



The Bunkhouse Chronicle

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Columnist

Get Shorty

Many of us watched with interest the recent — and remarkably anti-climactic — extradition of Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman to face drug trafficking charges in the United States. He has, naturally, pleaded not guilty. As this news broke, I received no fewer than a dozen messages and emails from my former partners in narcotics enforcement celebrating, to one degree or another, “Shorty’s” arrival in New York.

But we shouldn’t celebrate too much. The reality is that Chapo’s arrest and likely lifelong imprisonment won’t do a single thing to change the equation. He was long ago replaced, and untold numbers of people were murdered, in the endless succession drama that

plays out in the cartel strongholds of Mexico — which is quite simply a narco-state.

The sale and use of illicit narcotics are not, contrary to the legalize movement’s daydreams, victimless crimes. The truth is, as any veteran of the failed “War on Drugs” can tell you, that the traffic in narcotics has a nexus to every other kind and category of crime, from petty theft to homicide — and it has an extraordinary reach. The end user has no idea how many people were maimed, murdered, kidnapped, abused, raped, or tortured for that gram of crystal meth to finally reach them.

Worst of all may be the relationship of narcotics usage and sales to child neglect and endangerment, the horrific images of which I will spend the rest of my life trying to forget. The damage done by mere users is equally far-reaching, whether it comes from property crimes committed to fuel their addictions, or the bottomless list of both violent and non-violent crimes, the wreckage of relationships with friends and family, the enormous burden imposed on the criminal justice system, or the simple cratering of their own hopes and dreams.

But we shouldn’t kid

ourselves. The War on Drugs, as it is presently being fought, is an abject failure. It isn’t, and probably never has been, effective. When looked at objectively — and I entered that tube as a true believer in the cause — it is an industry designed to fail. Law enforcement will never have the money, the manpower, or the agility to defeat the drug cartels at their own game. Never. The cartels are the most powerful and ruthless corporations on this planet, and they simply devour the competition.

The costs for a single large-scale investigation into narco-trafficking — organizations that operate on the same principle as terrorist cells — can easily skyrocket into the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of dollars. It can take months, sometimes years, to start kicking doors, seizing loads of cash and dope, and putting it all on the table for the big photo-op and back-slapping spectacle that is helpful only for sustaining the illusion of hope in ultimate victory.

If we arrested 15 people in a big, above-the-fold caper that stretched over multiple states, the mopes were replaced in less time than it took to book them. The case itself would take years to adjudicate, fought every step of the way by cartel lawyers

who care nothing about the mopes who were arrested, but are seeking discovery to figure out how law enforcement got wind of them in the first place. Armed with that information, they change tactics, or technology, and drop the defendants neatly into the American prison system, where the American taxpayer pays through the nose for their care and comfort.

It is a revolving door of madness.

Almost no one discusses the violence in places like Chicago in meaningful terms. The street-gang violence in that city, where 762 people were murdered last year, and some 4,331 — many of them mere children — shot, isn’t happening in a vacuum. What we are witnessing is a proxy war between Mexican drug cartels for control of the highly lucrative narcotics trade in that city, and elsewhere. I know that to be true because I’ve sat in a room and listened to wiretapped conversations between brokers in Mexico and their lieutenants in Chicago.

The reality is that outside of marijuana — and even that is questionable in many cases — not one ounce of heroin, meth, or cocaine is sold in this country without the hidden hand of the Mexican cartels

somewhere along the chain. The Mexican cartels exercise absolute control over the narcotics corridors into this country, and its delivery into our cities.

That hidden hand reaches far deeper into American society than many would like to believe. It involves corrupted judges, border patrol agents, street cops, and elected politicians serving at very high levels of government. I don’t offer this as opinion. I know it from direct experience working cases as a task force agent in Southern California.

So, while its wonderful that Shorty has been extradited to face justice in America, and anyone who is being honest knows that he is decidedly not some kind of folk hero worthy of respect — a Sean Penn fantasy that is hard to square with facts — I’m having a hard time giving it much more than a shrug.

Until we have some kind of national awakening on the importance of educating our children in an honest way about the real horrors of narcotics use, and bend their minds away from usage, the Shortys of the world will continue to find eager customers, continue to exploit them, and continue their rampant plundering and pillaging.

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