, we carried out an extensive crackdown on the so-called Jamaican posses, which are not meant to reflect on your country, obviously, but merely identify the organizations that were originally, as I was led to believe, were politically oriented in Jamaica and then became, in this country, centers for the distribution of illegal drugs. We had very close cooperation from Jamaican authorities, as an example of the kind of thing that is important in this effort. Obviously authorities in your country know a great deal more about the characteristics of the organizations and the individuals involved than we would in the United States, and without that kind of cooperation, we would've come up short in what I think was a very successful effort to take out a number of the leaders of these very violent and widespread organizations, and we will continue to pursue that. Yes?

>> Question: My name is...

[ Speaking indistinctly ]

...from Ahram newspaper, Cairo, Egypt. Our President Mubarak was here in the United States last week. Do you think that anything has been discussed with him about this drug thing?

>> Thornburgh: I would be surprised, although I was not privy to those discussions -- that was a rather brief trip but welcome trip that President Mubarak made here -- but I would be surprised if President Bush didn't raise this issue with every visiting foreign leader, both in respect to securing their cooperation in the law-enforcement efforts about which I've talked and to warn them of the fact that because of the breakthroughs in transportation and communication and the ability and mobility of these organizations to move throughout the world that no country is immune from having to deal either with the problem of drug abuse, of the drug-trafficking organizations being within their country, or their country being utilized for money-laundering operations that are inherent. And my knowing President Bush's commitment in this regard, I'd be surprised if he didn't mention it to every visiting leader. Yes?

>> Question: Señor, si bien en Colombia.

[ Clears throat ]

>> Thornburgh: Just a moment. Does it work? Take my ear off here. Sí.

>> Question: Soy Alfredo Álaba, periodista del Diario del Comercio de Lima, Perú. Si bien en Colombia, las mafias Colombianas, los carteles, son los que exportan hacia este país o hacia Europa el Cloridrato de cocaína o la cocaína en una sola palabra. Perú es el principal productor de pasta básica de cocaína, y es donde se origina el problema. Perú y Bolivia. En menor escala Bolivia. Yo quisiera preguntarle, si es que sabe usted algo, eh, sobre un aumento de ayuda o cooperación, logística, para la policía peruana, para erradicar y combatir el -- los cocaína clandestinos y la producción de pasta básica de cocaína en el Perú.

>> Thornburgh: Question is about United States' efforts to aid the government of Peru in dealing with the production of the coca plant and the processing of coca paste, which eventually finds its way into the cocaine traffic dominated by the Colombian cartels. I was in your country earlier this year and met with President Garcia, General Zárate, and others who are involved in the front lines of the effort primarily in the Upper Huallaga Valley to eradicate the production capacity for coca leaves and to deal with the paste-producing resources and the laboratories in that area. And one of the things that was clear from my visit and my report to President Bush was that we had to provide more in the aid -- in the way of aid and support for the Peruvian military and for the Peruvian police activities if we were to go to the source of the problem of Andean cocaine being produced. The strategy adopted by President Bush clearly reflects a determination to aid not only the government of Colombia, but the governments of Peru and Bolivia, where, as you properly point out, the coca is grown and processed for its eventual transshipment out of Colombia. Obviously the situation in Peru is complicated by the insurgent group, which is active in the same area, in the Upper Huallaga Valley. We're sensitive to that challenge to the Peruvian government, as well. But we have recently reactivated our Drug Enforcement Administration support program in the valley after a period of suspension because of concern about safety and security of American drug enforcement agents there. And I think the president looks forward at the upcoming Andean Summit to a very careful consideration and full discussion of the needs of all of the countries that are involved in this effort. Yes?

>> Question: Vivimos en un hotel y trabajo en un periódico de Caracas, capital de Venezuela. Mi pregunta es o mi planteamiento sería el siguiente. ¿Es verdad que muchas naciones, estarían dispuestas a cooperar con la convención de Viena, y con el



programa Bush, para terminar con el narcotráfico y los distribuidores de droga? ¿Y todos todas las personas involucradas en los delitos de narcotráfico? Es también una de las partes de la estrategia del programa Bush. Es la aplicación de la ley. Pero ocurre que en muchos países latinoamericanos como por ejemplo, en Venezuela. Existe una carga muy pesada que es la deuda externa. Y eso impide que las naciones tengan un buen presupuesto, para distribuirlo entre sus ministerios. Entre ellos el ministerio de justicia, que por ejemplo en mi país es el que menos presupuesto tiene. Mi pregunta es, ¿hasta que punto eso no va a ser un obstáculo, para luchar contra el narcotráfico dentro del país y poder cooperar con los demás países del mundo? ¿Y de qué manera, si Estados Unidos nos va a ayudar, díganos, en recursos económicos? ¿Qué se va a dar a cambio? ¿Eso no endeudaría más a nuestro país?

>> Thornburgh: Well, the question is about the external debt of countries like Venezuela and the effect that the burden of that debt will have on the ability of those countries to participate in the anti-drug effort and to what extent, if any, the United States government will aid in supporting law-enforcement efforts within those countries as well as others. That's a difficult question to answer from my point of view because so far as the Department of Justice is concerned, we relate to existing law-enforcement facilities in your country and others primarily through the International Drug Enforcement Conference -- IDEC -- which has carried out joint western-hemisphere anti-drug operations in the last 7 years. But clearly from the point of view of the United States, the solution to the debt problem is important. Proposals have been made by Secretary Brady, my colleague at the Treasury department, to aid in the reduction of the external debt of many of the countries in Latin America that we look to for partnership in the drug effort. During President Salinas' visit to the United States this week, he made clear that the effort against drugs was not tied to the solution to the debt problem, but he and the United States are both interested in working out some way to ameliorate the burden of the debt problem. But he and I suspect other leaders in the western hemisphere recognize that the debt problem cannot be held hostage to a -- or the drug problem cannot be held hostage to a solution to the debt problem because of the internal consequences of a failure to attack the narcotraficantes.

That is to say if they are to continue to accumulate wealth and political influence and power and to intimidate and threaten the very basis of the rule of law in countries as they have done in Colombia unchecked, then a much greater price will be paid by those countries and those societies than whatever is imaginable

because of the debt problem. By that, obviously, I don't mean to shove aside as a matter of concern our participation in helping countries to solve their external debt problem, but I would suggest that whatever relationship exists between the two is really subordinate to what I think should be a determination to deal with the threat posed by narcotics trafficking in each of the countries where it's gained influence. Yes?

[ Clears throat ]

>> Question: I'm from Haiti. My country is the chief transiting country for drugs to the United States. Now there is a very heavy current of the Haitian ships smuggling goods from the American ports -- Miami -- to Haitian ports. And those ships, they seem to go empty from the Haitian ports to the American ports, but, however, they don't go empty, and we have good reasons to believe in Port-au-Prince that those ships smuggle heavy quantities of drugs into your country. And your government is a little bit aware of that, even your diplomats in Port-au-Prince, but up till now, your government seemed to have done nothing with those ships.

>> Thornburgh: I would be surprised to learn that they have done nothing. I would not be surprised to learn that they haven't done everything because in our country, as in every other country here, law-enforcement resources are finite. It may well be, may I suggest hypothetically, that the effort to intercept a Haitian -- U.S.-bound Haitian ship on the high seas with a quantity of drugs was subordinated to the seizure last week of 20 tons of cocaine on our west coast in California. The fact of the matter is that with a finite amount of resources, we have to target and prioritize our effort-- prioritize our efforts and frankly keep the traficantes guessing. We don't want to become predictable in the methods of investigation and prosecution that we undertake, lest we permit them to alter their modus operandi to the point where they escape detection. But I assure you that we are very much interested because of the enormous cost we're paying for drugs in this country in working with and cooperating with and taking advantage of the kind of intelligence you mentioned. In a particular case, particular shipments may escape detection, but I'll be honest with you. We're not so much interested in seizing the drugs. We are interested in putting the corporate officers of these criminal conglomerates in prison for long periods of time, like Carlos Lehder -- life with no parole. We are interested in seizing their assets. They are only in business for one reason -- to make money -- and we want to take that money away from them through the kinds of efforts that have produced this year about a billion dollars in forfeited assets that we have taken, through effective law

enforcement, away from narcotics traffickers. We will, of course, where we can, obviously, deprive them of the goods of their trade, but it is a far-ranging, comprehensive effort that is necessary. And I think that I could say with confidence that in a particular case that you may describe about a failure to intercept a shipment, it's not an indication of any lack of desire to cooperate or any zeal on the part of our law-enforcement officers. I have time really for only about one more question.

>> Question: Have you been threatened?

>> Thornburgh: By anybody here? I don't think so. Not so far. You've all been very cordial. Yes, sir?

>> Question: Mr. Attorney General, the Nigerian -- I work for Concord Press in Nigeria. The Nigerian public is aware of an agreement with the U.S. to cooperate on this drug matter, but the details are not known, and we are concerned that drug offenders are not punished enough in the United States. Does this agreement contain anything about extraditing our offenders here -- Nigerian offenders in American prisons -- which I was told by one of those who addressed us here that they have imprisoned about 60 of my people this year already? Does the agreement contain anything in sending them back home to face the music?

[ Light laughter ]

>> Thornburgh: Well, I'll be honest with you. I'm a little bit sensitive to discussing an agreement that apparently has not been made public in your country. I don't want to offend the diplomatic end of it, but I can tell you this -- that we were impressed with the reports that we had from my counterpart during his visit here about the severity of the sentencing in your country, and we commend you for that. Part of the problem in our country with regard to appropriate sentences in terms of jail time is our prisons are full, and too often a defendant in a drug case is given a lesser sentence because he can't be accommodated within our present system. That's why the president has made the centerpiece of his anti-drug proposal a \$1.5 billion commitment to almost doubling the capacity of our prisons since the beginning of this decade. So that once that capacity is in place, we expect that tougher sentences will be forthcoming. With regard to the exchange of prisoners, I would have to refer you to your own country for information on that. I'm sorry. My friend from Mexico had a question there, and since I had a chance to meet with the Mexican authorities yesterday, we'll close with that appropriately enough.

>> Question: Sí señor procurador, eh, en años pasados, en años pasados las relaciones, entre México y los Estados Unidos fue un severo deterioro por problemas relacionados con el narcotráfico. Entre ellos un aspecto muy relevante fue la muerte del agente Camarena. Quisiera preguntarle, desde el punto de vista Norteamericano. ¿Cuáles son los principales problemas que afectan las relaciones de México a Estados Unidos, relacionados con el problemas de las drogas?

>> Thornburgh: I think you're quite correct that until very recently, the climate for cooperation between Mexican authorities and those in the United States was far from ideal, and you're also correct in identifying that with the tragic kidnapping and assassination of DEA agent Enrique Camarena and the efforts to bring to justice those responsible. But President Salinas, from the very beginning -- in fact, before he took office -- during his meeting in Houston with President Bush, made it clear that fighting drug trafficking and official corruption were to be top priorities of his administration. And more important, he has proven in the early months of his administration that he meant what he said. We have cooperated closely with those who are leaders in the antinarcotics fight in Mexico. The record that has been compiled during 1989 is most encouraging -- the arrest of major traffickers, a step up in the eradication and seizure programs, a determination to deal very firmly with those who violate the laws of your country, and an ongoing working relationship established through three separate and very profitable meetings between Attorney General Alvarez and myself and the establishment of working groups to attack particular parts of the problem. As recently as yesterday, discussing with Treasury Secretary Aspe and with President Salinas and with the attorney general our desire to aid Mexican authorities in developing a whole new body of law with respect to money laundering and to aiding in their efforts to assist in the international effort to interrupt the flow of funds from narco-traffickers. So I would say that the prospects are bright. We are encouraged by the changes taking place. We are impressed with the caliber of persons who have been enlisted in the struggle against drugs in Mexico, and we look forward to some very positive results.

Before I leave, I want to tell you we have made available to you a copy of a report that I prepared for President Bush earlier this year which we call somewhat facetiously a Dun and Bradstreet report on the international drug trafficking as it affects the United States. It was prepared by our prosecutors, and it details the business organizations of the some 43 separate drug-

trafficking organizations within the United States. I think you'll find it interesting reading not just for an understanding of what is going on in the United States based on a review of completed prosecutions, but as a warning as to the type of organization you may have to deal with within your own countries. I wish you well in those efforts, I thank you for your interest and your questions today, and I hope that you and the media, who play such an important role in educating and guiding your constituencies, will make the kind of contribution to dealing with this scourge of drug trafficking and drug abuse worldwide that can give us all a better quality of life and a better tomorrow. Thank you very much.

[ Applause ]