

## DRUG SMUGGLING IN BRAZILIAN PORTS 2023 : BRAZIL MAY HAVE NEW ROUTES FOR INTERNATIONAL DRUG TRAFFICKING.

OPERATION BY THE ARMED  
FORCES IS EXPECTED TO FORCE  
A CHANGE IN THE MODUS OPERANDI  
OF DRUG TRAFFICKERS



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The intensified patrolling and increased access control to the terminals of the Port of Santos, during the Law and Order Guarantee (GLO) mission that began in November 2023, could lead drug traffickers to change their drug distribution routes. According to the Brazilian Navy, weapons and other products that fuel organized crime have already been detected in other port complexes in the South and Northeast regions since the operation began.

Focused on combating drug trafficking, arms, and other illegal activities, the GLO mission is being implemented in Santos and the ports of Itaguaí (RJ) and Rio de Janeiro. Following the decree of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, GLO started on November 6, 2023, and will continue until May 2024, with the possibility of extension.

According to the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 56 tons of drugs have been seized since the start of the operation in the ports of Santos and Rio de Janeiro and at the international airports of Guarulhos in São Paulo and Galeão in Rio de Janeiro. Additionally, 432 suspects involved in international drug trafficking have been arrested.

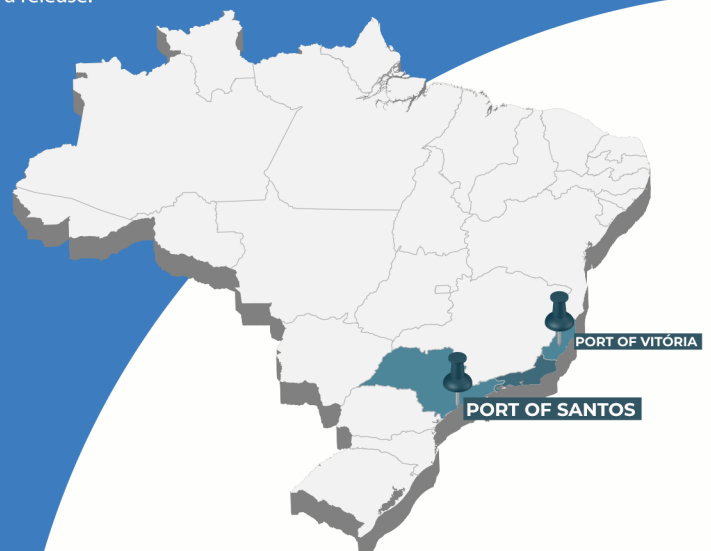
The work included inspections of 3,853 vessels, 3,343 containers, 19,891 cargoes, and 78,808 vehicles. Lastly, 86,863 passengers and 21,617 port and airport employees underwent inspections by authorities. The estimate is that this initiative has caused a loss of R\$ 48 million (US\$ 9.8 million) to organized crime.

Furthermore, according to the Brazilian Navy, aside from the financial loss, drug traffickers are already altering their drug distribution routes. "Since the first week of the operation, significant seizures have been made at the Port of Vitória (ES), along the coast of Salvador (BA), and in the triple border region in Foz do Iguaçu (PR). These results may indicate possible new drug routes. It's worth noting that although they're not directly under the GLO operation, they are safeguarded by forces ready to act against organized crime," stated the armed forces in a release.

For the Maritime Authority, the balance of the operation's first month is positive as the ports operate with reinforced security, functioning at full capacity. "Organized crime has been forced to retreat, being denied access to strategic positions previously used for illicit activities. Given the interagency action at the Port of Santos, it's possible that criminal organizations will seek new ways to operate to evade inspections. The major challenge is precisely to identify these new practices and counter them."

On the other hand, the Federal Revenue Service, which is primarily responsible for intelligence actions and drug seizures at the Santos dock, indicates that redirection to other ports, routes, and drug concealment methods is not a rapid process. According to Customs, records indicate that this process was already underway and intensified from late 2022.

"The decrease in cocaine seizures abroad in shipments leaving the Port of Santos, the decrease in the average weight of drug seizures in Santos, the decrease in cocaine seizures hidden in cargoes, the increase in seizures of cocaine concealed in the sea chest of ships, the lifting of bags containing drugs, among other methods, signal this migration process," stated the Customs Office of the Port of Santos in a release.



# TEMPORARY

For security consultant Luciana Fuschini, a retired Federal Police (PF) delegate, a change in the modus operandi of drug traffickers might occur. However, according to her, this shift will be temporary, and soon, the main drug distribution routes will be reestablished. "All this movement may cause temporary disturbance. Traffickers go where they find ease and greater vulnerability. And there are ports in the South and North with such characteristics."

Currently, drugs produced in South American countries use the Port of Santos as an exit route to the rest of the world. In 2022 alone, authorities seized 16,000 kilograms of drugs. Apart from the

large volume of cargo movements, which facilitates the concealment of narcotics, the Santos dock is sought after by drug traffickers due to the regularity of shipping lines to major consumer markets like Asia and Europe.

However, according to the consultant, there were no indications justifying the operation in Santos. This is because local authorities have been combating trafficking and have amassed hundreds of seizures over the past few years. She doesn't believe this to be the best way to combat drug trafficking.

According to Fuschini, the action holds a political nature and could have been implemented in areas with greater vulnerability and serious security

with greater vulnerability and serious security problems, such as in Bahia. "The Port of Santos continues to operate at security level 1, which is incompatible with the GLO," she stated. "This operation might hinder drug trafficking a bit, but things don't change with an overt operation. Combat involves investigation and intelligence," she explained. Law and Order Guarantee operations grant temporary policing powers to the Armed Forces, allowing them to act until normalcy is restored, temporarily and in restricted areas for a limited time. The goal is to collaborate with public security agencies to maintain public order, safeguard the population's integrity, and ensure regular institutional functioning.

# COOPERATION

During the GLO mission, the Navy collaborates with the Federal Revenue Service, Federal Police (PF), Federal Highway Police (PRF), National Waterway Transport Agency (Antaq), Port Authority, and the State Commission for Public Security in Ports, Terminals, and Waterways (Cesportos-SP).

The Navy maintains a similar stance. "It's important to mention that intelligence activity is fundamental for Operation planning and future results. Identifying new drug trafficking routes is a continuous and thorough task involving the analysis of the operational environment and the specificities employed by organized crime operating in the region."

According to Richard Neubarth, the Customs delegate of Santos, the greatest result of these operations will be the strengthening of collaboration ties among institutions so that even after the GLO ends, they continue working together, increasingly integrated, to achieve, within their competencies, the public interest.

# INSTANCES IN SANTOS BEFORE GLO

According to Customs, in 2020, 556 kilograms of cocaine were seized in the sea chest of ships at the Port of Santos. The volume increased to 493 kilograms in 2021, 752 kilograms in 2022, and 2.2 metric tons in 2023. The total seizures of the drug surpassed the mark of 7.1 metric tons last year.

Below are some examples of seizures by the Federal Revenue Service at the Santos dock in 2023. The volume confirms that various strategies are used by drug traffickers to conceal the narcotics.

DATE	WEIGHT (KG)	MODUS OPERANDI
01/16/2023	293	Drug concealed in the sea chest. Dive team needed
01/19/2023	69	Drug concealed in a vehicle inside a Ro-Ro ship
02/24/2023	68.07	Drug concealed in the structure of a refrigerated container with frozen chicken
03/03/2023	5	Drug concealed in a toolbox inside a Ro-Ro ship
03/13/2023	17	Tablets found at the terminal and others on the Ro-Ro ship
04/19/2023	117.79	Drug concealed in the sea chest of a bulk carrier. Dive team needed
05/18/2023	18.93	Drug concealed in the ship's cranes
05/28/2023	251.96	Drug concealed in the sea chest. Dive team needed
06/29/2023	75	Drug concealed in the ship's sugar crane
08/23/2023	247.65	Drug concealed in the sugar ship's sea chest. Dive team needed
09/11/2023	405	Drug found inside a truck on board a Ro-Ro ship

# EXPANSION

A potential expansion of the GLO's operational area to other Brazilian ports depends on the consolidation of the results achieved by the authorities involved in the mission at the ports of Rio de Janeiro and Santos. "The joint effort assesses the flow of goods and the incidence of illegal activities in each region, aiming to identify the main points of concentration for the efforts to be deployed in locations that present greater urgency and impact," highlighted the Navy.

The Maritime Authority further indicates that efforts are focused on operations at the ports of Rio de Janeiro and Santos, "as these locations play a vital strategic role in the country's economy and foreign trade. Additionally, the states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo have recorded the highest incidences of drug trafficking and arms smuggling, especially due to their large urban centers."

The research done by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in recent years stated that although port diversification had been noted before the pandemic, it gained significant prominence during its course and was notably evident in the nations where cocaine smuggled from Brazilian ports ended up.

Although Santos, located near São Paulo, the largest port in the country, continued to be a leading hub for cocaine trafficking, alternative routes to the north and south of the country gained popularity.

### PORT OF PARANAGUÁ

The southern Port of Paranaguá in the state of Paraná had various cases of transporting cocaine to Europe between 2019 and 2023.

In 2023, the drug seizures made by the Federal Revenue reached 21 cases and amounted to 1.81 tons of cocaine seized.

### PORT OF SANTOS

The Port is in the State of São Paulo, and its location is strategic about 80 kilometres of highway connect it to the city of São Paulo, the largest metropolis in the country.

The Port of Santos had several drug seizures in 2022, reaching more than 16 tons and in 2023, data available from the Federal Police, Federal Revenue, and media shows that the majority of drug seizures found cocaine on containers, followed by the vessel's sea chests. Once again, Europe is the hot spot destination for drugs or almost the only one if we carefully consider the information of intermediary ports of calls listed.

The majority of cocaine smuggled from the Port of Santos is hidden inside legitimate commodities containers, concealed inside container cooling structures and also has been discovered affixed to the vessel's hulls and inside sea chests by the divers. In other cases, in recent years, crewmembers assisted small boats approaching the vessel at sea and loading it with drugs.

### PORT OF RIO GRANDE

The Port of Rio Grande is one of the main ports of Brazil and Latin America, with 37 million tons of cargo handled in 2022. Based in the Brazilian south state of Rio Grande do Sul. In 2023, the drug seizures reached 0.339 tons, split into three incidents (Seachest, Main Deck and Container).

### PORTS OF ITAJAÍ, NAVEGANTES, ITAPOÁ, SÃO FRANCISCO AND IMBITUBA

The main ports of Santa Catarina, in southern Brazil, are Itajaí and Navegantes Port Complex, Port of Itapoá, Port of São Francisco do Sul, and Port of Imbituba. In 2023, Port of Navegantes had four drug seizures in containers, which amounted to 1.56 tons, and the Port of Imbituba had one sea-chest case with drug seizures amounted to 0.3 tons. The Port of Itapoá had two cases of drug seizures in containers, which amounted to 0.098 tons.

In another case, a passenger transport vehicle was approached with 0.327 tons of cocaine in a false compartment while undergoing inspection at the Port of Itapoá.

The State with one of the largest ports in the country, Santa Catarina, seems to have entered the international drug trafficking route. This perception, was reinforced by other cases in 2023 :

At the beginning of the last year (30.01.2023), a vessel departed from Port of Imbituba, arrived and dropped anchor at the Port of São Sebastião (State of São Paulo), and the Federal Police found 0.3 tons of cocaine attached to the vessel's hull.

On September 19, the Federal Police and the Brazilian Navy intercepted a fishing vessel sailing in the territorial sea of Brazil, in the northeastern State of Pernambuco, with around 3.6 tons of cocaine. The information from the Federal Police was that the vessel, manned by five crew members on board, departed from the Port of Itajaí on the North Coast of Santa Catarina. The Brazilian Government stated this was one of the largest seizures of the drug ever made in Brazilian waters.

## DRUG SEIZURE PORT OF SANTOS 2023

Date of seizure	Place	Cargo	Intermediare Destination	Final Destination	Weight (kg)
2023-01-16	Vessel- Seachest	Cellulose	Italy	Turkey	293
2023-01-19	Vessel- Ro-Ro -Vehicle	Cars	Not Available	Europe	69
2023-02-03	Refrigerated Containers(Hull Structure of Container)	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	58
2023-02-06	Refrigerated Containers(Hull Structure of Container)	Orange Juice	Spain	Saudi Arabia	53
2023-02-15	Boats at the anchorage area to attach drugs into the vessel's hull	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	582
2023-02-16	Container on the pier	Not Available	Not Available	Antwerp(Belgium)	565
2023-02-24	Container on the pier	Frozen Chicken	Not Available	Europe	68,07
2023-02-27	Vessel - Container	Peanuts	Antwerp(Belgium)	Poland	887
2023-03-03	Vessel -Ro-Ro-Vehicle	Cars	Not available	Europe	5
2023-03-13	Vessel -Ro-Ro-Vehicle	Cars	Not available	Europe	17
2023-03-15	Vessel- Hold	Soybean	Not Available	Antwerp(Belgium)	670
2023-04-11	Container on the pier	Paper Reels	Egypt	Algeciras(Spain)	236
2023-04-14	Vessel-Seachest	Not Available	Not Available	Germany	780
2023-04-19	Vessel-Seachest	Not Available	Not Available	Italy	117,79
2023-04-26	Terminal Docks	Waterproofing agent for concrete	Spain	Libya	199
2023-05-06	Refrigerated Containers(Hull Structure of Container)	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available	15
2023-05-09	Container on the pier	Coffee	Germany	Sweden	503
2023-05-17	Container on the pier	Metal Blades	Not Available	Antwerp(Belgium)	1.100
2023-05-18	Vessel's crane	Sugar	Not Available	Africa	18,93
2023-05-28	Vessel-Seachest	Not Available	Not Available	Antwerp(Belgium)	251,96
2023-06-07	Container on the pier	Corn	Rotterdam	Portugal	603
2023-06-23	Terminal Docks	Paper Reels	Not Available	Antwerp(Belgium)	561
2023-06-29	Vessel's accomodation	Not Available	Not Available	Nigeria	75
2023-07-02	Terminal Docks	Wheel Trucks	Not Available	Europe	40
2023-07-04	Container on the pier	Paper Reels	South Africa	Europe	130
2023-07-11	Vessel's accomodation	Not Available	Not Available	Germany	339
2023-07-14	Container on the pier	Not Available	Not Available	Genova(Italy)	120
2023-08-07	Container on the pier	Sugar	Not Available	Antwerp(Belgium)	405
2023-08-23	Vessel-Seachest	Not Available	Not Available	Morocco	247,65
2023-09-11	Vessel-Hold	Trucks	Not Available	Argentina	405
2023-12-19	Crewmembers	Bagpacs	Not Available	Antwerp(Belgium)	10

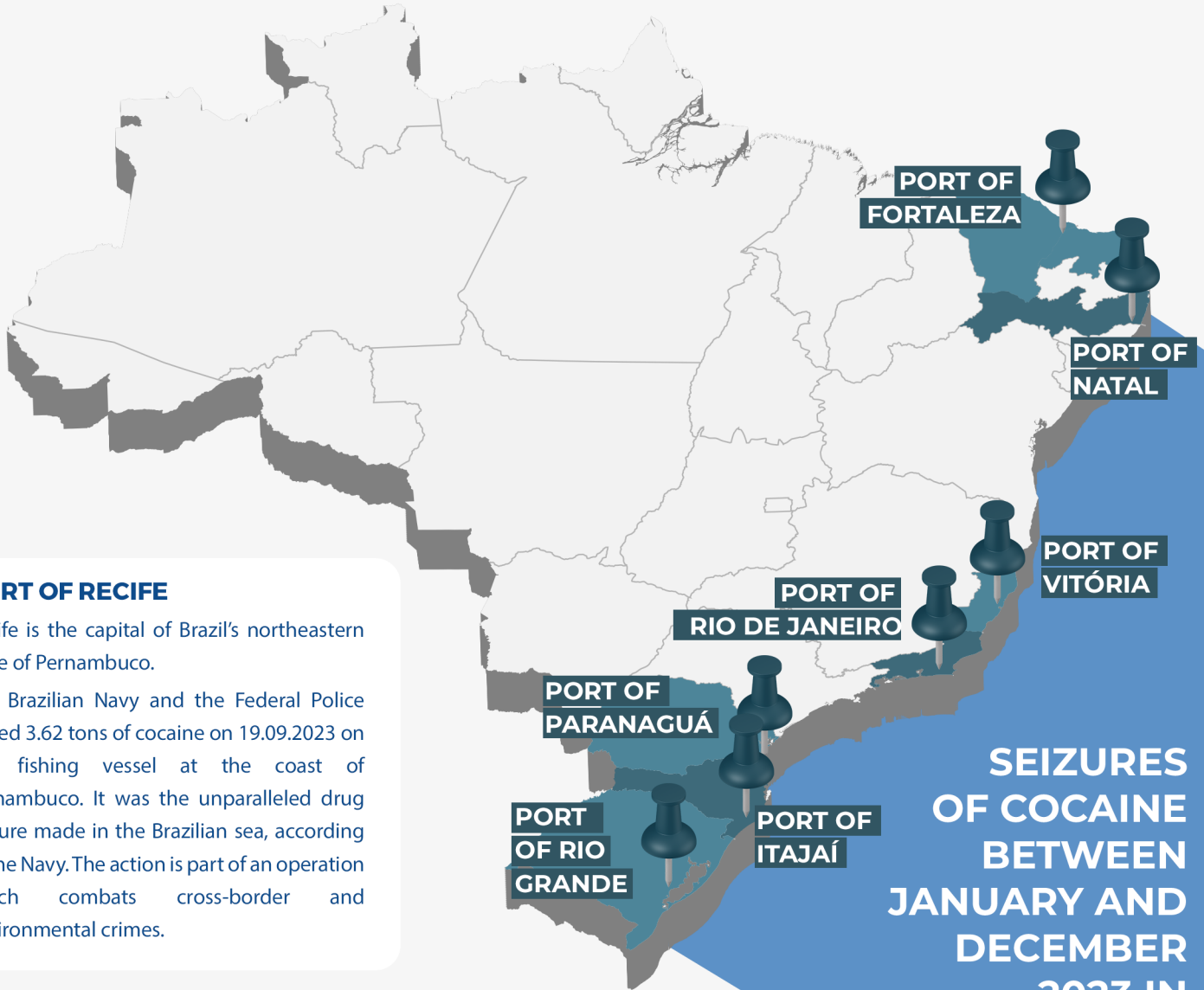
**Total: 9.424**

## PORT OF RIO DE JANEIRO

The port of Rio de Janeiro presented five cases of drug seizures in 2023 on containers/vessels and amounted to 1.747 tons.

## PORT OF VITORIA

Vitória is the capital city of Espírito Santo state in southeast Brazil. The 1.594 tons of cocaine seized on a ship docked at the Port of Vitória last November(05.11.2023) were the hugest quantity of drugs ever found on vessels in the ports of the State of Espírito Santo. Fifty-two bales of cocaine were hidden on board the vessel.



## PORT OF RECIFE

Recife is the capital of Brazil's northeastern state of Pernambuco.

The Brazilian Navy and the Federal Police seized 3.62 tons of cocaine on 19.09.2023 on the fishing vessel at the coast of Pernambuco. It was the unparalleled drug seizure made in the Brazilian sea, according to the Navy. The action is part of an operation which combats cross-border and environmental crimes.

## PORT OF NATAL

The port of Natal, in the northeast of the nation, became a hub for the shipment of cocaine to the Netherlands following the country's first-ever cocaine capture in 2019. In 2023, three incidents of drug seizures of cocaine in vessels destined for Europe(Rotterdam) amounted to 0.0314 tons.

## PORT OF FORTALEZA

The port of Fortaleza presented three cases of cocaine seizure in 2023. These incidents resulted in the seizure of 0.339 tons.

**SEIZURES  
OF COCAINE  
BETWEEN  
JANUARY AND  
DECEMBER  
2023 IN  
KILOGRAMS**