**From Seller to Smuggler: Tracing Guns Across the U.S.-Mexico Border**

In city tech there is a no-gun policy, a university in Texas allows students to carry handguns on campus, and with Texas open gun laws gun smuggling to Mexico became an issue.

In March, as reported by Mexican authorities, a staggering 3,600 recorded homicides took place, marking it as one of the most violent months in recent memory. Yes, you read that correctly - 3,600 human lives were lost in just one month. This alarming statistic raises a pressing question: is Mexico in war? The answer, unfortunately, is a 'yes' - it's the War on Drugs. While various actors partake in these tragic events, the primary culprits are the Mexican drug cartels. Across the nation, states are either under the control of a single group or in territorial conflicts.

Regrettably, Mexican authorities find themselves severely underpowered in their battle against organized crime, facing significant limitations in resources and power. This power is imbalanced by the fact that both the government and the cartels have access to high-powered firearms, whether obtained through legal or illegal means. Shockingly, a substantial portion of these firearms originate from the United States, with the military procuring guns directly from manufacturers. In contrast, the cartels employ a different tactic: smuggling guns across the border.

This complex issue demands careful consideration of various factors, including the methods employed in smuggling, the procurement process, the role of straw purchases, the contribution of the U.S. in fueling criminal activities, and the practices of manufacturers. In addition, there is the pressing matter of how both government authorities approach this multifaceted challenge. Consequently, corruption, loss of life, and public safety concern all of Mexico.

Cartels have spread every corner of Mexico, with various factions emerging from different regions. Primary examples include "The Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generacion," "The Cartel of Sinaloa," and "The Zetas." The primary calamity for the existence of these cartels is the illicit drug trade, which involves conflicts and fuels corruption. Because of the diverse network of transportation routes, disputes often escalate, placing innocent lives in jeopardy. These conflicts can lead to a range of tragic events, from attacks and kidnappings to casualties and executions.

Securing firearms is imperative for the Mexican cartels engaged in this violent struggle. This is where the United States plays a significant role. The simplest route for acquiring high-caliber weaponry is through the United States–Mexican border. A Vice News reporter experiences this and mentions "One of the reasons guns get smuggled to Mexico is because it’s easy." They go on to explain, "It’s virtually open if you go through the (nothing to declare lane), nobody stops, nobody asks you anything, perhaps a random inspection. If you were a smuggler trying to move things from north to south, all you have to do is put it in your car and head on over." Now we understand why this border is being exploited. The states with fewer firearm regulations are Arizona and Texas.

The acquisition of these weapons often involves what is known as 'Straw purchases.' This term refers to the act of buying firearms and then reselling them to individuals who do not have the legal right to possess them. This practice raises significant concerns. According to United States law, the Second Amendment protects the individual's right to own a firearm for lawful purposes, including self-defense within their own home, regardless of militia service. However, not everyone adheres to this law, leading to various issues. Moreover, firearm sales by companies do not always follow an adhocracy process; there is often a lack of background checks for buyers. Particularly in states along the USA-Mexico border, like Oklahoma, there may be no requirement to notify United States authorities. For instance, if a person were to purchase 40 AK-47 rifles outside of the 4 border states, there is no obligation to report this sale. This information comes from an agent from the ATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives).

Now let’s get to the smuggling of these illicit firearms. According to Stephen Stocks, one of the ways this is done is by. Whenever a cartel needs guns, they have phone calls, with accomplices who live across the U.S. They are paid to buy ammunition and firearms. They send them to couriers who then just drive them into Mexico directly to the hands of the cartel. As simple as that. Also, did you know that the cartels also buy firearms from eBay, and these are sent with no issue? The main problem here for the ATF is that they can’t trace person-to-person sales. So, if a straw purchaser were to sell a gun in a parking lot, there would be no way an ATF agent could find out. Providing a clear example, Timothy Wright III was apprehended for gun smuggling. Timothy was a Texas judge. Priscila Mosqueda provides details of this case. “The agency had been keeping tabs on Wright since at least September, when agents visited him, according to the indictment, though it's unclear whether that was the agency's first contact with Wright.” Continuing, “Wright had allegedly been smuggling guns to Mexico for about four months. But a few months after ATF agents visited him, he inexplicably began smuggling again, and the indictment suggests he didn't stop until the raid in March.” When retrieving the firearms from Timothy’s home there were 51 confiscated firearms, and his Ford–150 pickup truck was detained.

Continuing, it's worth considering that not all firearms in Mexico originate from the U.S. A significant percentage of guns recovered in Mexico can be traced back to the U.S. using serial numbers for identification. While other countries may contribute to the remaining percentage, our primary focus is on Mexico. Alejandro Celorio (Ministries of Foreign Affairs) points out, "Around 3% of military guns are found at crime scenes, while a staggering 70-90% are illicitly sourced from the U.S. No, Mexico." In contrast, there is only one authorized gun dealer in the entire country, and obtaining firearms is a highly regulated process overseen by the military, involving strict caliber limits. This procedure is considerably more bureaucratic than the DMV, as noted by a reporter from Vice News. Additionally, individuals are limited to owning just one firearm throughout their lifetime 50 caliber weapons used by cartels for warfare are not sourced from Mexico but rather from the U.S.

As a result of these illicit firearms wars, mayhem, threats, attacks, and death occur. Many innocent lives are taken from the cartel, ghost towns are more frequent due to fights over territories. Violent attacks and deaths are common in Mexico. Sicario are the cartel henchmen whose job is to show the immense power they possess. A clear example is when the Cartel took down a military helicopter with rocket-propelled grenades. “The Mexican military helicopter with 18 security personnel, including 11 soldiers, two federal police officers, and five crew members on board was taking part in an anti-cartel operation, Univision reported.” Continuing “The cartel members opened fire at the helicopter, striking its tail rotor, forcing it to make an emergency landing, Univision reported. Three security personnel were still unaccounted for after the attack, according to Reuters. It was believed that the Jalisco New Generation Gang, one of the most powerful drug cartels in Mexico was behind the attack, Reuters reported.” This was just one of multiple examples.

When Mexican authorities apprehended one of the leaders of the Sinaloa Cartel, it escalated into open warfare. Mexico's president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, felt compelled to release him for public safety reasons. In 2018, there were a staggering 30,000 recorded intentional murders, of which 20,500 involved firearms. Cartels have amassed such power that their videos showcase heavy weaponry, military attire, and armored vehicles. The extent of the situation leaves little room for effective intervention. As corruption prevails, the state's capacity to protect its citizens is severely constrained. Tragically, executions occur daily, tearing families apart, sometimes forever. A shocking event occurred in CDMX (Ciudad de Mexico) when dozens of CJNG cartel hitmen targeted the police chief in one of the richest neighborhoods. The ensuing gunfight claimed the lives of two bodyguards and an innocent bystander. Law enforcement seized 37 guns, including five .50 caliber weapons, used in the attempted assassination. All these firearms were traced back to the U.S. This serves as a stark example of what the ATF can achieve with the necessary backing.

In conclusion, the USA-Mexico borders have been in utter chaos, marked by violence due to the cartels in the war on drugs and the number of guns being smuggled for crime. It’s overwhelming seeing the number of lives taken from this never-ending war. Despite the Mexican authorities being there for the public, they are overpowered. We now know how the U.S. fuels the cartels with different forms of purchasing and ways to smuggle. Many lives are lost, assassination attempts are made, also military personnel are taken down by these firearms. While the ATF attempts to combat this issue, it is crucial for them to have more importance. The security and well-being of millions of people rely on tracing guns from guns across the U.S.-Mexico border.

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