

# Rehabilitating the war on drugs

New report calls for decriminalisation and legalisation of drugs as part of an alternative strategy for Central America

**For immediate release:** The war on drugs is America's forgotten war. For over 40 years, it has continued largely unnoticed outside the region and, for the last decade, has been almost completely overshadowed by the war on terror and the related conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. But the illicit drugs trade and the militarised government responses are the greatest threats to state and human security in the Americas. Many analysts and policymakers now conclude that the war on drugs has largely failed.

Open Briefing has today, 4 April 2012, published a policy briefing outlining a 'sustainable security' alternative to the war on drugs. *Rehabilitating the war on drugs: Central America and the legalisation debate*, assesses the implications of Guatemalan President Otto Perez Molina's surprise announcement that he wants to open a regional debate on the legalisation of drugs. The authors, Chris Abbott and Joel Vargas, conclude that decriminalising some drugs and legalising others should form the foundation of a sustainable security strategy to tackle the violent crime associated with the illicit drugs trade in the Americas. The report outlines the following integrated programmes that would constitute an effective strategy:

- Decriminalising some drugs and legalising others in a staged process.
- Separating the law enforcement and military elements of tackling drug-related organised crime.
- Addressing citizen security challenges, including lack of personal safety.
- Addressing police corruption through career-long training, supervision and assessment.
- Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration programmes for former cartel members.
- Radically increasing funding for drug education and treatment programmes in North America.

By focusing on ineffective supply reduction strategies, the war on drugs is destroying the countries of Latin America in order to protect those of North America. The Sixth Summit of the Americas on 14-15 April needs to allow for a proper debate on the potential legalisation of drugs, and Central American leaders must be prepared to develop policy strategies that also ensure the health and security of their own citizens rather than only benefiting others. The sustainable security strategy outlined in *Rehabilitating the war on drugs* could form the basis of such an alternative to the war on drugs.



**open briefing**  
the civil society intelligence agency

**Open Briefing**  
27 Old Gloucester Street  
Bloomsbury  
London WC1N 3AX

t 020 7193 9805  
info@openbriefing.org  
www.openbriefing.org

## Notes to editors

1. The briefing is available to download in English and Spanish from <http://www.openbriefing.org/thinktank/publications/rehabilitatingthewarondrugs/>.
2. Open Briefing is the world's first civil society intelligence agency; an accessible platform for insight and analysis on key defence, security and foreign policy issues. We provide open source intelligence assessments and independent security briefings, so that a better informed civil society can properly engage with peace and security debates and influence positive policy developments in these areas. Please see [www.openbriefing.org](http://www.openbriefing.org) for more information.
3. **Chris Abbott** is the founder and Executive Director of Open Briefing. He is an Honorary Visiting Research Fellow in the School of Social and International Studies at the University of Bradford and Honorary Sustainable Security Consultant to Oxford Research Group. Chris is also an independent consultant and freelance writer, and the author of two books on security and politics.
4. **Joel Vargas** is a Contributing Analyst at Open Briefing and the founder and Director of Sales & Operations at Contingent Security Services. He is a Latin America intelligence specialist and political adviser with over 20 years' experience in risk management, law enforcement and intelligence. Joel is currently a Crime Prevention Coordinator with a police department in the Chicagoland area.
5. To arrange an interview with the authors please call **+44 20 7193 9805** or email [chris.abbott@openbriefing.org](mailto:chris.abbott@openbriefing.org) and [joel@contingentsecurity.com](mailto:joel@contingentsecurity.com).