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ATF/DOJ Scandal Goes to Highest Levels of U.S. Government

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Around 11 p.m. on December 14, 2010, U.S. Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry was shot and mortally wounded near Peck Canyon, Rio Rico, north of Nogales in Santa Cruz County, Arizona, approximately 10 miles north of the U.S./Mexican border. Agent Terry, age 40, a Marine Corps veteran, died shortly afterward. Four suspects were taken into custody, including one who was shot and transported to the hospital (www.foxnews.com/us/2011/02/22/agent-brian-terry-policy-silence/).

Two months after the murder, the U.S. Attorney's office in Phoenix announced that three of the four would be deported to Mexico after pleading guilty to charges of illegal entry. Despite the fact they were arrested at the scene, it was announced that no evidence tied the three to the shooting of Agent Terry. This is inexplicable. At best, these men were material witnesses, and at worst, they were complicit in the murder of Agent Terry. Because these Mexican citizens had potential knowledge as material witnesses in the case, it would seem prudent to keep them in protective custody and made available for questioning. Why the rush to deport them?

Other disturbing details surrounding Brian Terry's death began to appear on CleanUpATF.org, a whistle-blower website dedicated to "returning the integrity, accountability, and decency to the ATF." Two Second Amendment advocates, David Codrea, a writer at NationalGunRightsExaminer.com, and Mike Vanderboegh of the *Sipsey Street Irregulars* blog became aware of the posts, and they began to draw on their own sources within the ATF to confirm allegations that were being made.

The original purpose of the ATF "Gunrunner" operation was (ostensibly) to "monitor illicit gun sales in the southwest," in order to "track down the smuggling rings delivering guns to the drug cartels." However, some of the rank and file of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (BATFE), often referred to as the ATF, grew concerned that a perverse deviation in operation Gunrunner probably had resulted in the death of Agent Terry.

The source of the gun used to kill Agent Brian Terry was traced, not to Mexico, but to a gun store in Phoenix that was cooperating with a federal investigation into arms trafficking.

Codrea and Vanderboegh independently corroborated the existence of a deviation from Project Gunrunner, which had by then come to be referred to as "Project Gunwalker." Sources told them of the unstated policy to provide assault weapons to straw buyers, who would "walk" the guns over the border and sell them to members of the Mexican drug cartels – for the purpose of manufacturing "evidence."

Evidence of What?

For the answer, we need to go back a little over two years. In early 2009, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder had suggested to reporters that a flood of guns was moving south to Mexico, and that U.S. gun shops were the source of these guns. Holder stated that was the reason the administration was considering renewal of the ban on so-called "assault weapons."

Hints of a Massive Scandal

Fast forward two years. It was on February 4, 2011, that Mr. Vanderboegh strongly implied that Assistant Attorney General Lanny Breuer was heavily involved in unlawful activity at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (BATFE).

Rumors began to circulate within the ATF that the Phoenix office had botched Project Gunrunner, and that the death of Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry was an unintended but foreseeable consequence of poor planning and sloppy management. Both street agents and responsible supervisors within the agency had tried to prevent such an outcome but were overruled by higher management.

Two semi-automatic Kalashnikov pattern rifles were also found at the scene of Terry's death. When traced, they were found to have been purchased from an American gun shop cooperating with the Phoenix office of ATF in an investigation known as Project Gunrunner. These weapons had been traced by the ATF at least once before, and the agency had extensive knowledge of the person who bought them.

Whistleblowers and Two Senators

Thanks to the new media [as opposed to the liberal, controlled, “establishment media”] that delved into this after being contacted by whistleblowers at the ATF, the unlawful Gunwalker operation eventually came to the attention of U.S. Senators Jeff Sessions of Alabama and Charles Grassley of Iowa. The Senators then got in touch with the whistleblowers so they could be afforded some protection from the threats of their managers at ATF, and so the truth of the circumstances of the death of Brian Terry could be revealed.

There are now five separate but connected accusations leveled by current or former employees of the ATF against ATF and DOJ officials in what has been dubbed “Project Gunwalker”:

1. That they instructed U.S. gun dealers to proceed with questionable and illegal sales of firearms to suspected gunrunners.
2. That they allowed or even assisted in those guns crossing the U.S. border into Mexico to “boost the numbers” of American civilian market firearms seized in Mexico and thereby provide the justification for more firearm restrictions on American citizens and more power and money for ATF.
3. That they intentionally kept Mexican authorities in the dark about the operation, even over objections of their own agents.
4. That weapons the ATF let “walk” to Mexico were involved in the deaths of Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry and ICE agent Jaime Zapata, as well as hundreds of Mexican citizens.
5. That at least since the death of Brian Terry on 14 December, the Obama administration has been engaged in a full-press cover-up of the facts behind what has come to be known as the “Gunwalker Scandal.”

The alleged cover-up has included threats to currently-serving ATF agents who have personal knowledge of the case.

Grassley Calls for Hearings

Republican Senator Charles Grassley, ranking member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, began demanding answers from the ATF as early as late January, 2011, but his inquiries were blown off by agency superiors and by officials as high up as Attorney General Eric Holder.

Given the likelihood that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid would continue to drag his feet in order to protect Attorney General Eric Holder, Gun Owners of America (GOA) called for both the Judiciary Committee and the Committee on Oversight and Reform in the U.S. House of Representatives to initiate hearings into Project Gunrunner. It was for the purpose of informing members of Congress who would conduct these hearings that GOA compiled its in-depth report on the ATF’s Gunrunner Project (see article *Panetta’s War on Reagan’s Defense Policies*).

“New Media”

On the May 4 edition of *News & Views*, a daily talk radio show broadcast from Memphis, Tennessee, on the IRN/USA News network, Host Chuck Bates and John Russell, Senior National Correspondent for IRN/USA News, discussed the Gunrunner project, which they have been following since Codrea and Vanderboegh began releasing information they were getting from whistleblowers in the ATF.

Bates noted that the intent of “Gunrunner” is to make a case that our Second Amendment rights are a danger to the rest of the world.

Russell cited an alleged “River of Iron” that the government has claimed runs from the U.S. down into Mexico, and that it fuels drug cartel violence. But Russell noted that actual gun traffic out of the U.S. commercial gun market that makes its way to Mexico could more accurately be characterized as a “leak.” He referred to leaked State Department cables that identified the real sources of weaponry being used by the drug cartels:

“According to State Department cables, the Mexican drug cartels are getting their weaponry from an international operation, with the cartels getting military weapons through various government channels. Some of those weapons did, in fact, come from the United States, but they weren’t the result of the ‘gun show loophole’ straw-man purchases or any of the other individual criminal acts anti-gun groups would have you believe.

“Large quantities of those U.S. weapons – everything from rifles to machine guns, grenade launchers, explosives and ammunition – came from purchases by the government of Mexico from the United States. As the underpaid, undermanned and undermined soldiers of the Mexican army skipped out on the military to put their training to work for the cartels, they took their issued-arms with them.

“Others come from weapon buys from guerilla groups located in South and Central America that are then smuggled into the country.

“No specific numbers on how many of those guns ‘recovered in Mexico and traced back to the United States’ were, in fact, military purchases; but the State Department cables indicate a portion of the fewer than 12 percent of the traceable weapons actually came from the United States in gun shop/individual type purchases. Remember, that’s not 12 percent of the tens of thousands of weapons recovered – it’s only 12 percent of the weapons recovered that were traceable. It’s nowhere near the 12 percent figure that has been misquoted and used as evidence of the United States’ ‘horrific’ problem of illegal gun sales.”ⁱ

Bottom Line: The (unstated) objective of “Gunrunner” has been to move thousands of guns with American serial numbers into Mexico. This would allow anti-gunners in the federal government to bolster their spurious argument that greedy American gun sellers are flooding Mexico with guns. In effect, Russell said, the aim of the Gunrunner project is to “frame the American

people” by attributing the carnage in Mexico and along the U.S./Mexican border to gun manufacturers, gun shops, and gun owners in the U.S.

Information coming out of the House hearings on “Gunrunner” (hearings began early in May) are corroborating reports of DOJ involvement that were published in February by new media organizations such as *National Gun Rights Examiner* and the *Sipsey Street Irregulars* blog.

Radical anti-gunners at the highest levels of our federal government will stop at nothing in their campaign to abolish gun ownership entirely. President Obama has been an advocate of draconian gun controls since his days as a Senator; and many gun owners who cherish their Second Amendment rights fear that if he is re-elected, those rights would be seriously jeopardized, if not obliterated.

Post-Note: At this writing, it has come to light that \$10 million of “stimulus” money was used to promote the “gunrunner” program, which seems to undermine Eric Holder’s lame protests in the Issa hearings in the House that he knew about the program only in the very recent past. Other revelations will continue to surface as hearings continue.

ⁱ www.liveleak.com, “Finally, WikiLeaks exposes true origins of Mexican cartels’ weaponry . . .” article by Jim Shepherd, 02/24/2011.