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APRIL 14, 2009 EL PASO, TX

BEST team arrests 2 men who allegedly tried to smuggle guns into Mexico Mexican nationals were willing to pay \$2 million for cache of automatic weapons

El Paso, Texas - Two men were arrested April 11 by members of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement-led (ICE) Border Security Enforcement Task Force (BEST) after they tried to buy automatic weapons and ammunition to smuggle into Mexico.

In December 2008, the El Paso Police Department provided information to BEST team members that led to a joint investigation and resulted in the arrests. Las Cruces Police Department and the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' (ATF) Las Cruces office also participated in the case.

Osvaldo Tostado-Gonzalez, 31, and Gabriel Gonzalez-Gonzalez, 38, both of Guadalajara, Mexico, were arrested after they arrived in El Paso to negotiate the final payment for a cache of firearms they intended to illegally export to Mexico, according to a criminal complaint.



The two men met with undercover agents Dec. 20 to provide a detailed list of automatic firearms and ammunition they wanted to buy. The weapons and ammunition were valued at about \$2 million. BEST agents and El Paso police detectives seized \$148,045 in cash Jan. 29 that Tostado-Gonzalez and Gonzalez-Gonzalez provided as a down payment for the weapons they planned to buy.

Among the weapons on their list were: 300 AR-15 or AR-16 rifles, 300 short-barreled .223 rifles, 10 Barrett .50-caliber rifles, two 40-millimeter grenade machineguns, 10 .45-caliber handguns with silencers, 10 .40-caliber handguns with silencers, and a large amount of ammunition of various calibers.

According to a criminal complaint, both men met with undercover agents in February and March and inspected the firearms they planned to buy.

"The success of BEST is due to the seamless cooperation among federal and local law enforcement agencies, and the sharing of intelligence and information about criminal activity that threatens border security," said Manuel Oyola-Torres, acting special agent in charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in El Paso. "This partnership is a force multiplier that makes our ICE efforts that much more effective against criminal organizations."

Tostado-Gonzalez and Gonzalez-Gonzalez made their initial appearance in federal court Monday. Their detention hearing is set for 10 a.m. April 16 before U.S. Magistrate Judge Norbert J. Garney.

ICE is charged with enforcing a wide array of laws, including those related to securing the border and combating criminal smuggling. BEST members routinely conduct joint operations with other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, which join forces and authority at the ports of entry, to prevent U.S. currency, weapons and technology from being illegally exported into Mexico.

BEST is a U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), ICE-led national initiative created along the U.S.-Mexico border. BEST in El Paso was formed in October 2006, and is one of 15 such teams nationwide.

El Paso's BEST members include: ICE; U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Border Patrol and Office of Field Operations; the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); the U.S. Department of State; the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); the El Paso County Sheriff's Office; the El Paso Police Department, and the U.S. Attorney's Office, Western District of Texas.

Officers from federal, state and local law enforcement agencies are collocated in the task force to share information. This close coordination among law enforcement agencies also helps identify and eliminate cross-border criminal organizations, such as drug and alien smuggling networks, and their supporting infrastructures that sustain them.

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.

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