

From: Breuer, Lanny A.
To: Raman, Mythili; Sweeney, Laura (SMO); Weinstein, Jason
Sent: 3/17/2011 2:21:57 PM
Subject: Re: FYI- Fast and Furious

DP

From: Raman, Mythili
To: Breuer, Lanny A.; Sweeney, Laura (SMO); Weinstein, Jason
Sent: Thu Mar 17 05:33:28 2011
Subject: Re: FYI- Fast and Furious

DP

From: Breuer, Lanny A.
To: Sweeney, Laura (SMO); Raman, Mythili
Sent: Thu Mar 17 04:11:13 2011
Subject: Fw: FYI- Fast and Furious

DP

From: Burke, Dennis (USAAZ) <Dennis.Burke@usdoj.gov>
To: Monaco, Lisa (ODAG) (SMO); SGoldberg@usa.doj.gov <SGoldberg@usa.doj.gov>; Breuer, Lanny A.; Weinstein, Jason
Sent: Wed Mar 16 13:38:55 2011
Subject: Fw: FYI- Fast and Furious

DP

From: Sherwood, Robert (USAAZ) [Contractor]
Sent: Wednesday, March 16, 2011 12:44 PM
To: Burke, Dennis (USAAZ)
Subject: FW: FYI- Fast and Furious

DP

From: Ramey, Jenna (USAAZ) [Contractor]
Sent: Wednesday, March 16, 2011 9:39 AM
To: Hernandez, Rachel (USAAZ); Morrissey, Mike (USAAZ); Cunningham, Patrick (USAAZ); Sherwood, Robert (USAAZ) [Contractor]
Subject: FYI- Fast and Furious

ATF allegations, anger spread through Mexico

Excerpt:

Violence and fear have spread rapidly throughout Mexico since 2008, when President Felipe Calderon declared war on drug cartels. And many Mexicans believe the new violence has been aggravated by a flow of weapons from the United States to Mexico.

Against this backdrop, revelations from a recent Center for Public Integrity investigation have sparked furious reaction from politicians and even the Catholic Church in Mexico. Earlier this month the Center reported that agents of the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms permitted suspected straw buyers to obtain weapons in the U.S. without preventing the guns from being trafficked south of the border, as part of an operation called “Fast and Furious.”

Mexican government officials insist they were unaware of the operation’s reach into Mexico. The nation’s leading prosecutor has launched an internal fact-finding investigation amid calls by Mexican regulators for a thorough probe.

“We didn’t get to know, and we could never have known, and we would have never approved an operation that entailed any sorts of arms trade, or a controlled traffic of weapons from the US into Mexico,” said Jorge Alberto Lara, Mexico’s Deputy Attorney General, in a statement late last week. According to Lara, Mexico’s Attorney General’s Office, known by its Spanish acronym, PGR, was informed of an operation in January that detained 20 people involved with arms smuggling in the Phoenix area.. But Lara said his agency did not know that operation was part of a larger scheme that allowed guns to “walk” into Mexico.

That announcement roughly coincided with a weekend statement from the U.S. embassy in Mexico City, which said Mexican law enforcement had indeed been briefed on ATF operations on the U.S. side of the border.

“There is no contradiction between the statement of the Mexican government and the information provided by the United States concerning an operation that dismantled a major arms trafficking ring that has been called Fast and Furious. The operation took place on U.S. territory and arrested 20 defendants on January 25, 2011,” the statement says. “After the arrests ... reports emerged alleging that the operation could have entailed a transfer of arms from the United States to Mexico. Attorney General Holder has called for an investigation. He has stated unequivocally that such actions, if true, ‘would not be acceptable.’ He affirmed that he ‘made that clear to attorneys and agents in charge of ATF.’

“The alleged transfer of arms to Mexican territory at this point is exactly that — an allegation,” says the statement, which is listed as a “clarification” on the embassy’s website.

But that statement has not calmed the political waters in Mexico. Calderon’s political opponents have criticized what they say is his lukewarm response to the “Fast and Furious” revelations.

On Tuesday, Mexican Green Party federal legislator Pablo Escudero presented a formal accusation to the PGR, which in the Mexican political system would oblige the government to begin a criminal investigation of the operation.

Meanwhile, leaders of the nation's principal political parties are demanding the removal of Carlos Pascual, the US ambassador to Mexico. The Mexican Senate and Chamber of Deputies have called high-ranking government officials to testify about the "Fast and Furious" operation and its consequences.

Even the Catholic Church in Mexico reacted harshly, slamming the U.S. government in the Sunday newsletter of the Mexico City Archdiocese.

"Some U.S. officials' cynicism has no limits," church officials wrote, calling it hypocritical that the United States works hard to stop the flow of immigrants going north, while it does nothing to stop the lethal flow of weapons into Mexico.

According to ATF agent John Dodson, who spoke with the Center for Public Integrity, the agency knew some of the guns would cross the border and could find their way into the hands of drug traffickers in Mexico. Higher-level agency officials told the Center they felt it was necessary to let the guns move in order to make a bigger case against cartel operatives, rather than low-level straw buyers.

Two assault rifles the ATF was said to be tracking were later found at the scene of shooting, in Arizona, that claimed the life of US Border Patrol Agent Brian A. Terry.

In Mexico the operation is now seen as a violation of national sovereignty.

Many have also expressed outrage that the U.S. government might have helped jeopardize the lives of people in Mexico. Since 2008, Mexican government statistics say 35,000 people have been killed in the country's war on drugs; many were innocent civilians caught in the middle of gunfire.

"Instead of restricting violence, (operations such as these) generate even more of it," said anti-drug war activist Isabel Miranda de Wallace in an interview Monday. "We believe the American government hasn't done its share in the control of arms trade."

Miranda de Wallace's son was a kidnap victim in 2005, and last year she discovered he was subsequently murdered.

"The Americans seemed really upset when one of their agents died here," she said. "But it appears that all of the Mexican lives lost in this don't add up to the same value for them."

Nationalistic rants have been aired in recent days. Former Mexican Foreign Minister and current Senator Rosario Green wrote in an editorial that this is not the first time the U.S. has acted behind the back of the Mexican government; she referenced episodes in the late 90s, such as "Casablanca," an anti-money laundering operation.

"This can be one of many operations we have no clue of," said Mexican federal legislator Esthela Damián, a day after she filed a proposal to ask top officials to testify on the matter. "This is an opportunity for lawmakers and the Executive branch to get to know details on the scope and impacts of operation ... Sure, there must be secret information, but it mustn't be held from the Congress."

Other analysts said they believe this episode will have long-lasting repercussions, affecting binational cooperation in the struggle against well-financed and highly organized criminal organizations.

"This gives the anti-Americans and the radical nationalistic politicians' strong arguments to oppose further cooperation," said Mexican national security expert Raúl Benítez. "This case strengthens the belief that Americans put up the weapons and Mexicans put up the dead."

Drug war analysts said it has taken years and hard work to build trust among Mexican and American officials in several agencies with stakes in the fight against the cartels. In recent years thousands of Mexican marines, soldiers, agents and forensic workers have been trained by U.S. experts.

"We saw what happened in in the Gulf of Mexico last year — U.S. and Mexican Marines training together — as the beginning of collaboration," said José Maria Ramos, a researcher at the Colegio de la Frontera Norte, in the border city of Tijuana. Last year there were even key arrests made of drug barons in operations that used U.S. intelligence.

Security expert Raúl Benítez believes the controversy over the Fast and Furious operation may become a major setback for the heart of the combined U.S. -Mexico response to drug traffickers, the Merida Initiative, which has had the executive branches of each country working together.

“The cooperation will change and become an agency-by-agency model. And it could deteriorate more ... There could be two years of nationalistic reaction here, especially during the upcoming (presidential) elections. This could fuel the nationalists here who question the need for Mexico to collaborate with the United States on this.”

Damian, the leftist congresswoman, is pursuing a more reconciliatory approach.

“I’m not betting on unnecessary friction or the rupture of our relationship. We cannot allow abuse and this was an abuse. But we must acknowledge that organized crime is growing disproportionately on both sides of the border,” she said. “We must not close our eyes to this ... and high-level confrontation won’t do either country any good. The winners will be the drug cartels.”

Alejandra Xanic von Bertrab is a freelance investigative reporter based in Mexico City, and a frequent contributor to the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists.