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Gun Mayhem Along the Border

It is an open and deadly scandal that at least 70 percent of the weapons recovered in Mexico's bloody drug war originate in the United States, where shady gun buyers operate freely thanks to loopholes in American law. To its credit, the Obama administration has ordered the more than 8,000 dealers along the border to begin reporting multiple sales of AK-47s and other semiautomatic battlefield weapons to the federal firearms bureau.

Straw buyers have been easily purchasing thousands of fast-firing weapons on the American side to supply the cartels, which deal drugs back across the border. These guns have no legitimate place in civilian life and were banned outright for 10 years until Congress and two successive administrations failed to fight for the ban's renewal. In Mexico, semiautomatics have been at the heart of a five-year-long drug war in which more than 35,000 people have been slain.

The National Rifle Association, of course, is greeting the new regulation as an unconstitutional outrage against the right to bear arms. But the reporting of multiple sales of handguns is already required of dealers in all 50 states. Gathering information on a buyer of two or more semiautomatic rifles within five days is logical and overdue in the four border states. The rule, issued by the Justice Department, even provides that a report will be destroyed after two years if it produces no criminal cases.

Gun lobby sycophants in Congress are calling the regulation a smoke screen to distract attention from a gun-tracking operation botched by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Known straw buyers made purchases that were supposed to lead to the cartels' main brokers. But hundreds of guns disappeared into Mexico, and two turned up at the scene of a shootout where an American Border Patrol guard was killed. If anything, the ill-conceived operation, which deserves the fullest investigation, is a measure of the firearms bureau's frustration in dealing with porous American law.

The new regulation is one answer to the problem. Controls also are needed over sellers at gun shows who, unlike gun shops, are unregulated in peddling war weaponry. The Obama administration must pursue stronger gun controls as Congress plays lackey to the gun lobby.