

CHAPO ESCAPES

Yesterday, once and future Sinaloa kingpin Chapo Guzmán escaped from the high security Mexican prison where he had been held since February 2014. He escaped via the same kind of highly developed tunnel system in which Mexican Naval forces, assisted by US Marshals and DEA Agents, found him. Both tunnels provided escapes through the bathroom.

You'd think maybe Mexican officials would have been on the lookout for any tunneling systems that might assist Guzmán.

Already, the Mexican press is calling this an embarrassment for Enrique Peña Nieto (though remember, he seemed rather reluctant to boast of Chapo's capture when it happened, until the story leaked to the US press).

US officials, who have curiously been granted anonymity to bitch, are complaining that the Mexicans never extradited Guzmán so we could dump him in Florence SuperMax, where he'd be far less likely to escape. The on-the-record statements from people like Attorney General Lynch are much more reserved – though even she makes it clear she wants to bring him here and try him.

I'm at least as interested in what this escape says about the hierarchy of the Mexican drug industry as anything about the legend of Chapo. WaPo's story – whose reporter is also tweeting some fascinating pictures that show just how predictable this escape should have been – also addressed this somewhat.

Even with Guzman in jail, his Sinaloa organization remained the dominant narcotics smuggling power in Mexico, with trafficking networks that spread across the United States. Guzman's cartel sends more cocaine and marijuana than any other into the United States, according to DEA officials, and it accounts for more than half of the

heroin surging into U.S. communities as overdose deaths skyrocket.

[snip]

Guzman's longtime business partner, Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, was believed to have assumed operational control of the cartel after Guzman's arrest, though few in Mexico doubted that Chapo continued calling the shots from his maximum-security cell.

That is, Chapo's arrest seems to have had little affect on the dominance of Sinaloa in the market (which may also suggest some favor from officials). Which will likely lead the decapitation-faithful in US law enforcement agencies to accidentally shoot Guzmán the next time we "help" with an arrest.

Finally, Chapo's escape has led to predictable tut-tutting about the corruption of Mexico generally and Peña Nieto specifically. Those complaints are true: over time we're likely to discover that Guzmán had help from inside, if not from even higher-level authorities (the house where his tunnel ended is close to a military base, apparently).

But is the US really in any position to complain? After all, at least under Eric Holder, our government didn't even *try* to imprison our transnational crime organization bosses – people like Jamie Dimon and Lloyd Blankfein, men who don't use the same overt violence that Sinaloa does, but who nevertheless have presided over transnational networks of entrenched crime. Jamie Dimon has never had to hide in a tunnel, in part because DOJ presumed he'd always escape whatever legal efforts we made to keep him there. And one reason we don't change the underlying law is because our Presidents, of both parties, are just as tied to those criminal TCOs as Peña Nieto and many of his predecessors.

I absolutely agree that Guzmán's escape reflects the lack of seriousness of some in Mexico about

prosecuting him. But that's not unique to Mexico, not even in North America.