



(U//FOUO) First-Ever Maritime Seizure of a Cocaine-Laden Self-Propelled Semi-Submersible

FROM: [REDACTED]
S2F California
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(C//REL) Earlier this week SIDtoday brought you [an article](#) about a major success against drug traffickers. Here's another success, with a twist -- the traffickers were using their own home-grown semi-submersible vessel!

(C//REL) On November 16, [SANDKEY](#) * intelligence led U.S. counterdrug forces to interdict a self-propelled semi-submersible (SPSS) carrying over four metric tons of cocaine. U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Steadfast* found the SPSS approximately 90 nautical miles southwest of Costa Rica near 0830N 08600W. The SPSS crew of two Colombians, a Guatemalan and a Sri Lankan are being detained aboard *Steadfast* in lieu of arrest and will be transported to the United States for prosecution.

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(U) US Coast Guard personnel atop the Colombian-made semi-submersible

(C//REL) HUMINT reporting from the Panama Express (South) Strike Force as early as January 2006 indicated that drug trafficking organizations were building self-propelled semi-submersibles along Colombia's west coast specifically to transport cocaine in the Eastern Pacific to Guatemala/Mexico. Measuring from 45 to 70 feet in length, the submersibles are made of fiberglass and covered with lead in an attempt to evade detection by U.S. technology. The emergence of SPSS use for drug shipments was spurred by both an unacceptable loss of cocaine by the traffickers during 2004 and 2005 to U.S. interdiction operations and the threat of the implementation of a 2005 Colombian government mandate that all fishing vessels be outfitted with commercial tracking devices.

[REDACTED]

(U) Inside the SPSS, bales of contraband can be seen on either side of the steering wheel.

(C//REL) While the success of the SANDKEY program rests with the collaborative efforts of all its members, the outstanding performance of the Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S) Tactical Support Group (TSG) during this event is especially noteworthy.

(C//REL) On November 11, the TSG in Key West, through routine search of the radio environment, discovered the primary frequency utilized by the participants in this operation. TSG analysts assessed the activity early as a probable SPSS movement. Subsequent SANDKEY reporting with direction finding and the drug traffickers' reliance on well-known codestrips enabled TSG analysts to refine the location of the SPSS and its intended destination off the coast of northern Costa Rica.

[REDACTED]

(C//REL) Pocket trash belonging to the Sri Lankan engineer may yield further exploitation opportunities.

(C//REL) This historic, first-ever U.S. interdiction of a SPSS is directly attributable to the men and women, who collect, report and analyze SANDKEY intelligence. This one seizure has prevented 7,000 lbs of cocaine, with an estimated street value of \$93 million, from reaching our streets.

(U//FOUO) POC: [REDACTED] S2F California, [REDACTED]

(U) Notes:

* The SANDKEY Community is a DoD/LEA (Law Enforcement Agencies) effort that collects and reports on illicit trafficking communications that have no reasonable expectation of privacy (unencrypted HF) to provide real-time intelligence on the locations and intentions of ships and crews engaged in multi-ton movements of narcotics.



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