Global COCAINE Trafficking

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SUMMARY

Increasing Cocaine Flow to U.S. and Global Markets

Increased cocaine movement to markets in the United States and throughout the world in 2015 and 2016 coincided with higher cocaine production in South America. Cocaine departing South America for worldwide destinations increased by at least 30 percent in 2015. Production rose by 28 percent, and increases occurred in the three major producing countries of Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. (Please see the appendix.)

United States Remains Top Consumer, Largely Supplied by Colombian Cocaine

The United States remains the largest consumer of cocaine and consistently has been responsible for about one-third of the worldwide consumption during the past 5 years. Forensic analysis indicates that almost all of the cocaine seized and analyzed in the United States was produced with Colombian coca. In contrast, cocaine markets outside of North America most likely rely primarily on Peruvian and Bolivian production.

Cocaine Reaching New Markets

Estimated cocaine production continues to exceed estimated worldwide consumption by a large margin. Consumption in Africa and Asia, where levels of cocaine trafficking and consumption have been low in the past, increased over the past 5 years. The amount of cocaine bound for the Eastern Hemisphere increased in 2015 and the first half of 2016.

ORIGIN OF ALL COCAINE

Unlike opium and heroin, which are the result of major production in both hemispheres, cocaine is produced almost exclusively in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia.

Global and U.S. cocaine consumption and the resultant overdoses may rise in the next year because of increased supply. An increase in availability may lead to an increase in retail-level purity and a decrease in price to attract more users. Cocaine-related deaths in the United States have increased by about 60 percent since 2010, according to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Most U.S.-Bound Cocaine Follows Pacific Route to Central America and Mexico

Central America and Mexico increased their dominance as the main transit corridor for U.S.-bound cocaine. This corridor accounted for more than 90 percent of cocaine movement northward from South America in 2015 and the first half of 2016; the Caribbean islands accounted for the remainder. A growing majority of trafficking in the Mexico and Central America corridor moved along maritime routes in the eastern Pacific.
Top Cocaine Production Countries

- Colombia: 495 metric tons
- Peru: 380 metric tons
- Bolivia: 255 metric tons

Number of Cocaine Users (by Country)

- Low
- High

Top Cocaine-Seizing Areas (outside United States)

1. Pacific Ocean
2. Colombia
3. Ecuador
4. Panama
5. Brazil
6. Spain
7. Atlantic Ocean
8. Peru
9. Mexico
10. Dominican Republic

WORLDWIDE COCAINE PRODUCTION, SEIZURES, AND CONSUMPTION
**COCAINE DEPARTING SOUTH AMERICA**

**Production, Exports Surge**

Exports from South America have risen after unprecedented growth in supply. More cocaine is available to depart the continent because estimated production has increased each year in each of the three major source countries since 2012. The amount has reached a total of 1,100 metric tons of pure cocaine in 2015, the most recent year for which data is available.

In particular, production surged in Colombia, which had a 60-percent increase in 2015. Although Colombia surpassed Peru as the primary cocaine source country in 2015, Peruvian production has continued to increase and has reached its highest level since the 1990s. Bolivian production reached its highest level on record.

In 2015 and the first half of 2016, Colombia was the main departure point for cocaine leaving the continent, followed distantly by Ecuador, Brazil, Venezuela, and Peru. Still smaller amounts departed the remaining South American countries, although the share of trafficking from these countries out of the continent has increased in recent years.

**Seizures Reach Record High**

South American seizure totals for 2016 were on track to set a record. Colombian security forces seized nearly half of the cocaine across the continent from January through June 2016; Ecuador and Brazil seized the next-largest amounts.
COCAINEMOVEMENT TOMEXICO,CENTRAL AMERICA, ANDTHE CARIBBEAN

Overview
In 2015 and the first half of 2016, cocaine movement from South America through Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean increased significantly. U.S. Coast Guard seizures along these routes increased by more than 50 percent from 2014 to 2015. Although most cocaine moving through the region was bound for the United States, the region also served as a transshipment area for cocaine bound for Europe and, to a lesser extent, for Africa and Canada.

Maritime Smuggling in Eastern Pacific Increased; Go-Fasts Dominate in Pacific and Caribbean
A greater number of trafficking and seizure events occurred in the eastern Pacific in 2015 and the first half of 2016. Go-fast boats were the primary conveyance traffickers used in both Mexico/Central America and the Caribbean, accounting for two-thirds of the cocaine documented departing South America for the Transit Zone.

Maritime trafficking from Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru along routes in the eastern Pacific Ocean continued to rise in prominence. The number of trafficking events in this vector more than doubled in 2015, and more frequent trafficking of smaller drug loads occurred in go-fast boats.

Cocaine Transiting Central America and Mexico
Ninety percent of the U.S.-bound cocaine departing South America transited Central America and Mexico in 2015. Most of the cocaine initially transiting Central America moves by land, maritime, and air routes through Mexico and eventually across the U.S.-Mexico land border into the United States.

Central America also served as a transshipment point for cocaine moving toward Western Europe. Cocaine moving along this route frequently is concealed within commercial containers.

Cocaine Transiting the Caribbean
The amount of cocaine trafficked through the Caribbean islands was at its highest level in 2015 and the first half of 2016. In the first half of 2016, the amount of cocaine moving through the islands was nearly double the amount from same period the year before. At the same time, the islands’ share of overall trafficking in the hemisphere fell relative to Mexico and Central America.

About two-thirds of the cocaine transiting the Caribbean in the first half of 2016 was destined for the United States. Mostly, the drug was smuggled through Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands; a smaller amount was headed directly to the mainland. Most of the remaining third of the cocaine transiting the Caribbean was bound for Europe, and smaller amounts moved toward Canada and Africa. Most Europe-bound cocaine moved in commercial maritime containers; a small amount moved aboard sailing vessels.

Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico Are Primary Transit Points
Most cocaine documented as transiting the Caribbean in the first half of 2016 passed through the Dominican Republic or Puerto Rico. More than 60 percent of the documented Caribbean cocaine flow in 2015 was bound for the Dominican Republic; traffickers subsequently transported most of this cocaine to Puerto Rico, the continental United States, and Europe. Dominican traffickers have well-established relationships with Mexican and Colombian trafficking groups.

High Number of Events to Eastern Caribbean Islands
Cocaine shipments to the Lesser Antilles in 2015 were frequent but small; most of these shipments were destined for Europe. The Dominican Republic and St. Lucia were the top destinations for trafficking events in the region.

Smugglers in the region largely used go-fasts, canoes, sailboats, and other small boats. Go-fasts continue to be the primary conveyance used in the eastern Caribbean, but the use of fishing vessels increased in 2015 and the first half of 2016.
TRAFFICKING TO MEXICO, CENTRAL AMERICA, AND THE CARIBBEAN

COCAINE MOVEMENT TO THE UNITED STATES AND CANADA

Trafficking to and Within the United States
The southwest border of the United States remained traffickers’ principal entry point for moving cocaine into the country in 2015 and the first half of 2016. A smaller amount entered by way of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands and air shipments and mail to the mainland.

Nationwide, cocaine seizures in 2015 were at their highest levels since 2010. U.S. Customs and Border Protection seizures increased by 57 percent from 2014 to 2015—the first year-on-year increase that has occurred since 2012.

Trafficking to Canada
In 2015 and the first half of 2016, traffickers moved more cocaine directly to Canada from Latin America, including Panama, Grenada, and Colombia, by maritime and air conveyances. Smaller amounts moved along overland routes from the United States. The most common method for importing cocaine to Canada in 2015 and 2016 was commercial air travel on passengers, among cargo shipments, and through parcel post.

COCAINE OVERDOSES REBOUNDING
Since 2010, cocaine-related deaths have risen by 62 percent and have reversed several years of decline from 2006 to 2010. There were 6,784 documented cocaine-related deaths in 2015, the second-highest total that has been recorded since 1999. A growing proportion of these deaths involved cocaine and synthetic opioids.

The number of cocaine users remains higher than the number of heroin users, and between 2014 and 2015, the number of new users rose by 26 percent, according to the U.S. National Survey on Drug Use and Health.
**COCAINE MOVEMENT TO THE EASTERN HEMISPHERE**

**Europe and Africa**

Colombian-origin cocaine most likely is capturing a growing share of the Eastern Hemisphere market because Colombian production is higher relative to Peruvian and Bolivian production. Most shipments from South America destined for Europe crossed the Atlantic in commercial maritime containers and entered by way of Spain, Portugal, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Additionally, one-quarter of the cocaine destined for Europe in the first half of 2016 first transited Mexico/Central America or the Caribbean in the first half of 2016, up from less than 10 percent in 2015.

Cocaine moves to the Eastern Hemisphere in commercial maritime containers and through couriers on commercial flights.

**Most Trafficking to Africa Since 2009**

Cocaine movement to Africa increased in 2015 and 2016. West Africa was the most common arrival area in the continent, accounting for more than 40 percent of the movement to Africa in 2015 and nearly all of the movement in the first half of 2016. The region accounted for less than 15 percent of movement to the continent in 2014. Trafficking events in 2015 were destined for 12 West African countries—the largest number observed. The top African destinations in 2015 were Cabo Verde, Senegal, and Cote d’Ivoire.
Asia and Oceania
The overwhelming majority of the cocaine destined for Asia or Oceania departed directly from South America. Asia- and Oceania-bound cocaine moving from Mexico and Central America also has increased in recent years. Although traffickers frequently smuggle cocaine to Asia and Oceania in luggage on commercial flights, most documented cocaine, by weight, is smuggled in commercial maritime containers. Cocaine demand in Asia and Oceania—led by Australia and China—accounts for less than 6 percent of global consumption. Most seizures in the region also occurred in Australia and China.

Middle East
In 2015 and 2016, most of the cocaine destined for the Middle East was either aboard commercial flights or in commercial maritime containers that transshipped Spain. Some of the shipments were concealed within the container structure or commingled within the main cargo, and the rest were in rip-on/rip-off loads.ii Traffickers may have intended to divert a portion of the cocaine to the European market rather than moving it all to the Middle East.

ii A rip-on/rip-off load is a method of transporting cocaine via commercial maritime containers in which the customs seal is compromised and replaced. Traffickers introduce duffel bags or luggage containing packages of cocaine into sealed containers carrying legitimate cargo. Unbeknownst to the shipping company, traffickers cut seals on the containers, place the bags within them, and replace the cut seals with either cloned seals or real seals that they have obtained.
APPENDIXES

COCAINE PRODUCTION ESTIMATES, 1999–2015

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ESTIMATED COCAINE CONSUMPTION BY REGION, 2015

- **22% Latin America**
- **34% United States**
- **22% Western Europe**
- **8% Africa**
- **4% Former USSR/Eastern Europe**
- **2% South and Southwest Asia**
- **2% East and Southeast Asia**
- **3% Canada**
- **1% Oceania**
- **1% Near and Middle East**