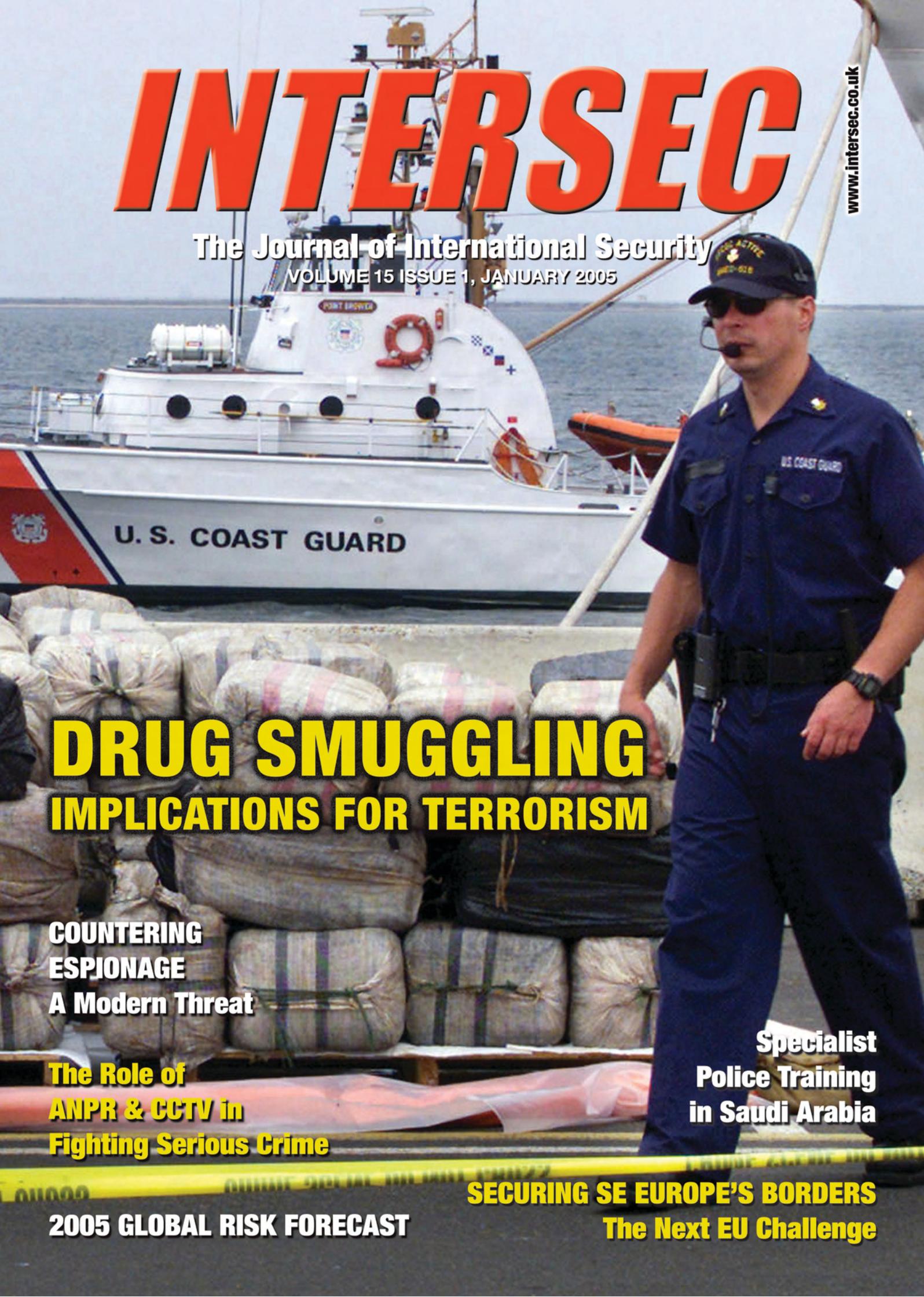


INTERSEC

www.intersec.co.uk

The Journal of International Security

VOLUME 15 ISSUE 1, JANUARY 2005



DRUG SMUGGLING IMPLICATIONS FOR TERRORISM

**COUNTERING
ESPIONAGE
A Modern Threat**

**The Role of
ANPR & CCTV in
Fighting Serious Crime**

**Specialist
Police Training
in Saudi Arabia**

2005 GLOBAL RISK FORECAST

**SECURING SE EUROPE'S BORDERS
The Next EU Challenge**



Drug Smuggling Implications for Terrorism

*Seaports have achieved great success in building stronger defences against drug smuggling and terrorism, thanks in part to the International Ship & Port Facility Security Code. But smugglers are ever resourceful and the current flow of drugs into the US, for example, may be greater than at any time in history. If the drug lords can bypass Homeland Security measures, terrorists are capable of adopting the same methods to introduce operators, or even weapons of mass destruction, into a target country, says **Kim Petersen**.*

There was a growing sense of confidence among the law enforcement and intelligence staff at the US embassy in Bogota, Colombia, in 1999 that, finally, efforts to stem the flow of cocaine into the US were beginning to show results. In the summer of that year, US Army Colonel James Hiett, in charge of US anti-drug efforts in Colombia, was reporting positively to the Ambassador and the Pentagon. The billions of dollars in training and interdiction efforts, combined with a new resolve by the Colombian Government to take the fight to the drug cartels, translated into decreased seizures by US Customs and other agencies. The US Congress, heartened by the apparent success, prepared an aid package of more than US\$1bn in additional counter-narcotics funds for the country.

However, in August of that year, it came to light that Col. Hiett's wife had sent approximately US\$700,000 of narcotics through the embassy to co-conspirators in New York City. Laurie Anne Hiett, who had a history of drug use, had shipped several packages of narcotics using the diplomatic mail service. When Army investigators tipped off the Colonel about his wife's activities, he set about helping her to hide the cash she had earned so as to eliminate the evidence. Both were later convicted and sent to prison.

For many in the US Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and other law enforcement services, the Hiett case is emblematic of the frustrations – and dangers – associated with narcotics enforcement. Like squeezing a balloon, when pressure is put on one place, the problem simply expands to the point of least resistance. But perhaps more ominous than successful drug smuggling is the potential that, in a post-11 September 2001 world, seams in US border defences could be exploited by al-Qaeda or other terrorist groups.

Historically, cocaine and heroin have arrived in the US and much of Europe through the seaports. Inadequate funding, poor training, and lack of even basic physical security measures all contributed to a systemically woeful level of security at ports around the world. Following the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, the United Nations' International Maritime Organization (IMO) passed the International Ship & Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code. For the first time, seaports and international shipping companies now face mandatory security standards that came into effect on 1 July 2004.

ISPS Code

The ISPS Code has two constituent parts: Part A, which is mandatory, and Part B, which is recommendatory. Part A provides the broad concepts and theory behind the security regime, and is bifurcated along ship and port lines. Part B gives

the ship and seaport operator operational guidance on how to accomplish the requirements of Part A. However, for entry into any US port, a ship must incorporate most of the elements of Part B into its security programme. In addition, all ports that these ships may have visited prior to entering the US (going back 10 ports) have to be certified as compliant with both parts.

The Code takes a risk mitigation approach in addressing the security vulnerabilities of both ships and ports. Ships engaged in international voyages and over 500 gross tons in size – some 20,000 ships worldwide – and seaports that receive ships engaged in international trade, along with some other special-type ships and ports, are subject to the provisions of the Code. Each must undertake a security assessment consisting of three parts: threat, vulnerability, and risk/consequence. The results of this assessment, performed by maritime security experts, must then be developed into a comprehensive security plan.

Furthermore, both the shipping companies and the ports are now obliged to appoint security personnel. Shippers must have a Company Security Officer (CSO) to manage fleet security obligations, as well as a Ship Security Officer (SSO) on board each vessel. Similarly, the ports must designate a Port Facility Security Officer (PFSO) as the security point-of-contact for the port, as well as to oversee the execution of all ISPS-mandated security activities. Everything is subject to verification by governmental authorities.

State Action

Prior to the ISPS Code, States that were frequently victimized by drug smugglers investigated how they might provide some measure of defence. Most significantly, Florida, whose ports were considered by the Government as a "major entry point for drugs entering the United States," took a major step forward by creating State Law 311.12. This law established specific requirements relating to port security, including the stipulation of fence heights and access control measures. For example, anyone wishing to visit any of Florida's 14 seaports more than five times in 90 days must now be fingerprinted and have a background check performed by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. A photographic ID is then provided to that person for future visits.

The ISPS Code and laws such as Florida's have significantly increased the level of scrutiny placed on ships, cargo, and persons entering seaports – none of which was good news for the drug cartels. But the fundamental strengths of those intent on bringing drugs into the US have been their creativity, tenacity, and flexibility. If the ports present too great a risk, new corridors into the target country will be found.

New Security – New Vectors

Illegal narcotic sales in the US generate an estimated US\$57bn annually, most of it in cash, and for drugs coming into the country, America's southern flank is its Achilles' heel. The DEA estimates that the vast majority of the cocaine entering the US arrives from Central America by land or sea. A tour of those countries most often associated with drug smuggling shows the relative ease with which the cartels operate: poorly trained and equipped police and military forces that are often paid less than US\$250 per month; spasmodic US counter-narcotics programmes and funding; enormous expanses of unpopulated jungle and coastline; and a population that is either corruptible or simply intimidated into serving the interests of the smugglers.

But with the heightened scrutiny on ports, the cartels have developed new smuggling routes for bringing cocaine out of Colombia and Peru into the US. For example, estimates are that 80% of drugs being run out of South and Central America, and particularly the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, enter via Mexico. The drugs are brought into that country by "go-fast" boats laden with drugs whose operators are familiar with the ideal transit times, so enabling them to escape detection.

Once in Mexico, the drugs enter the US by several methods, with tunnels being the favoured option. The DEA and other agencies used to discover an average of one tunnel a year. Now, more than ten tunnels are being uncovered annually. And it is not just drugs that are making their way into Texas and other States through these underground passageways; illegal aliens are paying "Coyotes" – criminals who provide illegal immigrants passage into the US – for the privilege of bypassing border checkpoints and harsh desert expanses and popping up in the middle of an American border town.

If smugglers and illegal immigrants – some of whom are arriving in Mexico from places as far away as Pakistan – can bypass ports and borders, what is to prevent a terrorist, perhaps with a weapon of mass destruction (WMD), such as a radiological "dirty bomb", from exploiting the same vulnerabilities?



This innocent-looking structure conceals the US end of an illegal tunnel. (Source: NPR)

Guatemala: The Emerging Hub

There is a complex web of groups that traffic and distribute illegal drugs. Criminal groups operating from South America smuggle cocaine and heroin into the US via a variety of routes, including

land routes through Mexico, maritime routes along Mexico's east and west coasts, sea routes through the Caribbean, and international air corridors. Criminal groups operating from Mexico smuggle cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, amphetamine, and marijuana.

With greater scrutiny being placed on Mexico, intelligence officials are concerned that Guatemala seems to be the new hub for drug traffickers. There are now regular confrontations between that country's Navy and the well-armed, well-equipped "narcos" that ply Guatemala's Pacific coastline. Guatemala appears to be the preferred staging area for drugs being transported from South America to the US and Europe.

Strategically located in the middle of Central America, Guatemala is viewed by the cartels as an ideal location for managing drug routes, using either the Atlantic or the Pacific oceans for maritime

vectors (using cargo ships, commercial fishing vessels, yachts, and of course, the go-fast boats used throughout the Caribbean Basin); overland routes using highways into Mexico; and even air routes into either the eastern or western US. With poorly controlled frontiers, and too few counter-narcotics assets like modern helicopters and coastal patrol boats, there is little the Guatemalan Government can do to stem the flood of drugs northwards.

Water Vectors

There has also been a change of strategy for smugglers using vessels. Smugglers are exploiting uninhabited coastlines and small marinas as entry points. Colombian cartels have been known to prefer moving cocaine through

Puerto Quetzal on the Pacific coast and the Puerto Barrios Region on the Caribbean coast. In Guatemala, the offloading of illegal cargo often occurs near the Mexican border, from where the drugs continue their journey by land or sea.

The National Narcotics Intelligence Consumers Committee reports that cocaine has been hidden in the walls of cargo containers, in bulk cargo such as coffee, and attached to the vessels themselves. Shrimp and tuna boats, common throughout the Caribbean and along the Pacific coastline, have often been used for the transshipment of drugs to intermediary countries, such as Mexico or the Bahamas, or to mother ships or go-fasts that complete the voyage.

The go-fasts, also known as cigarette boats after a popular manufacturer, can carry around 2,000kg of cocaine or heroin, and at only 15-20m in length, coupled with speeds in excess of 40 knots, they can move undetected into remote coastlines. If they encounter counter-narcotics forces, they can often outrun them.



Go-fast boats are popular for transporting drugs and can often outrun law enforcement vessels.

Photo courtesy of USCG.

Air Vectors

In the 1970s and 1980s, one of the most common ways for bringing drugs into the US was in small aircraft, such as the Cessna 182. Easily purchased, or stolen from poorly protected airports, these aircraft were easily modified with increased fuel tanks and instrument navigation to enable long, cross-country flights.

When the DEA began using high-performance rotary and fixed-wing aircraft with military-style surveillance equipment, such as Forward Looking Infrared Radar (FLIR), the use of small aircraft

by the cartels began to decline. Some drug traffickers have changed their methods to avoid detection by Department of Defense (DOD) radar. For example, one DEA official told Congressional investigators that traffickers were flying small aircraft into the jungle area spanning the border between Colombia and Panama, trucking drug cargoes across Panama, and reloading the drugs on small aircraft to mix with legitimate air traffic in the region. This avoided the radar assets that DOD has focused on the northern coast of South America.

In countries such as Guatemala, airspace is poorly protected, as is much of the countryside that offers ideal landing sites for drugs inbound from Colombia. Once offloaded, the drugs take the usual journey by land, sea, or onward by air into Mexico and then the US.

Land Vectors

With the advent of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and other international trade agreements, the ease of bringing drugs overland has increased significantly. The famed Inter-American Highway passes through Honduras and all the way into Mexico, and is a major route for illegal drugs. The highway is heavily trafficked and inspections by customs officials and police are rare.

Concealing drug shipments within tractor-trailers carrying Mexican goods into the US is made possible by the enormity of commerce now taking place between the two countries. Private automobiles, tanker trucks, buses and railway cars also bring drugs from Guatemala through Mexico and eventually into the US. The large volume of vehicular traffic crossing into Mexico from Central America also provides traffickers with ample smuggling opportunities. Once in Mexico, the drugs are usually destined for the US. Almost 6,600 tractor-trailer trucks and over 200,000 passenger vehicles cross the US-Mexico border each day, and customs officials estimate that two-thirds of all cocaine entering the US crosses the US-Mexico land border concealed in cargo.

Due to increased scrutiny and greater international condemnation, State sponsorship of terrorism has become increasingly difficult for countries such as Yemen and Syria. Recently, Libya announced its cessation of support for terrorist groups and a preparedness to work against future attacks. Consequently, terrorist groups are looking to drug trafficking and



Drug smugglers' ingenuity in concealing drugs is demonstrated by these discoveries in sweet wrappers, a baseball cap, a globe and suitcase trolley wheels. (Source: DEA)

other criminal activities, such as kidnapping, as sources of revenue. Drug trafficking often serves a two-pronged goal for them. Some groups, like those in Colombia, not only obtain operational funds through drugs, but also believe they can weaken their enemies by flooding their societies with addictive drugs. While some concentrate on kidnapping, weapons trafficking, extortion, smuggling of illegal immigrants, smuggling of cigarettes and other contraband, financial fraud, or other crimes, drug trafficking is seen as both profitable and as a weapon against the US and some European countries.

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service, in its October 1991 publication *Commentary No. 13: Terrorism and the Rule of Law: Dangerous Compromise In Colombia*, noted: "Former President Belaunde Terry of Peru coined the term 'narcoterrorism' in 1983 when describing terrorist-type attacks against his nation's anti-narcotics police. Now a subject of definitional controversy, narcoterrorism is understood to mean the attempts of narcotics traffickers to influence the policies of government by the systematic threat or use of violence." In other words, a narcoterrorist organization is an organized group that is complicit in the activities of drug trafficking in order to further, or fund, premeditated, and politically motivated violence against noncombatant targets with the intention of influencing a government or group of people.

In many regions of Central and South America, the drug industry overlaps with terrorism. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in Colombia, where two major terrorist groups receive more than half of their operational funding through cocaine production, taxation, and distribution: the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the United Self-Defense Groups of Colombia (AUC).

While both FARC and the AUC have shown little inclination to extend operations into the US,

US intelligence officials have revealed that, as both expand their urban operations, they have been using transnational terrorist groups for technical assistance.

Following the September 2001 attacks, a number of regions have received scrutiny as potential vectors of international terrorism. In South America, for example, transnational terrorists are known to operate and plan hemispherical operations. One region in particular focus is the "Tri-Border" area of Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil and the Paraguayan city of Ciudad del Este. This region is infamous for a history of smuggling and counterfeiting, and a general lawlessness that makes it one of the most notorious areas in the Americas.

Ciudad del Este boasts the largest Arab community in Latin America, and some citizens are reputedly strongly anti-US and anti-Israel in their views. Due to the sizeable Islamic population in Ciudad del Este and the numerous reports of terrorist training camps, safe houses, and the smuggling of arms and munitions, the region is suspected as a potential launching site for transnational terrorists, including Hezbollah and al-Qaeda.

In one example, Brazil arrested Egyptian, Mohammed Ali Abul-Mahdi Ibrahim Soliman, an alleged member of the extremist group Gamaa Islamiyah (IG). IG is believed to have terror cells operating in Brazil and in Ciudad del Este, and the group has ties to al-Qaeda.

In Afghanistan, there is overwhelming evidence that the Taliban condoned, and profited from, the opium and heroin trade. Taliban taxes on opium harvests, heroin production, and drug shipments helped finance its military operations against rival factions. Of course, the Taliban provided sanctuary to al-Qaeda and received military assistance from other terrorist groups operating from Afghanistan.

Poppy cultivation continues almost unabated, and these enormous profits have been used to strengthen warlords, corrupt local officials, and foment terror and instability.

Some of these warlords, sympathetic to the former Taleban regime, are undermining the regime of President Karzai using heroin production to finance operations against the Government, US forces, and international organizations working in Afghanistan.

The Future

With drug traffickers and terrorists finding common ground in such places as Ciudad del Este, intelligence professionals are asking what each group can learn from the other. Clearly, terrorists are interested in the methods successfully employed for years against superpowers like the US. Bulk drug shipments are of a size and weight comparable to several types of WMD that are believed to be within the capability of organizations such as al-Qaeda.

On the other hand, drug traffickers would benefit from the intelligence and logistical networks of transnational terrorist groups. Some, such as al-Qaeda and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, are known to manage cargo ships that operate around the world. Hearings in a US House of Representatives' subcommittee in 2003 revealed that al-Qaeda may own as many as 15 cargo ships, and Osama bin Laden's family's construction group has been linked "to a network of cargo freighters that could be used either in operations or for group logistics," according to the *Christian Science Monitor* newspaper.

With respect to shipping, al-Qaeda has successfully attacked vessels. A small boat containing explosives rammed the *USS Cole* in the port of Aden, Yemen, in October 2000, killing 15 Americans. Later, al-Qaeda used a similar attack against the French oil tanker *MT Limburg* in October 2002.

Notwithstanding the improvements brought about by the ISPS Code, ports still remain vulnerable to a sophisticated terrorist threat. Experts believe that ordinary cargo shipments and drug smuggling offer plenty of opportunities for terrorism. "Absent intelligence about the fact that something may be awry in a particular shipment, the chance of material getting through is very, very good," said Graham Allison, a former US Assistant Secretary of Defense who is now director of Harvard University's Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.

For example, ABC News successfully shipped depleted uranium into the US twice in 2004 in a test of port security, including a suitcase containing almost 7kg of depleted uranium in a teak trunk from Jakarta to the Port of Los Angeles. Customs agents did not detect what could have been a lethal WMD.



Routes to the US via land, sea and air, from under-resourced South and Central American countries, offer ample scope for the traffickers and perhaps terrorists too.

Conclusion

Seaports worldwide have instituted security plans, coupled with vulnerability assessments, training, and sophisticated security devices – with the goal of terrorist risk mitigation. But counter-terrorist planners have begun to recognize that the future threat of terrorism may be influenced by al-Qaeda and others exploiting the territorial weaknesses identified by drug traffickers. Should increased cooperation flourish between the drug cartels and transnational terrorists, a new stratagem will be required to deflect the risk. Given the profound failure of governments, including that of the US, to significantly reduce drug trafficking across their borders, this could present a daunting challenge. **I**

Kim E Petersen is the President of maritime security specialists, SeaSecure LLC. He is the Executive Director of the Maritime Security Council and former Director for Security at Princess Cruises and Renaissance Cruises. Previously, he held senior staff positions with former US Secretaries of State, Henry A Kissinger and Alexander M Haig, and in both the US Senate and US Defense Department in the areas of national security and intelligence.