

## THREE AMIGOS AND GUNS

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Aug 09, 2009 When Stephen Harper, Barack Obama and Felipe Calderon, the "three amigos" leading Canada, the United States and Mexico, saddle up for their summit in Guadalajara today and tomorrow, they will gallop through an agenda that has seldom been more rugged. From trade protectionism to climate change, swine flu and immigration issues, there will be scant time in the two-day meeting to pause for breath.

But there's likely to be a glaring omission, one that is a matter of life and death. It's the "iron river" of smuggled guns flowing from the U.S. to both Canada and Mexico, and leaving destruction in its wake.

Mexico's ambassador to Washington has accused the U.S. of fuelling drug-related violence in which some 6,000 people have died in the past year alone. He said there was a "direct correlation" between the overturning of a 2004 U.S. law banning assault weapons and Mexico's upswing in seizures of those guns on its own turf.

Toronto, where five people were shot on a single night last week, needs few reminders of the harm that smuggled weapons cause. In 2006, Toronto police tracked 120 of 181 guns used in crimes back to the U.S. A recent study by three international researchers suggested that two-thirds of criminally used guns seized across Canada have American origins. And last year, more than 500 restricted and prohibited weapons were confiscated by Canadian border security officials, a figure they say is only 3 per cent of the total smuggled into the country.

During the pro-gun Bush administration, there was little hope of convincing Washington to come to grips with the problem. Ironically, while President George W. Bush called for tighter border controls to fend off would-be Canadian terrorists, he had no evidence that the hypothetical terrorists had killed any Americans. Meanwhile, illegally-smuggled U.S. guns were demonstrably injuring Canadians.

Obama has opened the door to a dialogue on gun control. Shortly after his inauguration, he pushed for restoring the assault weapons ban, a move Attorney General Eric Holder said would benefit Mexico. Opposition in Congress has put a damper on the plan.

Harper should take the opportunity of this summit to point out that tighter U.S. controls, including enforcement of existing laws, would also benefit Canadians by keeping guns from the hands of violent gangs in our cities. Such a stand may seem unlikely for our Prime Minister, given his push to eliminate the long gun registry and his cordial relationship with anti-gun control folks.

But Harper has also billed himself as tough on crime. He could live up to his own billing by raising this issue with Obama in Guadalajara.