



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on July 31, 2012

Congress Blames Top ATF Officials for Fast and Furious

Congressional investigators probing the Obama administration's deadly "Fast and Furious" gun-running scheme concluded that senior Justice Department figures and five top officials with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) were responsible for the tragic program, according to the first segment of an official report. All of the ATF figures still work for the agency.



Various media outlets received advance copies of the [damning document](#), which was prepared for House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) and ranking member of the Senate Judiciary Committee Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa). Both of the GOP lawmakers have been at the forefront of investigating and exposing the blood-drenched scheme since it came to light.

The scandalous [Fast and Furious operation](#), first exposed by whistleblowers more than a year ago, used U.S. taxpayer funds to put thousands of high-powered weapons into the hands of Mexican drug cartels. Hundreds of murders have already been linked to those firearms, including the now-infamous [slaying of U.S. Border Patrol agent Brian Terry](#) in 2010.

The two Mexican "drug lords" supposedly being targeted by the Fast and Furious "investigation" [already worked for the FBI and were considered "untouchable,"](#) documents revealed later. Meanwhile, according to Justice Department e-mails uncovered during the congressional probe, the violence and killings linked to the weapons-trafficking operation were being [exploited by senior administration officials to push for more infringements on the right of Americans](#) to keep and bear arms.

According to the latest unreleased report, one of three being prepared by U.S. lawmakers about the growing scandal, operation Fast and Furious was "marred by missteps, poor judgments and inherently reckless strategy" from the start. Five top ATF officials including then-Acting Director Kenneth Melson were singled out, with the former chief blamed for not shutting down the program sooner despite his apparent concerns.

"I think they were doing more damage control than anything," Melson was quoted as testifying in the report concerning the administration's reaction to the congressional investigation. "My view is that the whole matter of the department's response in this case was a disaster."

Another senior ATF official cited in the congressional report was then-special agent in charge of the Phoenix field division William Newell, who had previously come under fire for other half-baked "investigative" tactics. His attorney responded to the new report by attacking Rep. Issa, [alleging](#) that the Oversight Committee chairman "has consistently shown that he won't let the truth get in the way of his quixotic political witch hunt."

Other ATF officials blamed in the report include Deputy Assistant Director for Field Operations William McMahon, Assistant Director for Field Operations Mark Chait, and Deputy Director William Hoover. It remains unclear what actions, disciplinary measures, or criminal charges, if any, will result from the



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probe.

“Now that the first report names five managers deemed responsible for allowing the operation to happen, it remains to be seen what Issa and company will do about it,” [noted](#) gun-rights activist David Codrea, who played a key role in exposing the scandal to begin with. Some potential criminal charges could include violations of the “International Traffic in Arms Regulations and the Kingpin Act,” he added, saying that “Issa himself indicated ‘prosecutions’ were a possibility.”

Codrea said it would be reasonable to wait some time before moving to file criminal charges — at least until certain highly anticipated developments in the ongoing saga. But if prosecutions do not ultimately happen, “many demanding justice will no doubt conclude the game has been rigged, and that those crying ‘politics’ have had a point,” he concluded.

According to the latest draft report, congressional investigators also discovered new evidence that ATF had attempted to mislead Mexican authorities. Apparently the agency sought to conceal the fact that two “Fast and Furious” guns were found at the scene of the [high-profile murder](#) in the Mexican state of Chihuahua of the attorney general’s brother in 2010.

More information on Fast and Furious should be emerging soon. The other two segments of the report to be released as part of the congressional investigation will deal with the Justice Department’s role in the program and its subsequent ham-fisted efforts to cover up the scandal, according to the document.

“Part two will look at the devastating failure of supervision and leadership by officials at Justice Department headquarters, principally within the Office of the Deputy Attorney General, and within the Criminal Division,” the report said. “Part three will address the unprecedented obstruction of the investigation by the highest levels of the Justice Department, including the Attorney General himself.”

Disgraced Attorney General Eric Holder, who [lied under oath during the congressional inquiry](#), was [held in contempt of Congress in late June](#) for defying subpoenas and his lawless efforts to obstruct investigators. But the fanatical anti-gun zealot — he once [proposed a tax-funded campaign to “brainwash” people](#) against the right to keep and bear arms — is now abusing his position to shield himself from prosecution, according to critics.

Well over 100 members of Congress have called for Holder to step down, and numerous Democrats broke with their party on the vote to hold him in contempt. Instead of stepping down and preserving the integrity of the Justice Department, however, the disgraced Attorney General has lashed out at critics and the media while implausibly claiming investigators were motivated by politics or even race.

Newspapers across the country have [run editorials demanding accountability and disclosure](#) in the case. So far, however, the Obama administration has refused, with the president even stepping in recently to assert “executive privilege” in withholding documents from investigators. Lawmakers are currently exploring other options to obtain the information.

The Justice Department has also been obstructing a separate congressional investigation into the [drug money-laundering activities of the Drug Enforcement Administration](#) (DEA), first exposed late last year by the *New York Times*. Separately, the DEA is also under fire for its role in [killing women and children in Honduras](#) recently as part of an effort to find a canoe allegedly carrying some narcotics through a jungle.

The ATF, meanwhile, is currently embroiled in yet another scandal after its new acting boss, B. Todd Jones, sent out a video [unlawfully threatening agents with “consequences”](#) for going outside the “chain



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of command” to report problems. Of course, whistleblowers — including the agents who exposed Fast and Furious — are protected by federal law when exposing criminal or unethical conduct.

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and its role in drug trafficking is back in the international media spotlight again, too. Mexican officials [recently accused the “intelligence” outfit of attempting to “manage” the drug trade](#) rather than fight it — a familiar charge that has been made for decades by top officials, drug smugglers, investigators, and even the former head of the DEA.

Other experts told *The New American* that Fast and Furious almost certainly went beyond just the ATF and the Justice Department. “There is no doubt that the top management of ATF knew and approved the operation,” said Andy Ramirez, president of the [Law Enforcement Officers Advocates Council](#) (LEOAC). “However, the fact is there is no OP that is run by a federal agency, with the exception of CIA, that is run without an Assistant US Attorney supervising it. They report to the US Attorney unless the OP is run out of Main DOJ in DC, and so on up the chain of command. This type of OP is so badly thought up that it had to go up to the very top, meaning AG Eric Holder and the White House.”

Ramirez also said that, according to his sources, “Homeland Security” boss Janet Napolitano was probably deeply involved in Fast and Furious, too. “That means two departments were involved and if you have two, then State and the White House knew, too. Hence the massive size and scope of the cover up itself,” he concluded.

The latest congressional report concluded that “strong leadership” would be needed at ATF to overcome the “deep scars” left by Fast and Furious. Critics of the agency, however, argue that the unconstitutional institution should be abolished altogether, and that other leads should be pursued as well. Anyone responsible for helping to unlawfully arm Mexican cartels, meanwhile, must be held accountable in a court of law to prevent similar tragedies in the future.

Photo of ATF Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

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