

OP-ED

Mexico’s ‘new’ drug war

President Peña Nieto’s strategy is a lot like his predecessor’s. For obvious reasons.

By **Ricardo Ainslie**

LAST WEEK, MEXICAN authorities arrested Miguel Angel Treviño Morales, the leader of the Zetas, Mexico’s deadliest and most feared drug cartel. In Mexico, the news was met with relief, although there is also apprehension that his arrest will lead to a convulsion of violence; historically, taking out cartel kingpins has meant power struggles within organized crime groups, schisms that leave many dead in their wake.

Treviño Morales, known as Z-40, was apprehended — along with a bodyguard and a third man, reported to be the cartel’s accountant — without a shot being fired as he traveled along a back road near Nuevo Laredo and the U.S. border.

For observers of the Mexican drug war, his arrest provides an unanticipated window into how President Enrique Peña Nieto will address his nation’s entrenched organized crime problem.

From the beginning of his presidential campaign, Peña Nieto, who assumed office in December 2012, vowed a different approach to the drug war from that of his predecessor, Felipe Calderon. Calderon’s frontal assault, though initially popular, very soon became the object of criticism as violence soared. Last summer, the electorate handed



Presidencia Mexico / EPA

PRAGMATISM may partly explain Peña Nieto’s cartel strategy.

Peña Nieto a decisive victory over Calderon’s party, the PAN. Having suffered about 70,000 deaths (a conservative estimate) over the course of Calderon’s presidency, the country was exhausted by the violence, anxious for change.

Calderon pursued a kingpin strategy: Drawing from American counterinsurgency tactics developed in Iraq, his administration declared war on a list of 37 most-wanted cartel operatives. In contrast, many Mexicans believed Peña Nieto would negotiate a peace agreement with the cartels, allowing them free rein in exchange for ending the violence.

In addition, Peña Nieto signaled that he might be reevaluating Mexico’s close cooperation with American law enforcement in the drug war.

The arrest of Z-40 would seem to prove those notions wrong. Within days, the national director of Calderon’s party accused Peña Nieto of disingenuously building expectations of a new approach when, for all practical purposes, he was continuing Calderon’s tactics. Indeed, the arrest had all the familiar hallmarks: Treviño Morales’ moves were tracked in real time by a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement drone, while American intelligence monitored his communications and shared what was learned with Mexican authorities.

Pragmatism may be one explanation for Peña Nieto’s decision not to jettison the kingpin strategy altogether. His administration simply could not ignore that Mexico’s drug cartels are criminal organizations that not only operate an international drug trade but also commit brutal acts against ordinary Mexican citizens on a daily basis, including kidnapping, human trafficking and extortion — on a massive level — of individuals and businesses. The Zetas, in particular, are infamous for having a “diversified business plan” when it comes to criminal activity.

For Peña Nieto — and Mexicans tired of the violence created by the government crackdown — it is one thing to entertain a live-and-let-live strategy toward the cartels when their primary activities are understood to revolve around servicing the high demand for drugs in the U.S. However, that strategy is no solution if Mexicans continue to be victimized in the absence of govern-

ment protection in their communities.

It is also likely that Peña Nieto was presented with a politically awkward choice vis-a-vis the United States. The Mexican president apparently faced incontrovertible evidence from U.S. sources indicating that the head of Mexico’s most feared cartel was, literally, in their sights. To have not acted on that intelligence would have certainly raised speculation that the Peña Nieto government was protecting Z-40, which wouldn’t have played well at home or helped in negotiating a new relationship with Washington.

Still, it would be a mistake for Peña Nieto to simply pick up where Calderon left off. The previous administration overemphasized a militarized law enforcement strategy, only belatedly looking at the social conditions that helped create a culture that allowed the cartels to thrive (lessons important in tamping down cartel violence in Colombia and Brazil).

That said, the kingpin strategy is not going to go away. There is no sign that the U.S. will end its intelligence work in Mexico, with or without overt cooperation from Mexican authorities, and the U.S. will undoubtedly continue to exert pressure on those officials to act on that intelligence. But so will everyday Mexicans, with their sometimes conflicting needs for peace and protection. In Mexico’s budding if imperfect democracy, the latter pressures can no longer be ignored.

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Prison reform the conservative way

By **Pat Nolan and Chuck DeVore**

WHEN liberals expand the reach and cost of government, we conservatives label them “knee-jerk.” However, conservatives have shown themselves to be enthusiastically knee-jerk in one area: criminal justice spending. For more than 40 years, conservatives have blindly supported a vast expansion of criminal laws and appropriated billions of dollars for new prisons to hold the inmates convicted under those laws.

Now, the weight of those costs is sinking California’s budget, siphoning off dollars that could go to schools, roads, hospitals or tax cuts. With the state’s expensive and troubled corrections system in crisis, there is a great opportunity to apply conservative principles — smaller, more effective government at lower cost to the taxpayers — to the prisons.

It’s time to retire the tough-on-crime sound bites. There are several ways to cut costs and still keep people safe.

We are leaders in the national Right on Crime movement. We believe it’s no longer enough for conservatives just to be tough on crime; we also must be tough on criminal justice spending. That means getting the most public safety for the fewest taxpayer dollars. Conservatives must demand the same accountability from our correctional system that we require from other government programs.

Some Republicans, for example, are trying to score short-term political points by employing old scare tactics about the state’s prison “realignment” plan. Realignment gives local jails the responsibility — and funding — to oversee low-level inmates, while violent and career offenders remain the responsibility of costlier state prisons.

This is a common-sense division of responsibility. Realignment is a work in progress and there will be challenges, especially at the county level as different jurisdictions try different strategies.

Instead of reflexively chaining themselves to a costly prison structure that is failing, California conservatives should take a page from conservatives in other states who have successfully reformed prisons with conservative ideas. Those reforms have reduced crime and taxpayer costs while keeping the public safe and, when possible, providing assistance to victims.

There is much for conservatives to like about realignment. It returns significant criminal justice discretion and dollars to local control. With careful management, realignment should keep crime rates low and reduce the

nearly \$10-billion California corrections burden by reserving expensive prison beds for career criminals and violent felons.

The public supports the new direction. A USC Dornsife/Los Angeles Times poll in June found that nearly 3 of 4 Californians endorse the idea behind realignment. And when David Binder Research asked crime victims whether California should “focus more on sending people to jail and prison or more on providing supervised probation and rehabilitation programs,” the respondents chose probation and rehabilitation by a 2-1 ratio.

Other states have found that rethinking corrections can pay dividends, for victims and taxpayers alike. In Texas, where being tough on crime is practically a residency requirement, legislators shifted funds from building prisons to alternatives such as strengthening probation and expanding drug courts. Texas saved more than \$2 billion in prison costs, and crime rates have fallen to levels not seen since 1968.

Texas’ example has been repeated in states such as Ohio, Georgia and South Carolina. And in Oregon, the Legislature passed a major reform bill with bipartisan support that will help the state save \$326 million in new-prison construction while supporting local programs proven to prevent crime and reduce recidivism. Supporters included Oregon’s associations of police chiefs, district attorneys, state police and sheriffs.

With California at a critical crossroads, the time is right for conservatives at the state and county levels to weigh in on corrections reforms. Here are three possible pathways:

Evaluation. One of realignment’s weaknesses is the absence of outside evaluation of outcomes. Demand strict local accountability for taxpayer dollars and hard evidence of program results.

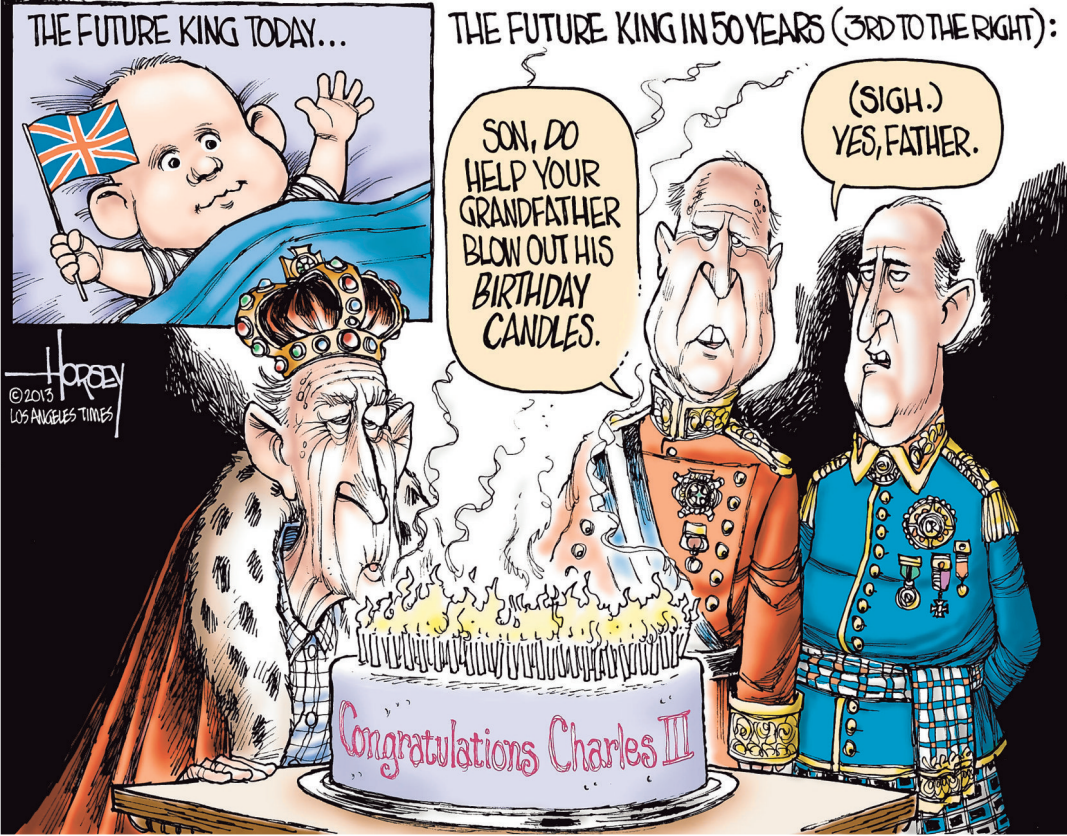
Alternatives and treatment. Explore how drug offenders, whether imprisoned or not, might be better helped to overcome addiction, which drives many lower-level crimes.

Accountability. Use sanctions that are rooted in conservative values, such as requiring restitution to victims, community service and other cost-effective measures that hold offenders accountable while helping them resume productive, law-abiding lives.

For too long, California conservatives have fallen into rhetorical traps that run counter to true conservative values of limited government and fiscal discipline. Now is the time for conservatives to retire the tough-on-crime sound bites and instead propose proven criminal justice reforms.

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DAVID HORSEY



DAVID HORSEY Los Angeles Times

No consensus, no peace

RONALD BROWNSTEIN

LIKE A LIGHTNING flash in a stormy sky, the Trayvon Martin case has illuminated the depth of the impasse between white and nonwhite America. But a similar dynamic looms less visibly behind Washington’s standoff between a Democratic coalition that relies on overwhelming support from minorities and a GOP coalition almost entirely dependent on the votes of whites, especially older ones.

Both developments tell the same challenging story: Even as America experiences its most profound demographic change in more than a century, our society is increasingly fracturing along overlapping racial, generational and partisan lines. The diversity remaking America could be a source of rejuvenation and innovation, but today it is reinforcing our partisan polarization. The Martin case and the Washington stalemate capture the escalating collision of perspectives and priorities between a growing, mostly younger minority community and an aging white population — what I’ve called the brown and the gray.

The Martin case frames these tensions most obviously. The courtroom drama provided a dispiriting bookend to the 1995 O.J. Simpson murder trial. In that case, most whites concluded that racial solidarity led a predominantly black jury to acquit the African-American football legend of the murder of his white ex-wife and her friend, despite powerful evidence of his guilt. This time, polls show an overwhelming majority of African Americans believe a predominantly white jury unfairly acquitted George Zimmerman even though no one disputes that he shot an unarmed black teenager. With each verdict, huge numbers of Americans concluded that racial identity trumped justice.

Large social judgments always shoehorn uneasily into specific

criminal cases, and evidence on the most basic questions in the Zimmerman-Martin confrontation were elusive enough that the jury’s verdict is understandable. Moreover, race didn’t figure as directly into the Zimmerman trial as it did in Simpson’s. But the Zimmerman verdict demonstrated a durable racial divide in attitudes about law enforcement.

Washington Post/ABC and Pew Research Center polls each found that whites, by a substantial margin, thought the Zimmerman verdict was fair, while nearly nine in 10 African Americans and about three in five Latinos considered it unfair. More broadly, in the Post/ABC poll, 86% of African Americans and 60% of Latinos thought the justice system discriminates against minorities, while only 41% of whites agreed.

Those responses tracked the long-standing trend in which minorities are more likely than whites to see lingering prejudice in many settings. Hardly anyone denies that America has dismantled many racial barriers. In a 2012 National Journal poll, solid majorities of African Americans and Latinos said they had more friends of other races than their parents did. On key measures, such as life expectancy and graduation rates, racial gaps have narrowed meaningfully.

And yet, as the liberal Center for American Progress noted in “All-In Nation,” a book on America’s demographic transformation, huge racial divergences endure on other fronts, including family wealth, employment, incarceration rates and access to elite colleges. As stubborn as these disparities is the divide over how to alleviate them. Reaction to the recent Supreme Court decision on the University of Texas’ admissions system reaffirmed the conflict between whites and minorities over affirmative-action programs. The center’s report reflects a generational shift in liberal thinking by downplaying such programs in favor of race-neutral initiatives, such as uni-

versal preschool, intended to expand opportunities for all lower-income Americans. Yet that program, like President Obama’s agenda, still requires an activist role for Washington.

That question of Washington’s proper role now represents the most important racial divide in American life. Minorities preponderantly support government investment in education, training and healthcare, which they consider essential for upward mobility. Most whites, particularly blue-collar and older whites, now resist spending on almost anything except Social Security and Medicare.

This clash rings through the collision between Obama (who won twice behind a coalition of nonwhites and the minority of whites generally open to activist government) and House Republicans (four-fifths of whom represent districts more white than the national average). In their unwavering opposition to Obama on most issues, House Republicans are systematically blockading the priorities of the diverse (and growing) majority coalition that reelected him. Without more persuasive alternatives, Republicans risk convincing these emerging communities that their implacable opposition represents a “stand-your-ground” white resistance to minorities’ rise. In the meantime, a rapidly diversifying America risks a future of hardening disparities and enmities if it cannot forge more trans-racial consensus in the courts — or in Congress.

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For the record

Barbie: A July 21 Op-Ed referred to Mattel’s Barbie doll as a “7-inch plastic girl.” The doll is 11½ inches.