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An ever-expanding business

While the U.S. protects the southern border, the smugglers opened new routes by land and by sea

Claudia Núñez / Special Envoy | 2011-05-26 | La Opinión

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Last part of the series

ARIZONA. - Lone Wolf, a shop in the middle of a quiet shopping center, next to a tobacco shop, a place for pets and small restaurants in Arizona, about 800 rifles sold to the Sinaloa cartel, even Barretta .50 caliber weapons, guns more powerful than a citizen of this country can legally purchase and able to pass a car and a bulletproof vest.

The weaponry is so powerful and lucrative side and Mexican territory, where he arrived after crossing one of the most guarded borders in the world.

But while U.S. authorities on the one hand protect the dividing line between Mexico and the United States, traffickers opened other paths, and even now cross the seas to make it to their destinations, a deeply disturbing situation for the authorities concerned

This has opened new routes through the Gulf of Mexico. These range from Florida, New Orleans or Texas to a country in Central America to begin their journey by land to Mexico.

"Traditionally there are five routes across the border (land), but a market coming out of Florida to Guatemala (via Maritime Shipping) is showing more activity," said Eric Olson, an expert in security of the Mexico Institute and coauthor of a recent analysis arms trafficking to Mexico to Woodrow Wilson Center.

"The reality is that the containers or goods leaving the country does not review because the U.S. does not care what comes out of their country, they care about what goes in," says Olson.

The National Coast Guard has warned Congress that beyond occasional seizures remains unknown the entire arms and drug smuggling by sea routes and the identification of consignments will be increasingly difficult as the volume of maritime traffic trade will triple by 2020.

Alongside the new arms shipments reaching Mexican ports on the black market also moved thousands of weapons that the U.S. left Vietnam in the 1970 and smuggled to the insurgencies in Nicaragua, El Salvador and other countries Central in the 80's.

Despite the threat of new routes through the Gulf, the desert border between Mexico and the United States remains the main route for arms trafficking between the two countries.

However, the confiscation of weapons in vehicles traveling southbound are daunting.

In 2009 only 155 weapons were seized along the entire frontera. Mientras in 2010, the sum only up to 310. In contrast, in 2009 was achieved 26.411 rounds of ammunition confiscated before they crossed the border and other 83.938 bales last year. In those two years the dollar amount seized by authorities at the border was more than \$ 62 million.

Agents led by Rosa Hernández, director of the Bureau of Customs and the Frontea (CBP), at the port of Otay Mesa, California, inspected one to one hundred trucks on their way to Mexico.

"We look for weapons, looking for money. It is rare to find weapons, but a lot of money," says Hernandez.

"When that money goes to Mexico out more drugs, more violence leaves and we want to stop that."

The fact that the confiscation of weapons in the border is at least not necessarily indicate that they are not coming to Mexico or other Central and South America. Specialists in the traffic of weapons on both sides of the border agree that more than 2,000 weapons enter Mexico illegally each day.

"For every high-powered weapons seized and five others crossed the border," said Thomas Mangan, an agent of the Bureau of Liquor Control, Snuff, Firearms and Explosives (ATF).

Court records detailing the legal proceedings against 21 gun traffickers cells operating in Texas and Arizona, reveal that between 2006 and 2009 reached more than 70,000 smuggle arms into Mexico.

The U.S. side considers that the responsibility to curb the inflow of weapons into Mexico for the authorities of that country, and it explains, for example Gilberto Otero, a prosecutor from the Imperial Valley, an area where is located the main route cocaine from Mexico into the United States.

"We do not have the resources to stop weapons going to Mexico," said Otero.

But in Mexico the problem is viewed from another angle and point the finger at its neighbor to the north because, says the governor of Baja California, José Guadalupe Osuna Milián "these weapons are the result of the drugs that Americans consume."

Meanwhile in Mexico, customs inspectors review only 10 of every 100 people who pass through the checkpoints and seize between 100 to 120 guns a year, admits the holder of the Tax Administration Service (SAT), Alfredo Gutiérrez Ortiz Mena.

The smugglers move weapons hidden in their vehicles or in their clothing, drawing 88 million border crossings each year are performed on the porous border.

A recent United Nations report states that all guns used by Mexican cartels buy a 48,000 in armories that exist in the U.S., especially in the state of Arizona and Texas.

Legally, only one store in Mexico by the Secretariat of National Defense (SEDENA) can sell guns and rifles for shooting and hunting in the country, however applicants must go through a purchasing process that lasts several weeks and unless the buyer is a member of a shooting club, authorizing the sale of a rifle. The sale of ammunition is also regulated.

According to the latest figures, more than 2 million Mexicans legally registered weapon and another 15 million illegal weapons in the hands of organized crime, as private security firm Group Multisystem Industrial Security (MGUS).

In May 2010, for example, the Mexican government reported that of the 75,000 firearms seized in the past three years, about 80% came from the United States.

In the United States only five states have waiting periods between purchases of long guns. Arizona, which borders Mexico is not on the list. Both factors have made the Sunshine State the arms bazaar for posters. Robbie Sherwood, spokesman for the prosecutor's state of Arizona, says that the vast majority of guns seized in crimes across the border from a small number of retailers, including, Lone Wolf.

Andre Howard, owner of Lone Wolf, declined to be interviewed. Some employees mentioned in an anonymous way that all transactions were legal.

"The terrorists, illegal immigrants and violence coming from the south and it is true, we know that arms and money flow into Mexico, but I want to clarify one thing, not all weapons from the United States come from everywhere," said Governor of Arizona, Jan Brewer, who does not accept that their condition is a major supplier of arms to the south of the border.

Advocates of gun control say that Arizona buyers can take dozens of rifles, even hundreds, no problem. Known as "goat horn", the AK-47 semiautomatic rifles and AR-15 rifles and Barrett 50 powerful are the weapons most wanted drug traffickers in their reach and their ability to shoot dozens of ammunition per minute.

"In addition to his power, are very easy to get, you can buy at any store," said Jose Acosta, narcotics officer in the city of Calexico.

The sellers do not commit a wrongful act to allow tens of rifles sold to one person and this is something they know and take advantage of the criminals, says Helen Dunkel, ATF spokeswoman in San Francisco.

Weapons are handed out to the traffickers usually because people with no criminal record that in exchange for \$ 150 fill federal forms to purchase weapons, but to declare that they are lying to them. The act is a federal offense and is called "Straw purchase".

Recruiters working for the cartels train their buyers about how to behave, what to say if they ask why they are buying so many weapons. In many cases, young women who process the purchase of up to 17 rifles in one day.

"It is logical that there is something suspicious about the purchase, why a girl would need so many heavy weapons?" Explains Dunkel.

The AK-47 semiautomatic rifles, that store shelves are labeled as the Lone Wolf of 600 priced at \$ 550, once in Mexico can cost four times as much.

The lucrative business of smuggling weapons is reaching also the political and security of the United States, are teaming with Mexican drug traffickers.

For example, the anti-drug agent Francisco Javier Reyes, a member of the Police of Oklahoma, was arrested and convicted for having trafficked to Mexico 40 assault rifles, among these three dozen AK-47, five rifles KS and three 50 mm gauge during March and July 2010.

Also in Columbus, a town of barely 1,500 inhabitants at the edge of New Mexico, which borders the small town of Palomas, Chihuahua, took national notoriety when on March 11, several officials, including the mayor himself, Eddie Evans and Police Chief Angelo Vega, were accused of serving the Mexican drug cartels.

According to the indictment, those involved gained about 200 firearms including AK-47 rifles and 9mm semiautomatic to sell to gang members The Azteca, which operate in Texas and supposedly working for the cartels in Mexico.

Some of the alleged assault rifles smuggled by the network of Columbus were seized in violent crimes in Ciudad Juárez. It is believed that three of the guns used by the gang The Aztecs, accused of killing a U.S consular agent in March, came from shipments sold by these officials.

Also, last November 29, 1918 bodies were found distributed in 11 mass graves in the "El Capricho", located eight miles south of Puerto Paloma.

Martha Skinner, a former mayor of Columbus does not explain how the U.S. intends to be helping to fight violence across the border and at the same time arming the people of that country.

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