

COCAINE SMUGGLING BY HELP OF NACRO-SUBMARINES FROM SOUTH AMERICA TO AFRICA AND EUROPE: A CALL FOR A HIGHER AWARENESS OF AN EXISTING SMUGGLING PATHWAY¹

The drug cartels of South America and organized crime have long been known to use semi-sub speedboats, Narco-Torpedoes and Narco-Submarines for smuggling cocaine from South America to Mexico and eventually to the United States of America. The drug trade is increasing strongly and organized crime is always looking for better and smarter ways to smuggle drugs into target countries. Counter-measures in the Americas in the war on drugs are the use of Anti-Submarine Technology such as Submarine-hunter Aircrafts, Submarines and Coast Guard Ships. Since the War on Drugs by the USA and other countries in the Caribbean and South and Middle America puts a high pressure on the drug cartels they are searching new pathways for delivering Cocaine to the target markets. In November 2019 for the first time a Narco-Submarine has been seized transporting 3 800 Kilogram Cocaine from South America to Spain. This capacity building and background paper investigates newspaper and official reports as well as scholarly papers on the evidence available for a newly emerging trans-Atlantic smuggling pathway from South America to the coasts of Africa and Europe. In particular it investigates and discusses in detail the evidence available for trans-Atlantic trips Narco-Submarine from South America to Europe or Africa and the new developments in Summer 2020. It uses artwork created by irregular naval warfare expert H.I. Sutton (Covert Shores). In conclusion this paper calls for a higher awareness and better vigilance and better coordination of law enforcement administrations (coast guards, customs services, police, naval forces) for this existing way of irregular naval warfare and drug smuggling from South America to Africa and Europe by help of Anti-Submarine technology such as anti-submarine aircrafts, anti-submarine naval ships, drones, satellites and the use of naval forces such as the coast guards in coordinated operations in Europe and Africa in order to combat global drug smuggling.

Key words: coast guard, counterterrorism, customs technology, drug trafficking, illicit drugs, irregular naval warfare, law enforcement, narcotics trafficking, smuggling, anti-submarine technology, submarine detection, organized crime, war on drugs.

JEL Classification: E26, F14, K33, K34, Q37.

Carsten WEERTH,

Senior Lecturer
FOM Hochschule für Oekonomie
und Management,
Senior Customs Officer
Main Customs Office Bremen
carsten.weerth@gmx.de
orcid.org/0000-0003-3702-8456

1. Introduction

Naval drug-smuggling techniques are applied in the Americas since the 1990ies: Mostly speedboats, self-propelled semisubmersibles (SPSS) or Narco-torpedos, and so called Narco-Submarines which are adequately described as Low Profile Vessels (LPV).

This paper investigates the use of Narco-Submarines and speedboats off Africa and Europe and it raises awareness for a known but newly re-emerging smuggling pathways from Middle and South America by help of trans-Atlantic Narco-Submarine trips to Africa and Europe.

2. Trans-Atlantic Smuggling of Cocaine from South America to Africa/Europe

This paper starts as follow up research on a proven case of a trans-Atlantic journey by a Narco-sub from South America to Spain which was located off the Coast of Galicia in November 2019 (Guardian, 2019a, 2019b, Sutton, 2019a, 2019b, Weerth, 2020).

The coca harvest has been very successful in the past years (more fields are in use and the agricultural technology adapts) and in

¹ The author is thankful to **H.I. Sutton** for his naval expertise, analysis and graphic visualizations of Narco-Submarines that he shares as Covert Shores under the URL: hisutton.com. In particular his contributions to Forbes Magazine, Small Wars Journal and his book on Narco-Submarines are very helpful and his © pictures are presented in this paper. For up-to-date actual and first hand info on Narco-Submarines follow him on twitter.com (twitter.com/CovertShores).

2017 it reached new record yields – in 2017 it increased about 25 per cent and reached an all-time high of 1,976 tons (UNODC, 2019, UNODC, 2020 and McCarthy, 2019a, 2019b) (see figure 1).

The smuggling of cocaine from South America to other countries is on the rise since 1980 and hit an all-time high in terms of law enforcement seizures in 2018 (figure 2).

West Africa has long been known to be an entry point for Africa and the European drug markets as emerging and lowly controlled smuggling route (figure 3) – cocaine seizures are well documented at least since 2005 (UNODC, 2013) (figure 4). But what is new is the size and amount of smuggling, the high quantities seized (Ralson/Dechery, Worldbank, 2014). It is a market and distribution route that can be distinguished in a Northern Hub, a Southern Hub and an Eastern Hub (Duncan, 2018) – the Northern Hub consists of Cape Verde, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia, Guinea and Sierra Leone, the Southern Hub of Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo and Benin, the Eastern Hub consists of Mali and Mauritania (UNODC, 2013) (figure 4). The UNODC estimates transit amounts between 17–48 tons of Cocaine entering through West African states in 2005–2010 (UNODC, 2013 and Csete/Sanchez, 2013). West Africa is a hub of overlaying smuggling activities and illicit financial flows (OECD, 2018).

Very much cocaine was produced in the Americas and is available since 2015–2018 for distribution from South America into the world (figure 1).

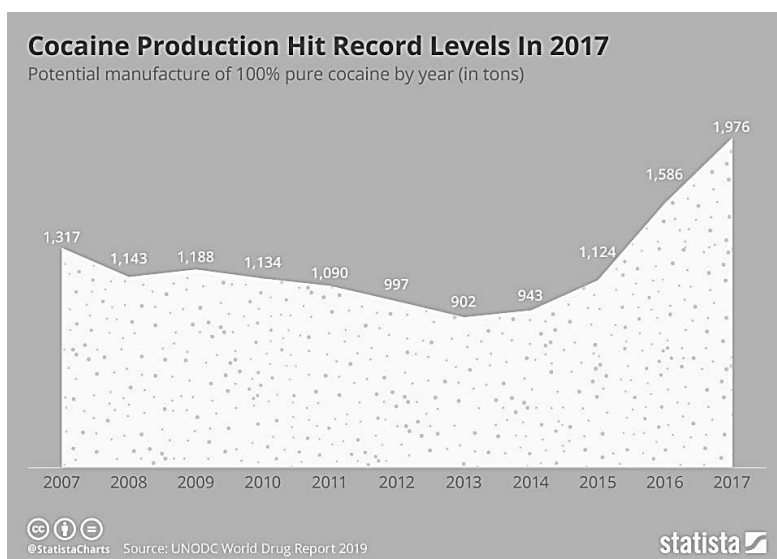


Figure 1. Cocaine Production hit record levels in 2017

Source: <https://www.statista.com/chart/18525/potential-manufacture-of-pure-cocaine-by-year/>, cited as McCarthy, 2019a, 2019b

The amount of cocaine produced, smuggled and seized globally is rising strongly (figure 2).

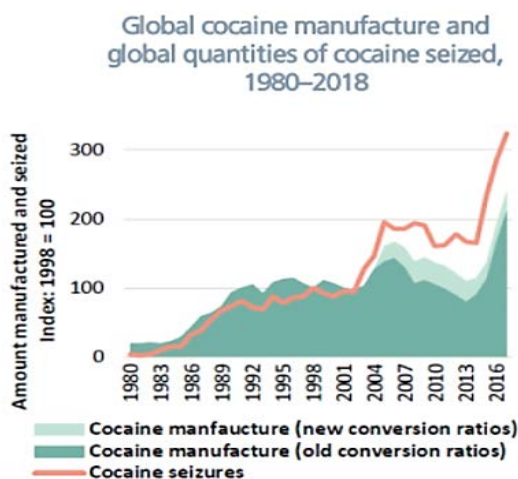


Figure 2. Global Cocaine Manufacture and Global Quantities of Cocaine Seized 1980-2018

Source: UNODC, World Drug Report 2019

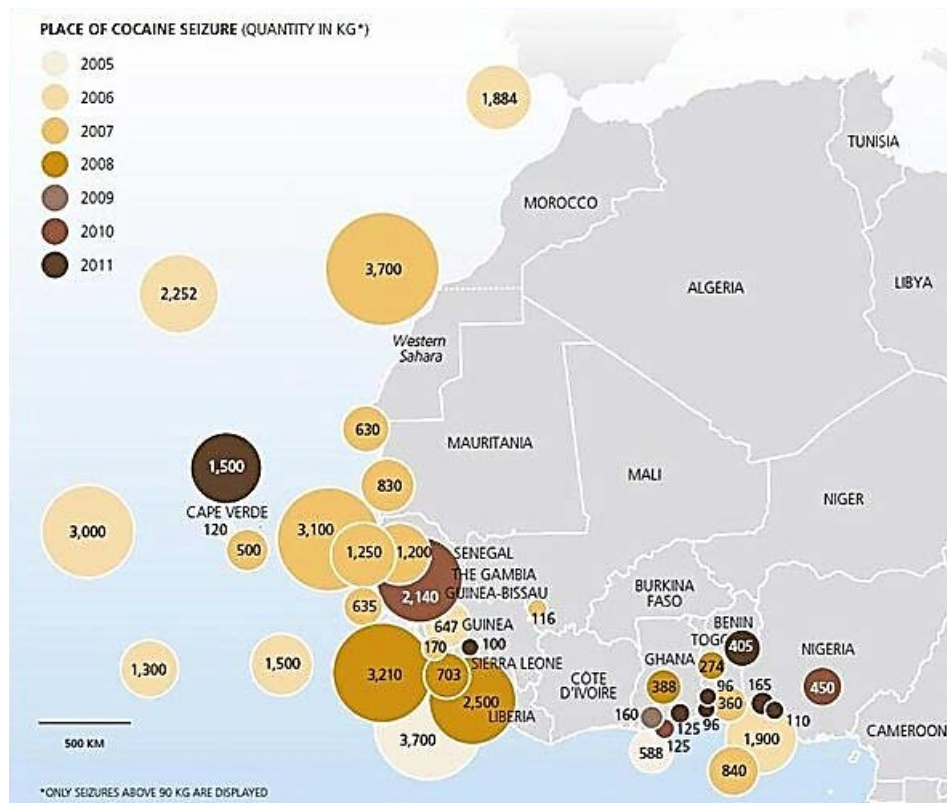


Figure 3. Major Seizures of Cocaine off West Africa and ashore from 2005–2011 [in KG]
Source: UNODC, Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa, Report, 2012, 9

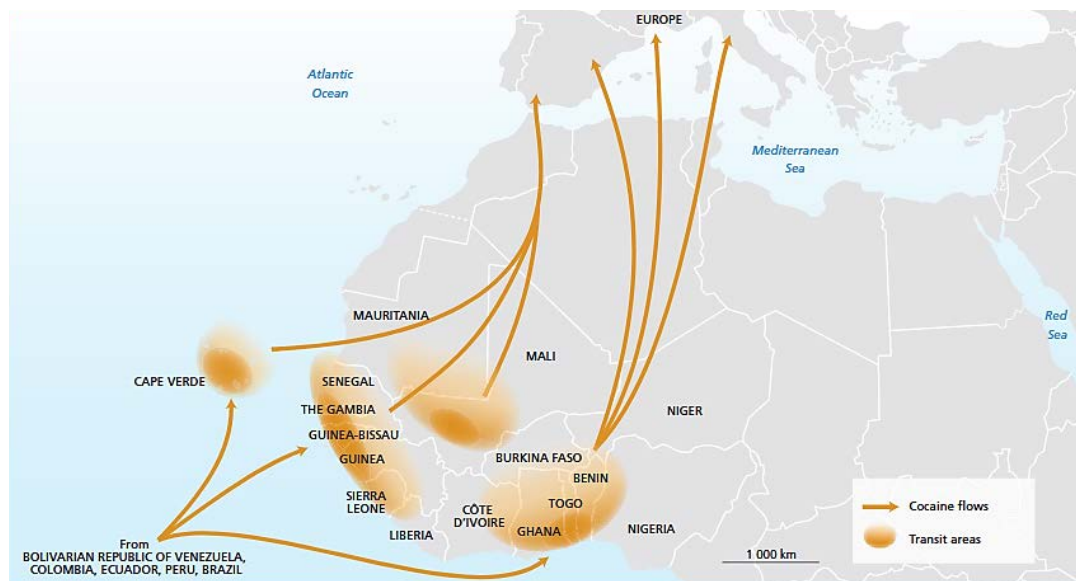


Figure 4. Cocaine Trafficking Flows in West Africa
Source: UNODC, Transnational Organized Crime in West Africa, Report, 2012, 10

3. Narco-Submarine evolution and current prevailing types in 2018–2020

Hundreds of photos of Narco-Submarines and their evolution and varying design are well documented in the internet (Sutton/Covert Shores, National Geographic Society, Time Magazine, Forbes, all online) and the scholarly literature on this matter (Stone, 2011; Bunker/Ramirez, 2015; Sutton, 2020a; Sutton, 2020b).

Modern Narco-Submarines are custom made for single journeys out of glass fibres and wood and can be categorized in four main types (Sutton, 2020a, 2020b and 2020d) (figure 5).

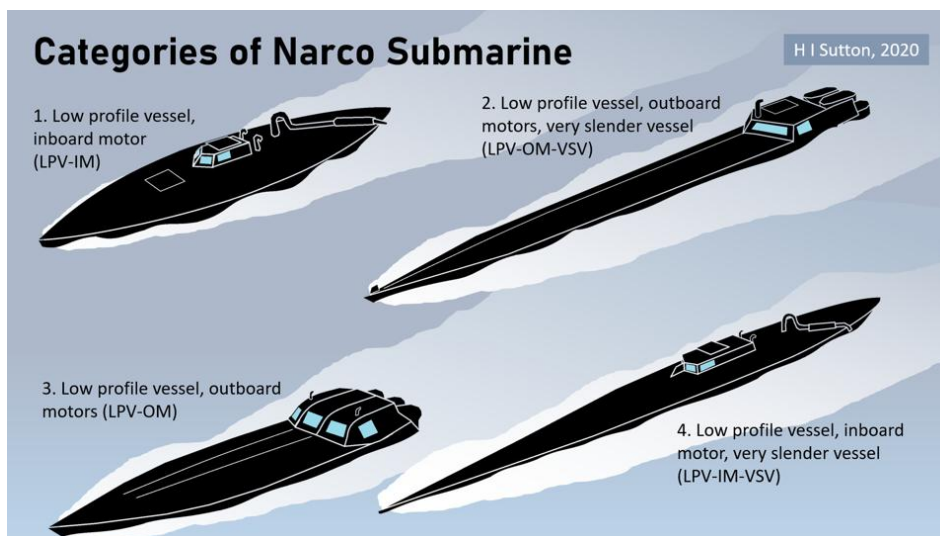


Figure 5. Categories of Narco Submarines

Source: Sutton, 2020d, © H.I. Sutton, 2020

The War on Drugs (GCWD, 2011) is fought by help of regular naval ships in the Caribbean and the Pacific by the USA (US Navy and US Coast Guard), the Colombian Navy and other states and the interception numbers of Narco-Submarines is rising.

3. Maritime Cocaine Smuggling in the Americas and interceptions

Current data speak of a Narco-Submarine Epidemic with 35 seizures in 2018 and 36 seizures in 2019 (Sutton, 2020c). The Cocoa harvest has been very high in 2017–2018 – about three times higher than in 2008 (Sutton, 2020c) and a lot of Cocaine is in Columbia that must be shipped away to its Markets in North America and Europe. Alone in May 2020 three Narco-Submarines were stopped and seized in the Caribbean in four days (Sutton, 2020e) (figure 6).

4. Current trends of Narco-Submarines in the Americas

Current trends of Narco-Submarines in the Americas are the emergence of very fast running very slender fast go boats – so called Very Slender Vessels (VSV) that are equipped with three or even four out board motors, mostly the widely available Yamaha Enduro (Sutton, 2020d; Sutton, 2020e) (figure 6).



Figure 6. Very Slender Vessel (VSV) Narco-Submarine that is a low lying speed boat type that runs fast from South America to Middle America

Source: Sutton, 2018, © H.I. Sutton

The aim of VSV is to run very fast and be difficult to detect as Low Profile Vessel (LPV).

They mostly are travelling in coastal waters in the Middle Americas. The VSV are produced in high numbers in the South American jungle and since the US is leading a War on Drugs they are often intercepted in 2018–2020 (Sutton, 2020c, 2020d and 2020e) (figure 7).

This suggests that the normal routes to Middle and North America are still supplied with very fast running Narco-Submarines (VSV) (figure 6 shows the VSV as type drawing, figure 7 examines one of the two found VSV and one LPV-OM as of May 2020 (Sutton, 2020e)).

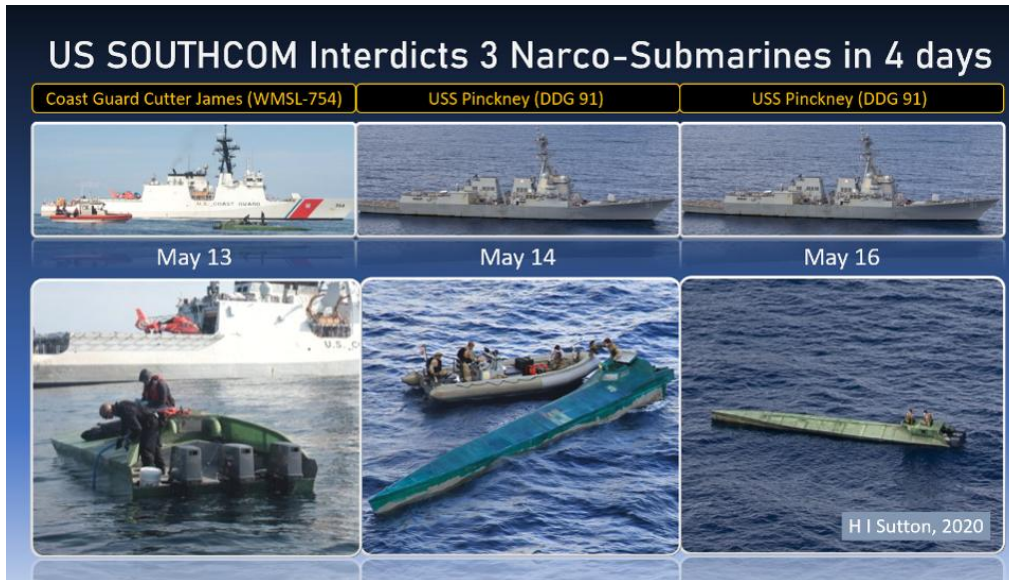


Figure 7. US SOUTCOM interdicts 3 Narco-Subarines in 4 days in May 2020

Source: Sutton, 2020e, © H.I. Sutton, 2020



Figure 8. Very Slender Vessel interdicted by the US Navy and US Coast Guard in the Pacific on May 14 2020

Source: Sutton, 2020e, © H.I. Sutton

5. Trans-Atlantic transport – novel developments in August 2020

Since more and more Narco-Submarines are located and intercepted by US Coast Guard and US Navy and other countries military and special forces in the Caribbean and the Pacific on journeys from South

America it is suggested that the cartels are seeking and using new and additional smuggling pathways from South America to Africa/Europe also by help of large Narco-Submarines that can deliver up to 3,8 tonnes Cocaine (Sutton, 2020c).

The Cartels are actively switching their smuggling pathways out into the Atlantic up to successful transits by help of Narco-Submarines to Europe (Sutton, 2019a, 2019b; Weerth, 2020). This Narco-Submarine is of the LPV-IM type and runs barely detectable with a large load of cocaine and a lot of fuel at a slow speed.

The design of the proven trans-Atlantic Narco-Submarine (Sutton, 2019a, 2019b; Weerth, 2020) has also been explained by help of drawings (Sutton, 2020i) (figure 9).



Figure 9. Transatlantic Narco Submarine, A Proven Case, November 2019

Source: Sutton, 2020i, © H.I. Sutton

New developments during summer 2020 suggest that the Cartels and Organized Crime are actively running their cocaine by help of Narco-Submarines out into the Atlantic Ocean where the ships have different option of how to distribute their narcotic cargo:

- Variant A: Going directly to Africa/Europe as has been proven;
- Variant B-E: loading cocaine on Yachts or Merchant vessels or Working boats such as Tugboats that are going in both ways (to the east to Africa/Europe or to the West to the USA/Canada (Sutton, 2020g) (figure 10).

All variants must be seen as new challenge to law enforcement agencies such as Coast Guard, Customs, Border Forces, the Navy and Military Forces but also for secret services.

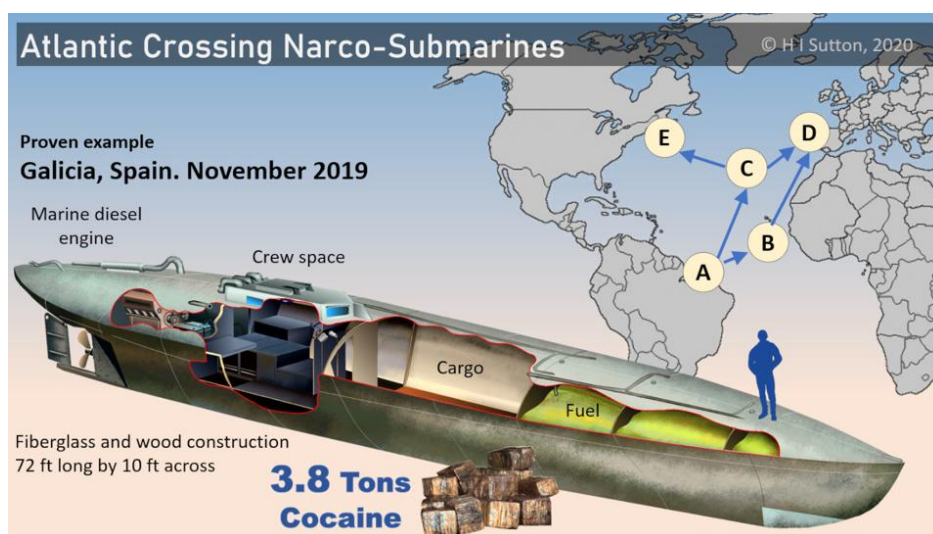


Figure 10. Proposed trans-Atlantic routes for Narco-Submarines from South America, August 2020

Source: Sutton, 2020g, © H.I. Sutton

An unusually large (long) Low Profile Vessel (LPV) has been found and intercepted on August 6, 2020 by law enforcement in Colombia that is thought to be a larger version of the successful Galicia example which is thought to be again an attempt to cross the Atlantic (Sutton, 2020g) (figure 11).

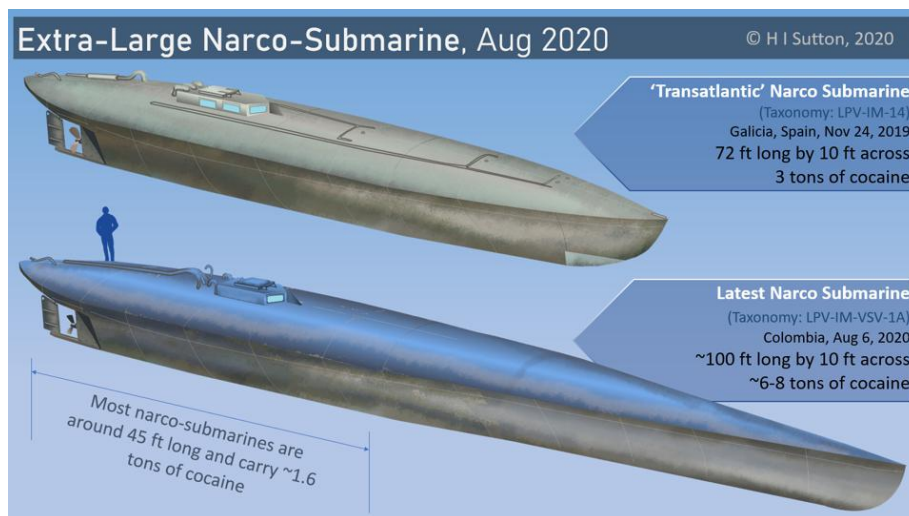


Figure 11. Extra-Large Narco-Submarine, August 2020 Submarine, for trans-Atlantic use?

Source: Sutton, 2020g, © H.I. Sutton

The newly intercepted very large Narco-Submarine was built to carry between 6-8 tons of cocaine to Africa/Europe (Sutton, 2020g, 2020i).

6. Known distribution pathways off Africa and Spain – a higher awareness is necessary

In November 2019 a Narco-Submarine was brought up off the coast of Spain transporting more than 3 800 Kilograms of cocaine (Guardian, 2019a, 2019b; Sutton, 2019a, 2019b; Weerth, 2020). This must be seen as a final wake-up call for law enforcement agencies in particular in Africa/Europe but possibly all around the world (Weerth, 2020).

Also in August 2020 (after intercepting the very large LPV that was possibly intended for Trans-Atlantic travel) a novel type of Narco-Submarine (go-fast boat) that is suitable for fast distribution of narcotics was found and intercepted off Spain – a so called *Ghost Glider* (Sutton, 2020h, 2020j) (figure 12). That custom drug-running vessel is again custom build by help of a tubular rigid inflatable boat (RIB) and a speedboat hull (Sutton, 2020h). It is different from the normal (open) go-fast boats (Sutton, 2020t).

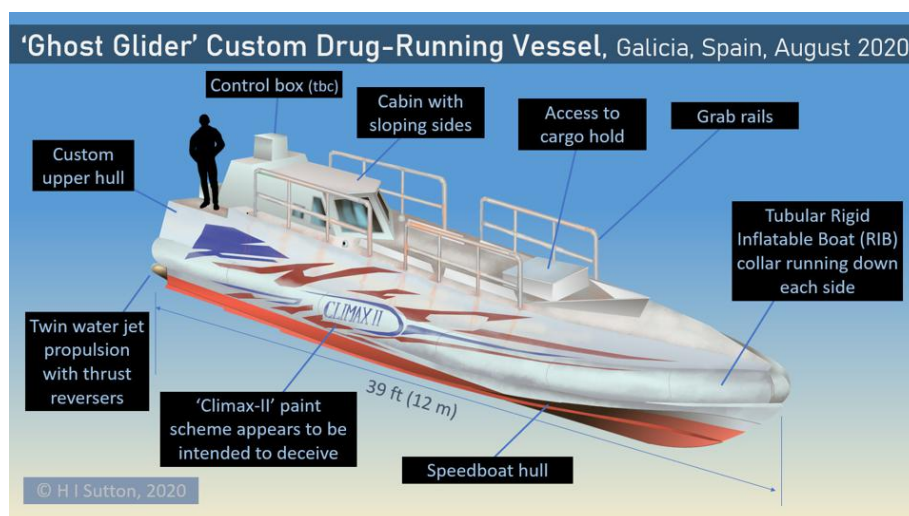


Figure 12. ‘Ghost Glider’ Custom Drug-Running Vessel, Galicia, Spain, August 2020

Source: Sutton, 2020h © H.I. Sutton

7. Weak states and vulnerable states in West Africa as distribution pathways

Smuggling pathways into Africa and Europa are known since the beginning at least of 2005 (figure 4) and the reports suggest that between 2005 and 2011 many seizures have been made (figure 3). The UNODC estimates the amounts of trafficked cocaine in West Africa between 17–48 tons in 2005–2017 (UNODC, 2013).

The amount fell later to numbers of about 30 tons per year but they are rising strongly again.

But novel proven ways of delivery of large amounts of Cocaine across the Atlantic Ocean are making the issue of interception and law enforcement off Africa and Portugal/Spain very acute and pressing.

What are the consequences and implications? Are Europe's and Africa's Coast Guards, naval forces (Marines) and customs forces equipped and prepared for such an unexpected naval warfare at their coasts?

Previously it has been established that the Cartels and Organized Crime are seeking in particular weak entry points for their drug pathway into Africa and Europe (figures 3, 4).

Established entry points have been Guinea-Bissau which had risen until 2012 as main-entry gate into Africa as a fully-fledged "narco-state" (Ibewke, Baumans, 2020). And the northern hub in West Africa consisting out of Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Cape Verde, the Gambia, Sierra Leone and Senegal (UNODC, 2013). One of the factors that are enabling the cocaine-flow into West Africa are direct Ro-Ro ferry lines from Brazil to Guinea-Bissau (Ibewke, Baumans, 2020) and Senegal (Roger, 2019; Soto, 2020; Voytenko, 2018; Voytenko, 2019; Voytenko, 2020). And even if a better law enforcement pushes back the trafficking efforts they are coming back and re-emerge (Roger, 2019; Soto, 2019; Voytenko, 2018; Voytenko, 2019; Voytenko, 2020).

First Islands to land and distribute the cocaine are the Azores and Cape Verde, where the cargo is transferred onto other ships. Off both islands high quantities of cocaine have been seized since the beginning of the 2000s – but also more recently in 2017 (BBC, 2017 and Frey, 2019). Another drug distribution hub are the Canary Islands/Spain, off Africa.

The West of Africa has been established to be an adequate entry point over weak law enforcement structures, comparably cheap prices for bribes and established smuggling routes (either by air travel, air cargo or through the deserts, possibly also along with weapons and migrants/refugees) north towards the Mediterranean and over it to Spain, France, Italy and elsewhere (figure 4). One major observation that must be underlined is that the major entry countries are either Portuguese or Spanish speaking (Csete, Sanchez, 2013).

8. Contributions of terroristic groups

One major contribution to the smuggling pathways into and through Africa apart from bribing, failed states and weak law enforcement is the contribution of terroristic groups in Africa, namely Al Qaida (de Andrés, 2008; Gaynor, Diallo, 2010; African Center for Strategic Studies, 2017), local jihadist groups (Gaye, 2018), the Hisbollah (Reuter, 2020) and local rebels in Senegal and Mali (de Andrés, 2008; Crisis Group, 2018). The terroristic groups are employing local tribes and gangs in their trafficking, also the Tuareg (Gaye, 2018).

Some countries, officials and governments are openly cooperating with terroristic groups (de Andrés, 2008; Csete, Sanches, 2013; Gaye, 2018; Crisis Group, 2018) – it is not only a matter of a wake or failed state but also a strategy in some cases (Csete, Sanches, 2013).

9. Entry points into Europe and the European Union

For Europe and the EU the South of Spain has been long established to be a major entry point for drugs trafficking, mostly due to the near proximity of Africa and the narrow street of Gibraltar. In Spain the custom made Narco-Submarines have long not been of importance because normal boats, fishing boats or ships are available and there is no need to run long distances with a large narcotic cargo.

One mode of action of the cartels and Organized Crime is simply to use go-fast boats (Kodiac's or solid hulled) that run over the Street of Gibraltar (sometimes even at daylight).

Examples can be found easily:

– Off the Costa del Sol (The Sun, 2018);

– Running ashore at daylight on June 3, 2020 near Gibraltar (no drugs were recovered, Sutton, 2020 m).

The Spanish Guardia Civil, Coast Guard and Customs Service are patrolling the Street of Gibraltar with normal helicopters and speed boats. They are prepared to tackle the normal thread of go-fast boats (Sutton, 2020 t).

Other episodes that are documented are evidence of the Azores/Madeira/Canary route:

- in 2001 a sailor brought about half a ton of cocaine from Venezuela to the Azores (Bremner, 2019), and more recently;
- 3,7 tons of cocaine seized on a tugboat (BBC, 2017);
- 500 kilograms of cocaine seized on a sailing yacht in the Azores (Frey, 2019);
- 1,5 tons of cocaine was seized on a sailing yacht heading for the Canary Islands (Maritime Analysis and Operations Center, 2020a);
- 4,5 tons of cocaine was seized in the Atlantic on its way to Vigo/Spain (Maritime Analysis and Operations Center, 2020a; Puga, 2020);
- 2,5 tons of cocaine was seized in Galicia/Spain (Maritime Analysis and Operations Center, 2020a);
- 1,2 tons of cocaine was seized on a sailing yacht from the Canary Islands to Galicia (Maritime Analysis and Operations Center, 2020b);
- 1 820 kilogram of Cocaine seized on a sailing yacht in the middle of the Atlantic (The Portugal News, 2020).

The cocaine trafficking to Cape Verde and West Africa (The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Senegal), and large seizures there are good documented between 2005 and 2011 (UNODC, 2013). In 2019 9,5 tons of cocaine were seized off Cape Verde and 1,9 tons of cocaine in Guinea-Bissau (Reuters, 2020). In 2020 the French Navy helped the Coast Guard of the Ivory Coast to seize 411 Kilograms of cocaine (Reuters, 2020; Maritime Analysis and Operations Center, 2020a).

Geographical facts must be considered when looking at the smuggling routes:

- the narrow street of Gibraltar (smallest distance between Africa and Europe, 14 kilometers);
- the difficulty to watch and control the rugged coast of Galicia in the North of Spain;
- the relatively short distance between Brazil and West Africa (1 600 miles or 2 600 kilometers) and regularly running ferries there;
- the danger and prospect of crossing the Sahara on camel back (the shortest distance is said to be 1 500 kilometers), or by help of either bought illicit airplanes or by regular air traffic into Europe;
- the cooperation of cartels and organized crime with Al Qaida and Bedouins and the idea of trafficking cocaine into Arabia/Asia.

10. Maritime Analysis and Operations Center (MAOC), Lisbon

The European Union has also started like the USA to better combat narco trafficking in a War on Drugs. In 2007 the Maritime Analysis and Operations Center – Narcotics (MAOC (N)) that is located in Lisbon/Portugal has started its operation. It is run by Portugal and co-financed by the European Union (Maritime Analysis and Operations Center, 2020c). The MAOC is an initiative by seven member states of the European Union: France, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Portugal and the UK and is co-funded by the Internal Security Fund of the European Union. The MAOC provides a forum for multi-lateral cooperation to suppress illicit drug trafficking by sea and air (Maritime Analysis and Operations Center, 2020c).

The headquarters is staffed by Country Liaison Officers (CLOs) representing the police, customs, military and maritime authorities of the participating European nations, as well as by a permanent observer from the United States through the Drug Enforcement Administration, Lisbon Country Office, and the Joint Interagency Task Force South. The European Commission, EUROPOL, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the European Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Defence Agency (EDA), EUROJUST and FRONTEX are all observers of MAOC (N).

In addition to the intelligence provided, MAOC (N)'s success can be attributed to other factors, such as the working model (Liaison Officers working together with full transparency and equality), as well as the civil-military connection and cooperation with West African countries. The MAOC (N) model, working practises and operations are conducted in a format which aims to minimise bureaucracy, whilst maximising operational activity. From 2007 to July 2016, MAOC (N) supported the coordination and seizure of over 116 tons of cocaine and over 300 tons of cannabis (Maritime Analysis and Operations Center, 2020c).

It is not understandable why nations that are highly affected by cocaine smuggling are not contributing to the MAOC, such as Belgium and Germany. That should be changed soon.

11. Discussion

Narco-Submarines are one major distribution way from South America to Middle and North America. In trans-Atlantic drug trade the preferred naval smuggling method is often by help of merchant vessels and yachts, but also by help of working ships such as tug boats.

The rise of Narco-Submarines as mode of smuggling rose in the Americas from 2007 on where the newest and best-use designs have been developed (Ramirez, Bunker, 2015; Ramirez, 2015a). But they keep evolving (Sutton, 2020a, 2020b). Up to 10,000 Kilograms Cocaine can be shipped in one shipment in costal near waters (Goudar, 2019).

This has been one of the success-model of the cartels in the Americas in order to smuggle drugs from South Americas to Mexico and from there to the United States of America.

A proven case of a trans-Atlantic smuggling journey from South America to Europe in November 2019 shows the ability and practice of cocaine shipments by help of Narco-Submarines in great quantities (here 3,8 tons) is a game changer: It must be a wake-up call for the law-enforcement authorities (Military forces and the Navy, Coast Guards, Border Polices and Customs Services) in Africa and Europe and around the World (Weerth, 2020).

The customs authorities, coast guards and regular naval forces must be aware of slowly travelling mostly submersed Narco-Submarines that are trying to land the remote coasts of Western Africa or Portugal/Spain/France/Ireland/UK. And they pose only one thread on top of weapons trafficking, refugee trafficking and narco smuggling by other modes such as aircrafts (Sutton, 2020n), and conventional ways of maritime smuggling.

Possibly the Narco-Submarines are not landing their load but re-distributing it on to Yachts or Fishing-Boats and Merchant Vessels off the coast. But a vigilant European Coast Guard System must be aware of such a new threat and be able to detect such Narco-Submarines. This is of even higher importance in the light of the cartels and organized crime regularly aiming at weak and failed states in Africa in order to facilitate the entry into Africa and from there to Europe and (possibly) further to Arabia and Asia.

Submarine Hunters must be employed from the naval marines of the countries in question.

That also applies for flying Submarine Hunter aircrafts, drones and the use of satellite technique (figure 13). The experience of the USA goes back to the 1990ies and the European and African countries must learn from the USA, its failures and successes.

The USA is successfully employing its Lockheed P-3 Orion Anti-Submarine (Hunting) Aircraft in the Americas (Sutton, 2020c) and also Boeing P-8A Posidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft, Airforce Boeing E-3 AWACS Sentry and Northop Grumman E-8 JSTAR Surveillance Aircraft (Mizukami, 2020). Furthermore it is using Coast Guard Cutters, US Marine Submarines and Special Forces, drones and of course other nations are also combating the Narco-Submarines (Sutton, 2020o) (figure 13).



Figure 13. Five unseen eyes hunting Narco-Submarines in the Americas

Source: Sutton, 2020o, © H.I. Sutton

The World Customs Organization (WCO) reveals the interaction of forces which succeeded in tracking down the first trans-Atlantic passage from Brazil to Spain in November 2019: it was not found by chance but a highly interwoven cooperation of police, coast guard and customs authorities from the USA, UK, Brazil, Portugal and Spain which made a three day joint initiative to search, locate and intercept the Narco-Submarine and was coordinated by the MAOC (Maritime Analysis and Operations Center, 2020a; WCO, 2019; UNODC, 2020). What can be learned here is that cooperation of different states and competent authorities is the key to successfully combating the global trafficking of narcotics. Furthermore it is of the utmost importance to cooperate: the USA, the EU and other countries in the Americas and Africa must work together. And continuous funding, technical equipment, training and manpower must be supplied to handle this ongoing task. The MAOC is funded by the EU and a cooperation of seven EU member states. It is unknown why Belgium and Germany are not contributing and participating. This must be changed rather sooner than later in order to have a powerful answer to pressing attacks by the cartels and organized crime organizations.

It is estimated that overall 5–15% of Narco-Submarines are found and intercepted currently, making 85–95% of Narco-Submarines to go through to the target with their narcotic drugs cargo of mostly cocaine (Mizukami, 2020). Other estimates are that up to 20% of Narco-Submarines are intercepted which make up to 80% going through the net and are reaching their target (Sutton, 2020s).

12. Conclusions

The direct smuggling from the Americas to Europe and Africa is not new. Major entry points have long been the north-western EU harbors in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and the UK, the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands, mainland Spain and Gibraltar, and the West of Africa. Direct smuggling of cocaine by help of large airplanes and by help of direct Ro-Ro ferry lines from Brazil to the West African states have been documented as well as naval smuggling by help of yachts and working (tug) boats.

The War on Drugs can only be won when all modes, techniques and ways of smuggling drugs into a country are known and understood. One way that is common in the Americas is the use of Narco-Submarines. A new Narco-Submarine epidemic is under way since 2018 when 35 Narco-Submarines were seized and in 2019, when 36 Narco-Submarines were seized (Sutton, 2020c). Until the end of August 2020 19 Narco-Submarines have been intervened in the Americas (Sutton, 2020q; Sutton, 2020s).

For the first time in November 2019 the trans-Atlantic smuggling of more than 3 800 kilograms of cocaine to from the Americas to Spain has been publicly well documented and widely discussed in the media and in law-enforcement circles (Guardian, 2019a and 2019b; Sutton, 2019a and 2019b; Weerth, 2020).

The WCO and UNODC later revealed the international cooperation to uncover that trans-Atlantic smuggling attempt (WCO, 2019; UNODC, 2020).

The new generation of Narco-Submarines is good enough to cross an entire ocean – either on its own power or being towed – the large fuel supplies and inboard motors suggest that they run slowly on their own). A very large LPV was intercepted in August 2020 that was thought by analysts to be again Narco-Submarine for a trans-Atlantic use (Sutton, 2020d).

This is and must be a wake-up call to all law enforcement and customs authorities in Europe, Africa and beyond. Apparently the drug cartels have found a suitable vehicle for smuggling large quantities of drugs into another continent. The routes are not new but the quantities shipped are rising strongly.

That raises the question of how well the law-enforcement side is prepared.

The Global War on Drugs has failed (GCDP, 2011). Some claim that this war cannot be won and is lost already and that narrative is poorly proven (Csete, Sanches, 2013) – in 2020 we must conclude to the contrary: it is proven and must be fought.

In the US the coast guard and Navy is openly combating the drug-speedboats and Narco-Submarines in the Caribbean and Pacific more or less successfully. So are other military forces in Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama and elsewhere – the list of Narco-Submarine interceptions is a list of joint effort (Sutton, 2020q; Sutton, 2020s).

In the Americas the experience with Narco-Submarines goes back to the 1990ies and currently the War on Drugs is fought by help of the US Coast Guard, US Navy, US Airforce and many countries also supplying national naval and police forces – the USA is openly contributing high tech with drones, US Airforce Aircrafts, US Navy Submarines (Sutton, 2020o). All experiences of the USA must be known, understood and shared.

But this new irregular way of naval warfare is only one way of trafficking narcotics across borders and into target markets – another fast, expensive and successful way is the use of Narco-Airplanes – which are not custom made self-made boats and submarines but either small airplanes or business airplanes such as a Beechcraft, Cessna, Hawker/Bae-125 or Gulfstream (Sutton, 2020n). The use of Lear Jets and Boeing 727 (in Africa) or Boeing 737 is not uncommon and are well known and documented (Bullock, 2018; Gaye, 2018). In particular by help of terrorist organizations such as Al Qaida, jihadists and the Hisbollah the cartels and organized crime organizations are transporting large cocaine quantities across the Atlantic or over the Sahara (UNODC, 2013; Alio, 2017; Gaye, 2018; Reuter, 2020).

The problem of Narco-Submarines has not been openly on the agenda in Europe and Africa since its appearance in the Americas (in the 1990ies), but it is since the end of 2019.

60% of the narcotic substances are entering the EU through the ports on conventional merchant vessel ways – but a growing amount is being smuggled through the West Africa/Spain route (EMCDDA, EUROPOL, 2020).

This is a call for a higher awareness of the West Africa/Spain route and the smuggling of cocaine and failed states and a joined military and law enforcement effort to combat the organized crime and terrorism in West Africa and off Spain/Portugal in order to minimize the cocaine trafficking into Africa and Europe (and possibly Arabia and other parts of Asia).

A view into the history of the development of Narco-Submarines is of importance here.

By chance the Narco-Submarine expert found new pictures of an early precursor of the Americas glass-fiber and wood built model on the island of Sri Lanka where it was built during the civil war and used as smuggling LPV (Sutton, 2020l; Sutton, 2020r).

The Tamil Tigers experimented with many attack boat and submarine designs (Sutton, 2016a) and these could potentially be used globally also for arms smuggling, e. g. in the Middle-east (Sutton, 2016b) or in Asia. So it finally is a question of egg and hen – what was there first and who invented it (South America or Sri Lanka)? But is this really of importance? They are where the money is.

Or in other words: regardless who invented it the Narco-Submarine technology will be employed by drug cartels, organized crime and terroristic groups wherever possible.

LPV and VSV are easily built and difficult to detect. They are one-way boats that can be lost and smuggle large quantities of narcotic drugs over even long distances. They are difficult to detect and can be combated with a large effort – and even then it is expected that about 80% will reach its target beach/harbor or transfer ship (estimates by Mizukami, 2020; Sutton, 2020s). In order to tackle this law-enforcement problem together all circles must be alert globally and help each other. And learn from the long experience and example in the Americas. And work together as the MOAC is doing with the authorities from the Americas and Africa. This must be seen as a call for awareness on this growing threat of smuggling to border forces, coast guards, customs services, police forces and regular naval forces as well as the secret services around the world.

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КОНТРАБАНДА КОКАЇНУ З ПІВДЕННОЇ АМЕРИКИ ДО АФРИКИ ТА ЄВРОПИ: ЗАКЛИК ДО БІЛЬШОГО РОЗУМІННЯ НАЯВНОГО ШЛЯХУ РОЗПОВСЮДЖЕННЯ КОНТРАБАНДИ

Карстен ВЕЕРТ,

головний офіцер митної служби

Головного митного управління міста Бремен,

доцент

Університету прикладних наук у галузі економіки та управління

carsten.weerth@gmx.de

orcid.org/0000-0003-3702-8456

Уже давно відомо, що наркокартелі Південної Америки та злочинні організації використовують напівпідводні швидкохідні катери, наркоторпеди та наркосубмарини для контрабанди кокаїну з Південної Америки до Мексики й далі до Сполучених Штатів Америки. Обсяги торгівлі наркотиками значно зростають, організована злочинність завжди шукає кращі та більш ефективні способи контрабанди в цільові країни. До американських контрзаходів у війні з наркотиками належить використання таких протичовнових технологій, як протичовнова авіація, підводні човни, кораблі берегової охорони. Оскільки війна з наркотиками в США та інших країнах Карибського басейну, Південної і Середньої Америки чинить значний тиск на наркокартелі, вони шукають нові шляхи доставки кокаїну на цільові ринки. У листопаді 2019 року вперше вилучено наркосубмарину, що транспортувала 3 800 кілограмів кокаїну з Південної Америки до Іспанії. Представлена стаття про розбудову потенціалу та довідкові матеріали досліджують газетні й офіційні звіти, а також наукові праці щодо наявних доказів нового трансатлантичного шляху поширення контрабанди з Південної Америки до узбережжя Африки та Європи. Зокрема, досліджено й ретельно обговорено наявні докази трансатлантичних подорожей наркосубмарин із Південної Америки до Європи й Африки та нові розробки влітку 2020 року. У роботі використаний ілюстративний матеріал, створений експертом із нерегулярної морської війни Г. Самтон (H.I. Sutton (Covert Shores)). У висновку в роботі наводиться заклик до підвищення обізнаності, пильності та кращої координації правоохоронних органів (берегової охорони, митних служб, поліції, військово-морських сил) щодо сучасного способу нерегулярної морської війни та контрабанди наркотиків із Південної Америки до Африки та Європи шляхом використання таких протичовнових технологій, як протичовнова авіація, військові кораблі, безпілотники, супутники, а також із залученням військово-морських сил, наприклад берегової охорони, у скоординованих операціях у Європі та Африці з метою боротьби з глобальною контрабандою наркотиків.

Ключові слова: берегова охорона, контртероризм, митна технологія, наркотрафік, заборонені наркотики, нерегулярна морська війна, правоохоронна діяльність, незаконний обіг наркотиків, контрабанда, протичовнові технології, виявлення підводних човнів, організована злочинність, війна з наркотиками.