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Veterans: Boycott Mexico over Marine arrest

By Kellan Howell
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The nation's oldest and largest major combat veterans organization is demanding the Mexican government ensure the safe return of a Marine being held prisoner in the country and is asking Americans to put down the tacos and tequila until that happens.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars is calling for a boycott on all Mexican products and travel until Marine Sgt. Andrew Tahmooressi is released from a Mexican jail where he has been held prisoner since March.

“This combat Marine has been languishing away since he was arrested March 31 for allegedly crossing the border accidentally with three personal firearms that were legally registered in the states but not in Mexico,” said VFW National Commander-in-Chief William A. Thien. “It was a mistake, but so is the Mexican government’s reluctance to release him unharmed back to the U.S.”

Mr. Thien added that the VFW has already attempted to negotiate politically, asking President Obama to contact Mexican President Enrique Pena Nieto, but said that phone call never took place.

After almost three full months in jail, Mr. Thien said it’s time to take off the gloves by applying economic pressure to the Mexican government.

“This is about politics, and if my government won’t do anything, then I guess we need to let the power of the purse take over. No products, no travel, a total boycott ... then maybe a dialogue will start.”

Other veterans groups are applauding the VFW’s bold decision and are urging their supporters to do the same.

“We applaud the VFW for their efforts to ensure the timely and safe return of Marine Sgt. Tahmooressi,” said Pete Hegseth, CEO of Concerned Veterans for America. “It’s a pretty stark statement that our friends at the VFW think that this is what it will take to bring him home. One thing is for certain: President Obama has done more in the past few weeks to release the leadership of the Taliban from Gitmo than he has to ensure the

safe return of Sgt. Tahmooressi. This is an outrage and a slight that the veterans we represent nationwide will not forget.”

Some experts don't think that the boycott would be enough to convince the Mexican government to speed up its investigation, and could have unintended negative effects.

“It's very unlikely to be effective other than perhaps giving this issue some media attention. In practice what it will do is penalize ordinary, hard-working Mexicans who had nothing to do with creating this problem so I don't think it's the best strategy,” said Ian Vasquez, director of the Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity at the Cato Institute.

The American Legion is asking its members to personally contact the president demanding his intervention in the matter and cited Mr. Obama's comment that America “leaves no soldier behind” in relation to the recent prisoner exchange for Army Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl.

“By nearly everybody's account, this was an accident,” American Legion National Commander Daniel M. Dellinger said.

While Sgt. Tahmooressi maintains that his crossing over the border was a result of poor road signage, officials at the Mexican Embassy in Washington argue that Sgt. Tahmooressi knew exactly where he was going when he crossed the border and that the signage along the highway clearly states that firearms and ammunition are not allowed beyond the border.

“Leading up to the entry point into Mexico, there are signs that indicate which lanes drivers should follow if they have something to declare to customs and which lanes to follow if they have nothing to declare. Mr. Tahmooressi chose to enter through the ‘nothing to declare’ lane, forfeiting his opportunity to make known that he had arms and ammunition with him and/or rectify a possible driving mistake and declare that he did not wish to enter Mexico,” the Mexican embassy wrote in an official fact sheet on Sgt. Tahmooressi's case.

Mexican officials also claim that Sgt. Tahmooressi did not state that he was an active duty member of the military and that when he crossed the border he was not in uniform, driving an official vehicle, or on official business.