



U.S. Department of Justice

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco,  
Firearms and Explosives

*Assistant Director*

Washington, DC 20226

SEP 8 2010

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MEMORANDUM TO: All Assistant Directors  
All Field Operations Personnel

FROM: Assistant Director  
(Field Operations)

SUBJECT: Project Gunrunner – A Cartel Focused Strategy

This serves to inform you that the Office of Field Operations, in partnership with other directorates, including the Office of Strategic Intelligence and Information (OSII), has developed the attached document, *Project Gunrunner – A Cartel Focused Strategy (September 2010)*, to reflect our increased national emphasis on firearms trafficking enforcement related to the Southwest Border, as well as the importance of identifying and prioritizing those trafficking investigations in which a nexus to Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) and cartels may be established.

ATF has a long and successful history of combating firearms-related violent crime. Key to this success has been our ability to effectively regulate the firearms industry and identify and investigate the illegal diversion of firearms from lawful commerce. Perhaps at no time in our history has the investigation of firearms trafficking schemes and networks been more important to public safety, and increasingly to national security, than now.

In response to the increased trafficking of firearms from the United States to Mexico, ATF developed Project Gunrunner, a firearms trafficking and border violence reduction strategy designed to deny drug trafficking organizations access to U.S. firearms. Initially implemented in our four primary Southwest border field divisions, Project Gunrunner has evolved into a national strategy as we have seen Mexican cartels reach further into the interior of the United States to acquire firearms in support of their lucrative drug trafficking operations.

While our multi-faceted strategy continues to include the inspection of licensed gun dealers and the investigation of straw purchasers and illegal traffickers, our revised approach places greater emphasis on investigations that target specific cartels and the persons responsible for organizing and directing firearms trafficking operations in the United States. We have come to understand that we can best impact firearms trafficking to Mexico and Southwest border violence by linking our investigations to drug trafficking organizations and when possible, to specific Mexican

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cartels. Our efforts will also be enhanced through increased coordination with our Federal counterparts.

This approach requires conducting our border-related firearms and explosives investigations in a more creative and comprehensive manner by fully incorporating our agency's unique regulatory, investigative, and analytical capabilities and resources, as well as those available from other law enforcement agencies, particularly DEA. At the heart of our increased emphasis on cartel focused investigations is greater use of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) program and intelligence capabilities available from the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC) and the DEA Special Operations Division. Recent changes to OCDETF policy encourage the use of OCDETF in firearms trafficking cases provided there is a nexus to high value drug trafficking targets.

Properly implemented, this revised strategy will improve data collection, analysis, and exploitation of information; employ a greater array of investigative resources, including greater utilization of the OCDETF program; improve sharing and leveraging of information available from other law enforcement agencies; improve investigative coordination and information sharing with the Government of Mexico; and place greater emphasis on multi-defendant conspiratorial cases that focus on persons who organize, direct, and finance cartel-related firearms and explosives trafficking operations.

This revised strategy acknowledges and incorporates an investigative approach already implemented by several ATF field divisions and reiterates the primary responsibility of the field special agents in charge for implementation of the strategy. This document recognizes that Project Gunrunner is both an ATF strategy and a component of a larger U.S. Government counternarcotics strategy. Our success is contingent on the effective use of our regulatory, investigative, technical, intelligence, training, liaison, and public/industry outreach capabilities. However, the success of Gunrunner is also dependent on our ability to secure prosecution and sentences appropriate to the criminal conduct. Recognizing the nuances of current Federal firearms statutes and related sentencing guidelines, it is imperative that comprehensive, complex criminal investigations that link firearms trafficking organizations to drug trafficking activities and organizations be conducted in order to leverage the prosecutorial advantages afforded by a wider array of criminal and civil statutes.

Effective strategies set clear goals and performance measures. The ATF 2010-2016 Strategic Plan lists Interdiction and Prevention of Firearms Trafficking and the Advancement of Firearms Trafficking Intelligence Capabilities as Strategic Goals in our efforts to reduce the risk to public safety caused by firearms trafficking. Several performance indicators are also listed as a means of measuring our performance toward achieving our strategic goals. While performance indicators reflect a level of ATF efficiency and effectiveness, our overall value as a law enforcement agency will be reflected by our ability to reduce the frequency of gun

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trafficking to Mexico by disrupting and dismantling the firearms trafficking organizations that provide firearms to targeted drug trafficking organizations.

Vital to our ability to track and report our progress is the timely and accurate reporting of information in our case management system (e.g., N-Force and N-Spect). The Cartel Strategy document and the attachments to this memorandum provide guidance on coding investigative activity in N-Force and N-Spect. Recent enhancements to N-Force allow us to document investigations involving Mexican cartels in the same manner as U.S. street gangs and outlaw motorcycle organizations. All special agents and industry operations investigators, but particularly those currently involved in Southwest border firearms trafficking and cartel related investigations and inspections, should be familiar with these procedures.

In addition, all special agents are encouraged to identify Southwest border firearms trafficking suspects in TECS, including case agent contact information, in order to gain intelligence information concerning border crossings, etc.

As a reminder, the June 25, 2009 memorandum entitled, "National Firearms Trafficking Enforcement Implementation Plan," pages 4 and 5, provided guidance and requirements regarding the proper documentation and supervisory review of all firearms trafficking investigations in N-Force. Field division management must ensure that these requirements are met on a continuing basis.

Please review the *Project Gunrunner - A Cartel Focused Strategy* document to ensure complete understanding of our revised priorities. Please address any questions about this material to the attention of [ATF], ATF's Southwest Border National Coordinator at (202) 648-7162 or [ATF] Chief, Firearms Operations Division at (202) 648-[ATF]



Mark R. Chait

Attachments

## N-FORCE AND N-SPECT: CODING SOUTHWEST BORDER ACTIVITIES

In N-Force, in addition to any other appropriate profiles:

- Select the program code most appropriate to the case.
- Users must select the “Project Gunrunner (SWB-Southwest Border Project)” profile on the Investigative Profile Section in the Violent Crime / Investigative Profile tab in the General Case Information Folder. This case level profile should be used by all field offices where a link to the southwest border has been established.
- If the case has established a nexus to a Mexican Drug Cartel, the appropriate cartel should be selected in the Violent Crime section.
  - Cartel Related-Gulf Cartel
  - Cartel Related-Los Zetas
  - Cartel Related-Sinaloa Cartel
  - Cartel Related-La Familia Michoacana (La Familia)
  - Cartel Related-Juarez Cartel (  )
  - Cartel Related-Tijuana Cartel (Arellano Felix Organization)
  - Cartel Related-Beltran Leyva Organization
- If the case has a nexus to criminal activity in furtherance of a U.S. based street gang or drug activity, the “Gang Related” and/or “Drug Related” profiles should be selected in the Violent Crime Section on the same tab.
- If the case involves firearms trafficking to a cartel, “To Mexican Cartel” should be selected on the Firearms Tab in the Firearms Trafficking Section. Accurate reporting on source and target state and country is essential. As a reminder, the estimated number of firearms believed trafficked should be supported by facts uncovered in the investigation.
- If the case involves explosive trafficking to a cartel, “Explosives: Traffic to Mexican Cartel” should be selected on the Arson/Explosive Tab/Section. Accurate reporting on source and target state and country is essential.
- If specific information linking a suspect or defendant to a cartel is established, the cartel affiliation should be reported on the Charges tab in the Suspects / Defendants section in the Affiliation Field.

In N-Spect:

- Select the program Code most appropriate to the inspection.
- Select the appropriate Tier 3 value when establishing the assignment:
  - Southwest Border DE Non VCIT
  - Southwest Border DE VCIT
  - Southwest Border VCIT Recall Full
  - Southwest Border Non VCIT Recall Full
  - Southwest Border Full Recall
  - Southwest Border Assist CE
  - Southwest Border (Gunrunner Team)