

Originally published 04:00 a.m., April 9, 2010, updated 08:18 a.m., April 9, 2010

Obama yet to fulfill gun pledge with Mexico

[Kara Rowland](#)

Nearly a year after President Obama personally promised Mexican President Felipe Calderon that the White House would push the Senate to ratify a small-arms treaty as part of the effort to combat drug violence, the measure is stalled and the administration has shown few signs it is pressing hard for passage.

Known by its Spanish acronym, CIFTA, the 1997 pact seeks to cut down illegal firearms manufacturing and trafficking by imposing standardized controls on the import, export and transit of weapons and related materials for countries throughout the Western Hemisphere.

Though most other members of the Organization of American States adopted the treaty soon after its drafting, the document has languished unapproved by the U.S. for more than 10 years, while attracting sharp criticism from some gun rights groups as an infringement of rights guaranteed by the Second Amendment.

During an April 2009 visit with Mr. Calderon in Mexico, Mr. Obama condemned escalating drug violence on the border and revealed that he was "urging" his former colleagues in the Senate to ratify the treaty.

"As President Calderon and I discussed, I am urging the Senate in the United States to ratify [CIFTA] to curb small-arms trafficking that is a source of so many of the weapons used in this drug war," Mr. Obama said at the time.

But one year later, and amid another high-profile outbreak of border violence, Mr. Obama has not discussed the treaty in public recently and the Senate - which requires a two-thirds majority for ratification - has yet to take it up.

"What we've done is said that we support [the ratification of] this measure. It's up to the

Congress of the United States to follow through on that," Arturo Valenzuela, assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, told reporters last month. He said a bigger priority than the treaty right now is for both countries to "manage the border."

Cato Institute scholar Ted Galen Carpenter said there's a reason there's been little evident follow-up since the U.S. administration promised its neighbor that it would push the treaty.

"There is no chance of getting a two-thirds vote in the Senate to pass this treaty; it has too many implications for gun rights in the United States," said Mr. Carpenter, vice president of defense and foreign policy studies at the libertarian think tank.

Mr. Obama "had to make some kind of public gesture to satisfy the Mexican government at some point - and with the surge in violence over the past few weeks I wouldn't be surprised if we see some kind of statement coming out in the next few weeks. But it's not going to change the political reality in the United States. It's not going to change the vote count on Capitol Hill," Mr. Carpenter added.

"So this is just security theater, if you will," he said.

With the White House leaving the heavy lifting to Congress, the fate of the treaty is highly uncertain.

The office of Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry, the Massachusetts Democrat who last year said he would push for its ratification, did not respond to requests for comment. A spokesman for the panel's senior Republican, Sen. Richard G. Lugar of Indiana, referred to a March 2009 statement in which he said his colleagues "should consider ratifying" the agreement during this session of Congress.

But the initial reaction last year by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Nevada Democrat facing a tough re-election battle this fall in a strongly pro-gun rights state, suggests he's not itching to help make that happen.

After Mr. Obama's statement last April, Mr. Reid issued a statement saying simply: "We must work with Mexico to curtail the violence and drug-trafficking on America's southern border, and must protect Americans' Second Amendment rights. I look forward to working with the president to ensure we do both in a responsible way."

Even if there were stronger interest in ratifying the treaty, the Senate schedule is already crowded, and Mr. Obama on Thursday gave the upper chamber a new task when he signed a nuclear arms reduction treaty with Russia that also must be ratified.

CIFTA backers say the accord would help stem the flow of illegal weapons into Mexico from the United States by promoting information sharing and making firearms easier to trace. They say the treaty is not intended to force any changes in U.S. law.

But critics say the pact's vagueness could open the door to more government regulation of the gun market. For example, they say, the treaty's broad definitions of "manufacturing" and "ammunition" could be read to prevent gun owners from reloading their own cartridges.

Andrew Arulanandam, a spokesman for the National Rifle Association, said his group still sees CIFTA as a threat despite Mr. Obama's hands-off stance over the past year.

"The president said he would send CIFTA to the Senate and urge ratification, and those are his words so we have to take them at face value," he said. "We're right to fight this, if and when it comes down the pike."

The Mexican government maintains that the majority of guns confiscated from powerful drug cartels can be traced to U.S. sellers - though the exact figures are disputed.

Even without CIFTA, the Obama administration has taken steps to try to curb southward gun traffic.

Over the past year, the Homeland Security Department has increased staffing on the border and begun screening all southbound rail shipments to look for illegal weapons, drugs and money. The stepped-up scrutiny netted a 22 percent increase in firearms seized and a 14 percent increase in drugs seized along the southwestern border, officials said.

· **Ads by Google**  [Gun Safety Training](#) [Firearm Safety Class](#) [Gun Safety](#) [Firearm Safety](#) [Gun Safety Courses](#)