

***My Article for PlanetIvy.com on the Mexican Drug Wars – 2014. This article went viral and had over 200,000 views.***

***Another top drug lord is in chains, vigilantes are on the rise- are the tides finally changing in the Mexican drug Wars?***

Last Saturday, February 22<sup>nd</sup>, Joaquín 'El Chapo' Guzmán, was arrested in the Mexican town of Mazatlán. He's head of the Sinaloa Cartel, who are reportedly responsible for up to 30% of cross-border trafficking, to go along with a globe-covering trafficking network. Meanwhile the vigilantes, now part of 'official' security forces, have had a few victories themselves. All of this seems like great news for the Mexican Drug war. Could the tides be turning at last, it what has seemed like an endless battle for so long?

US attorney general, Eric Holder called 'El Chapo's capture, "A landmark achievement, and a victory for the citizens of both Mexico and the United States." Chapo has been practically untouchable since his escape from prison in 2001, so it's easy to see why officials are lauding this capture as such a great thing. They had him crawling through rivers of shit, Andy Dufresne style, only Chapo didn't come out clean on the other side. He was found in room 401 of an apartment block by the sea, and pinned before he had a chance to grab his trusty AK. Great story but what does it mean in the grand scheme of things?

It certainly sounds awesome, but when you look a little deeper, the words 'fucked beyond repair' come to mind.

The government (PRI) have done there utmost since coming to power in 2012, preaching and doing. In the last year they've captured multiple Cartel leaders, including heads of the Zetas, the Knights Templar and the Gulf Cartel. It sure seems like the PRI are doing some serious battling out there, with death and homicide rates down, although they have been accused of messing with statistics, meaning this could all be a load of propaganda, more than anything. The PRI came to power with promises, and we all know that promises need to be kept.

The media in Mexico are also under agreement of how to cover the Mexican drug war, with rules in place so that they do not glorify and cartel activities or violence. It's easy for this to work both ways- by not glorifying the cartels, doesn't that give glory to the other side?

The Vigilantes marched victorious through Apatzingan, Michoacan on Saturday the 8<sup>th</sup> of February. They arrived in the city, hundreds of them, marching alongside armoured vehicles, and took back the city, stronghold of the Knights Templar. This was following an agreement, signed in late January by vigilante leaders and the government, legalising their activity in Michoacan. Before the march on the city, the vigilantes, or 'autodefensas' wrote on their Twitter feed, 'Today the world will be witness to your liberation, Apatzingan.' How poetic. They were met with no violence at all- a clean, glossy little victory for the combined forces of government and 'every'man'. There's your propaganda right there.

This all may seem pessimistic but the ugly truth isn't all that hidden. Previous PRI regimes have acted similarly, taking out slews of top-drug-cartel-folk. In the late 80's president Carlos Salinas began his

term with the capture of Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo. Earlier than that, in 1976, José López Portillo's people took down then Sinaloa boss, Pedro Aviles, in the first year of his presidency. Sadly political support for cartels continued. Both Portillo and Gallardo basically passed power on to the rival cartels in exchange for sacks of cash. The take-downs were propaganda, nothing more. There was never any real intent to change the tides at all.

We can only hope that this latest capture will result in actual justice, not just the fake, money-laden kind. As for the vigilantes and their new government- army-alliance, let's hope it's a little more 'actual' as oppose to 'symbolic.'

Think of the Mexican drug Wars as a monster with many heads. Cut off one and it sprouts another three. There's no stopping it, not with a conventional sword or axe, or anything obvious. There's too much money to be made, and this monster loves the smell of cash, no matter how many heads it loses and no matter how many it must kill in its endless war.

We can hope it will eventually end, but sadly El Chapo is just one little head of a monstrous beast.