BORDER SECURITY REPORT

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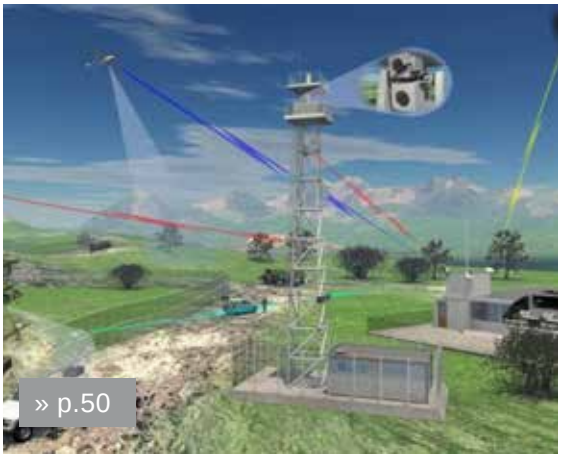
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Border Security Report is a bi-monthly electronic magazine and is the border management industry magazine delivering agency and industry news and developments, as well as more in-depth features and analysis to over 30,000 border agencies, agencies at the borders and industry professionals, policymakers and practitioners, worldwide.

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AI on the Border

In almost every aspect of our lives, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) promises to transform the way we do things, and security at the border is no different. From autonomous Command and Control Systems managing a wide variety of sensors and platforms such as camera's, seismic sensors and drones, to the vast task of managing the huge volumes of biometric and API/PNR data that are now mandated. The possibilities, advocates tell us, are endless. And for a change, this is one of those technologies that really does look ready to live up to the hype.

After all, many of us will have had a chat with Alexa and Siri most days, and they are very real applications of artificial intelligence (AI). Via Alexa, we can also control our smart TV's, washing machines and heating systems. But more pertinently, we can turn lights on and off, we can monitor our smart cameras indoors and out, set off alarms and call the authorities, if necessary. All remotely and with very inexpensive equipment.

So, what else does AI/ML promise at the border?

Probably the most obvious is around non-intrusive inspection (NII) systems.

Every single day, in virtually every international and regional airport, commercial port, ferry terminal and land border crossing point around the world, hundreds of thousands of scan images are taken by NII systems of bags, packages, vehicles, trucks and containers.

Every single one of these images must be examined to determine whether there are weapons, drugs, contraband etc. present. These examinations are performed by a vast army of highly trained border, customs and security officials.

This vast treasure trove of scanned images sits on local, national and sometimes transnational databases and are an obvious target for AI/ML.

AI uses algorithms to identify anomalies in the scanned images. By analysing patterns and comparing them to known threats, these systems can autonomously flag items that deviate from the norm for further inspection. And unlike humans, who get tired and bored, AI systems get better and better as they examine more and more images.

Of course, there many other border tasks that already lend themselves to the utilisation of AI/ML, especially around the analysis of movement of people and goods, but there are also a number of really innovative projects and applications that take border security into new areas, such as dialect recognition software, to identify the origin of people without papers, lie detector software for screening new entry applications, and checking of interview transcripts for worrying anomalies or contradictions.

In this issue we have put together a number of interesting articles focussing on just some of applications of AI that will affect how we do business of border management, now and in future!

Tony Kingham
Editor

ETIAS Fundamental Rights Guidance Board releases its first Annual Report

published its first Annual Report, marking an important step in its mission to safeguard fundamental rights within the framework of the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS). This report provides an overview of the Guidance Board's structure, organisation, and key areas of focus in 2023.

Throughout the reporting period, the Guidance Board concentrated on building internal capacity. It also supported the initial technical and organisational phases of ETIAS, including developing screening rules, establishing the ETIAS watchlist, and procedures for the processing of applications. The Guidance Board also provided expert input on specific consultations that arose during the year.

The period covered by the report was marked by the complexities of implementing ETIAS in a constantly evolving environment. As the system's development progressed, new and emerging fundamental rights challenges came to light. The Guidance Board has actively worked to identify these issues and address them, contributing constructively to the ongoing development of ETIAS.

Implementing a large-scale IT system like ETIAS, which involves multiple actors, presents significant challenges—not only in ensuring the system functions effectively but also in protecting fundamental rights. The Guidance Board, during its formative phase, has begun to address them and is committed to continuing this work in the future.

Throughout the reporting period, the Guidance Board concentrated on building internal capacity. It also supported the initial technical and organisational phases of ETIAS, including developing screening rules, establishing the ETIAS watchlist, and procedures for the processing of applications.

From mid-2025, individuals from more than 60 visa-free countries will be required to obtain a travel authorisation before coming to Europe for a short stay. The authorisation will be processed through the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS). The aim of ETIAS is to carry out a pre-travel screening of

visa-free travellers to determine whether they pose a security, illegal immigration, or public health risk.

The ETIAS ecosystem is complex and includes the ETIAS Central Unit hosted by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), ETIAS National Units located in 30 European countries, and the ETIAS information system developed and maintained by eu-LISA. In addition, the ETIAS Screening Board with an advisory function is established, composed of the ETIAS National Units, Frontex and Europol.

The ETIAS Fundamental Rights Guidance Board (the Guidance Board) is established by Regulation (EU) 2018/1240 (ETIAS Regulation). It has an advisory and appraisal function. The focus of the consultations is the impact of the processing of applications on fundamental rights, and the Screening Board may seek the advice of the Guidance Board on specific issues related to fundamental rights, including on the ETIAS screening rules and risk indicators (Article 33 of the ETIAS Regulation), in particular with regard to privacy, personal data protection and non-discrimination, cf. Article 9(5) of the ETIAS Regulation.

The full report can be downloaded at https://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/fundamental/Annual_Report_EFRGB_2023.pdf

AI IN BORDER MANAGEMENT: IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

By Dr. Erdal Düzdaban

The rapid advancement of information technologies has prompted significant discourse regarding the potential societal benefits of artificial intelligence (AI). By definition, AI refers to the capability of devices, guided by computer systems, to perform tasks traditionally associated with intelligent beings. Research on artificial intelligence dates back to the 1940s. A key focal point in this field has been the development of systems that can generalize, classify, and learn from past experiences, ultimately applying this knowledge in ways that are relevant to human needs.

Significant advancements are being made in the development of artificial intelligence (AI) technology, not only to enhance human economic welfare but also to improve applications in security domains. In the realm of crime prevention, data collected in compliance with legal standards are analyzed within the constraints set by law. This legal framework guides the interpretation of data and informs

the implementation of preventive measures aimed at reducing criminal activity. Law enforcement agencies leverage existing and interconnected data through the application of artificial intelligence (AI) to conduct comprehensive data analysis. This process allows them to identify meaningful relationships between various datasets and visualize these connections, thereby enhancing their ability to combat crime effectively. In the fight against crime, analytical approaches vary by country, influenced by the available data capacity.

The data utilized encompasses open sources as well as legally obtained information pertinent to criminal investigations. However, if legally collected data fails to translate into actionable insights for operations, it hinders the establishment of a uniform application standard across countries regarding data security and retention periods. Generally, law enforcement agencies are more effective in combating crime in border regions due to their significantly greater capacity and resources compared to organizations tasked with border protection. Often, border protection agencies share responsibilities with customs organizations operating in the same area.

Although legal frameworks outline the specific geographic responsibilities and operational protocols for these entities, issues related to authority, accountability, and coordination frequently arise, impeding effective collaboration. Border agencies routinely conduct risk assessments to prevent cross-border crimes and address potential threats in border regions. Within the Schengen framework, there is a degree of data sharing among member countries, and some nations participate in global and regional intelligence exchanges.

However, despite established internal guidelines regarding the reliability, preservation, usage, and coordination of shared data, achieving a cohesive approach remains problematic. Questions often arise about who can access this data, the extent of its utilization, and how it can be effectively integrated into operational strategies.

For instance, in drug enforcement initiatives, the outcomes of cooperative efforts, such as controlled delivery operations involving multiple countries, frequently have limited relevance beyond the participating nations. Uncertainties persist regarding the sharing of operational data with other countries, the sanctions imposed on individuals involved in these operations, and whether post-incarceration processes are communicated to relevant authorities across jurisdictions.

Additionally, information concerning individuals on watch lists in counter-terrorism efforts—despite not being subject to active criminal investigations—can still be utilized as operational data, raising further questions about privacy and the scope of its application. In essence, it is crucial to define the types of data subject to artificial intelligence (AI) and establish robust control mechanisms for this data.

At the European Union level, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), effective from March 25, 2018, provides a comprehensive framework for data privacy across all member states. This regulation establishes rules governing the use of personal data and its transfer to other countries and international organizations. In addition to general data processing guidelines, it also addresses specific scenarios, such as legal obligations in the public interest and legitimate interests,

ensuring a balanced approach to data protection.

In border areas, the question of whether to utilize intelligence information in addition to data on individuals previously involved in operations is a distinct issue that warrants examination. In order units primarily require information for tactical and operational assessments. However, engaging in long-term, probabilistic strategic evaluations, along with optimizing capacity for these assessments, may constrain the possibilities and capabilities of the relevant units.

Accordingly, the application of AI technology in data analysis for border management and security primarily supports tactical and operational decision-making rather than facilitating long-term projections. Its effectiveness is largely contingent upon the specific data it utilizes, enhancing immediate responses in the context of ongoing operations.

Let's consider an example of AI applications in data analysis within a hypothetical country (X). Border units in country (X) can access various data sources, including information from other security agencies, financial transactions through banks, watch lists, data from regional unions, and the INTERPOL database. Additionally, base station information can be incorporated into this data.

Currently, AI is utilized to query and list information based on specific criteria. While this analysis can provide descriptive insights into past events, it has limitations. For instance, if a person is detected communicating from the same base station as an individual on a watch list—whose connection to terrorism lacks supporting evidence—this alone would not suffice for making informed decisions. Relying solely on such data could infringe upon the individual's right to free movement.

AI technology, as it stands, lacks the capacity for human-like analysis of the aforementioned data. Given the current pace of technological development, it appears unlikely that AI will achieve a level of understanding comparable to human reasoning in the near future. Although AI can establish connections based on available data, it cannot replicate the nuanced decision-making that humans can provide. In the context of border management and security, if the analytical capabilities of AI are confined to existing data, concerns regarding privacy and personal data protection will inevitably arise.

In conclusion, while technological advancements should enhance physical operations in border management and security, they should not be the sole determinants in decision-making processes.

Dr. Erdal Düzdaban held various ranks within the General Directorate of Security of the Republic of Türkiye, dedicating his career to combating organized crime and terrorism. He also served as a contracted expert in border management and security for international organizations, including the OSCE secretariat and its field offices in Kosovo, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. His experience extends to UN Peacekeeping Operations in Kosovo and the IOM Nigeria Office, where he made significant contributions to enhancing security and cooperation on a global scale.

51 arrests in wide-scale operation to take down encrypted communication platform used by organised crime groups

During a global operation, authorities from around the globe took down an encrypted communication platform used for criminal activities such as drug trafficking, homicide, corruption and money laundering. The wide scale operation, supported by Eurojust and Europol, led to over 50 arrests and the seizing of financial assets.

Investigations into the communication platform started when authorities were alerted of a new encrypted service being used in Sweden, France, Spain and the Netherlands. Due to servers being located in France, French authorities started investigations into the platform. The platform's robust encryption made it ideal for criminal networks to use for their activities. It was mostly used for drug trafficking but also for other criminal activities, such as arms trading, homicide, robbery, kidnapping, and money laundering.

The communication platform is a fully anonymised service. Users can purchase the solution without any personal information. The platform uses three encryption standards and offers the option to send a message followed by a specific code that results in the self-destruction of all messages on the target phone. By using multiple private servers around the world, third party or government agencies have difficulty tracking the communication solution.

As servers were found in France and Iceland, the platform was administered from Australia and Canada, and financial assets were located in the United States, a global operation against the phone service started. A joint investigation team (JIT) between authorities from France and the United States was set up at Eurojust, the second-ever JIT with the United States. This allowed them to exchange information and evidence in real time. Authorities from the Netherlands, Sweden, Canada and Australia were also involved in the investigations. Through coordination among the authorities, hosted by Eurojust, a strategy to take down the encrypted phone solution was defined.

To facilitate investigations into the illegal activities using this communication platform, an Operational Taskforce (OTF) was established at Europol in March 2022 involving law enforcement authorities from Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United States.

A Joint Operational Centre was also established at Europol's headquarters, where representatives from the OTF members and Europol's officers provided support and facilitated the coordination of the simultaneous operational activities taking place around the globe.

The investigations culminated in a number of joint action days taking place across the globe against the phone service. 38 suspects were arrested in Australia, 11 in Ireland, one in Italy and one in Canada. A drug lab was dismantled in Australia and weapons, drugs and over EUR 1 million euro is cash was seized globally so far. Further actions are expected as the investigation progresses.

The following authorities were involved in the actions: France: Cybercrime unit Prosecutor's office - JUNALCO (National Jurisdiction against organised crime); Gendarmerie Nationale - C3N Cybercrime Unit; Netherlands: National Police; Sweden: Swedish Prosecution Authority; Swedish Police Authority; Australia: The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions; Canada: Public Prosecution Service of Canada; Iceland: Director of Public Prosecution; National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police; Reykjavik Metropolitan Police; United States: Department of Justice; Federal Bureau of Investigation

SWEDISH KID SOLDIERS

By Lina Kolesnikova - Security and Crisis Management Expert

On 12th of August the Danish Minister of Justice Peter Hummelgaard warned that Denmark would put pressure on Sweden to contain cross-border gang violence. Particularly, it concerned armed Swedish teenagers acting as child soldiers in criminal turf wars. The Minister called it “a scary phenomenon” that Danish gangs are hiring young Swedes to do “their dirty work”. “There are people sitting as masterminds in the non-western world — in Lebanon, in Dubai, in Iraq — pulling the strings and starting conflicts with each other in Copenhagen. Quite simply, we don’t want to put up with that”, Hummelgaard said.

In social media groups, such as the encrypted Telegram or via other covert channels, “orders” are made for killings or explosions. In one of its post, SVT (Swedish TV channel -LK) has shown, for example, how a “client” is looking for a person who is willing to throw a grenade into a house in Denmark. The payment promised is 30 000 - 40 000 Swedish kroner, corresponding to approximately 19 500 - 26 000 Danish kroner (approximately 2 600 - 3 500 euro – LK).

Since last April, there have been 25 incidents in Denmark, involving teenagers from Sweden hired by criminal gangs in Denmark (data for August 2024 – LK). In one of

the latest cases, one of the gang members was killed.

Denmark is not alone suffering from this new phenomenon of cross-border "services" associated with free movement of people across Europe and beyond. Gangs from Sweden got implicated in other criminal incidents occurring in recent months in Norway, Turkey and Iraq.

Denmark has seen a rise in violence on its soil by Swedish gang members in recent months and the trend is a spillover from its northern neighbour which has by far the highest per capita rate of gun violence in the EU.

In August Danish police has begun an active monitoring of passengers arriving by train from Sweden. The Danish government considered to employ facial recognition technology at the Øresund Bridge (the bridge between Denmark and Sweden - LK) to speed up search and investigations that were done manually. Denmark also tightened border controls with Sweden after that surge in shootings. To set faster intelligence gathering and controls, the Minister of Justice announced that Danish police would further intensify their cooperation with the Swedish police by permanently stationing an officer with the Swedish police to ensure even more permanent and effective intelligence cooperation.

Cross-border youngster's criminal services became a prominent theme attracting attention of politicians in the two countries. Some Danish political parties demanded to introduce a full-scale border control between the two countries. The Minister of

Justice believed this measure as unnecessary as there is nothing in these circumstances that suggests, in his opinion, that border control would be an effective tool. On the contrary, he assumed, the resources spent on establishing border control at the Øresund Bridge are far better spent on equipping the police with even more manpower and technology power able to "decrypt" or to "penetrate" the information channels used by criminals. The objective would be to see what is being ordered and who offers what services, and then stop (prevent) the activity before anyone even tries to carry it out. The Minister thinks the adopted anti-gang measures, defined in packages, a good tool to keep gang crime down in Denmark, "so that it does not grow to the unmanageable level that you see in Sweden or the Netherlands". The latest package - the so-called gang package four - came into force on 1st of July 2024.

According to the assessment by the Danish Ministry of Justice, the latest wave of violence involving Sweden-originated criminal services supply is the out-product of the organized gang LTF (Loyal to Familia) conflicting with another yet unknown network, and both these groups procuring criminal services of Swedish teenagers. Loyal To Familia was judged to be an illegal association by Copenhagen City Court in 2018. The Supreme Court upheld the decision in 2021. However, the group is still active. As in most gang conflicts, the battle for the drug market seems to be central to that conflict.

Swedish child soldiers

EU statistics agency Eurostat reports that 25 people aged 15-24 were killed in gun violence in Sweden in 2021, that is the top two position in the EU only to France, which had 40 such deaths across a population six times the size of Sweden's. In Sweden, there were cases of children as young as 11 being hired to kill. There

were 149 bomb attacks last year in Sweden. Ordinary people are more and more increasingly caught in the crossfire of gangs.

According to the police report last year Sweden has had about 14,000 active gang criminals and an additional 48,000 people loosely affiliated with gangs.

The growing involvement of children and young people into criminal activities in Europe is striking. Sweden continues to make headlines for the last five years as a story of "something went horribly wrong" in the country previously famous for its security and social cohesion. In Uppsala, for example, local police survey had indentified that a quarter of criminal gangs members are younger than 18.

Important fact that demands attention is that both victims and perpetrators are mainly boys and men with foreign background. They are often 2nd and 3rd generation in families who came to Sweden as migrants or refugees mainly from the Middle East, Africa, Afganistan, Turkey and other places. Swedish Prime Minister Kristersson has blamed the rise in organised crime on "naivety" over immigration and an "irresponsible immigration policy and failed integration".

In regular political debates, some parties attribute the rise of "immigrant" criminality and violence to lack of social support offered to them. But, for the case of Sweden, that does not fly. In that case, there are no socio-economic explanations like absence of social elevators, poor urban areas, unaccesibility of education etc. Sweden is a country with one of the best social welfare systems in the world. The Swedish system provides plenty of opportunities for newcomers to integrate into society. Surprisingly, the Swedish situation shows exactly the opposite, as it is the existing social welfare system that is blamed for an unwilligness of immigrants to build a new life and to integrate in the "normal" activities in the society. So, it looks as if, first, there is not enough "will", and then, possibly, "explanations" are attached to that lack to turn things around, such as not enough social support, or too much social support, etc.

The lack of "will" is a complex phenomenon combining "no need, it is good enough as it is", "they (locals) are to be played and are natural victims to be robbed off", and other discouraging agendas. Largely, the lack of "will" comes from the environment (family, friends, street life, …) in which kids grow. Most young gang members have been on social services' radar for years.

Second important fact is a popularity of criminal ultra-violent gun crime culture, which is associated with a certain prestige in urban areas with predominately migrant population. Swedish journalists note that "these kids have been trained by criminals -- they live, eat and breathe a culture of violence". "Robin Hood"-isation of criminals, whatever the term might be translated to in the concerned cultures, according to the Swedish police there are more and more children of middle-class families who are involved in criminal activities.

One of the examples would be a high popularity of Snabba Cash TV series among these groups. The series give the charming image of a member of a gang and an exciting life of gang environment. That is particularly true in environments where money is the main driver, and other social bonds are underdeveloped.

Thirdly, legal systems in the EU, and Sweden in particular, are not prepared for under-legal age criminals. Anyone under 15 years

old is immune from prosecution in Sweden and cannot be detained by police. Swedish legislation was not designed for gang wars and child soldiers. Gangs now recruit children to carry out contract killings -- some younger than 15 -- knowing they can't be jailed. They are paid smaller amounts for contract murder, but at the same time youngsters are given possibilities to move upwards in criminal hierarchies (rite of passage).

There are several reasons why young Swedes might be willing to engage in criminal activities. Firstly, the penalty for murder when you are under 18 is typically four years in Sweden, so they are used to the fact that the consequence is not very great.

Secondly, having committed a murder is associated with prestige, which gives them the opportunity to move up in the gang hierarchy. It is an example of how to quickly obtain capital by aligning with violent forces. Something that has great value in the gang environment.

Finally, would be the fact that getting involved in criminal gang assures social bonds to a group of people, i.e., the status of being part of something. Youngsters have more protest in their blood than wisdom and combining that with no or weaker social bonds in the regular society, lead to teenagers become more violent more easily easier, with less convincing needed.

Children and teenagers in criminal groups of Europe

Powerful criminal gangs often use children to commit murders because

they receive lenient sentences.

Criminal organisations actively use children under 14 as drug runners (or, in extreme cases, as killers) because minors are immune from prosecution. On January 15 2018, around 2,000 people took to the streets of Naples to protest against a wave of violent attacks by gangs of youths, many of who were minors.

Italian police and prosecutors have been successful in prosecuting and jailing members of organised crime; as a result, these organisations have searched for new opportunities in recruitment.

This is nothing new – child soldiers have been routinely recruited or coerced to fight, most notably in Africa. But the latest novelty is that children are being allowed to reach higher ranks in criminal groups.

Due to a lack of responsibility from families and no perception of responsibility to society and country, youngsters are often left to learn from whatever is around, and more extremist and criminal activists take advantage.

In conclusion, cross-border services (private armies, mercenaries, criminals …) have become a reality.

However, the current situation in Scandinavian countries is very interesting. We have seen several cases of hot disputes over the situation of Schengen internal borders before (France vs Italy, Switzerland vs France and Italy, Germany vs Poland etc) but they are all about illegal migrants. This is a first time we see that inability of one EU state to cope with its internal security issues forcing its neighbour state to reflect on border protection. It is easy to suggest that we might see more and more similar discussions in future.

We Will Do More to Fight Human Trafficking in Nigeria – NAPTIP DG Assures EU Member States

Director General of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), Binta Adamu Bello, OON, has assured European Union Member States that the Federal Government of Nigeria through NAPTIP, shall continue to double its efforts, strategies, and policy implementation in line with the priorities of the Renewed Hope Agenda of the present administration to tackle all forms of human trafficking in the Country.

She stated this while speaking at the European Union (EU) Member States' Immigration Liaison Officers (ILOs) meeting, held at the premises of the EU Delegation to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Abuja.

The meeting was presided over by the EU Ambassador-Designate, Gautier Mignot, with the Liaison Officers of all Member States' of the EU in attendance.

The main purpose of the meeting was to strengthen the existing good cooperation with NAPTIP and give the Agency the opportunity to exchange ideas directly with the EU Member States on issues of human trafficking as well as highlight NAPTIP priorities for the future.

Addressing the participants, the Director General who stated that her administration shall build on the existing policies and counter-trafficking programme of her predecessors, told the EU Member States' that she will deepen actions and do more in line with the National Action Policy on Human Trafficking in Nigeria, to smoke out human traffickers out of the Country.

The NAPTIP boss said, "We will do more in line with the National Action Plan (NAP) in the fight against human trafficking in Nigeria and tying it to the priorities of the present administration and in line with the Renewed Hope Agenda. More attention would be paid to the following areas:

"Developing a more efficient and cooperative system for the identification and return of trafficking victims in the EU countries; Improved relations with partners;

"Construction of six (6) Victims Support Centers (shelters with skills acquisition facilities) one in each of the 6 geopolitical Zones of the country for returned and rescued victims of trafficking to cater for their maximum rehabilitation, recovery, and reintegration into society.

"Renovation and supply of equipment to existing shelters; Conducting joint cross-border operations targeting trafficking routes; Expansion of corporations with neighboring countries; Capacity Building of personnel especially Investigators and Intelligence officers; Counsellor and care Givers; and Prosecutors;

"Improve the technology capacity for tracking and analyzing trafficking data and forensics. Improve NAPTIP's capacity to respond to emerging challenges such as cyber-trafficking and the use of digital platforms for recruitment and exploitation.

"Developing a common front to prevent, fight and suppress trafficking in persons especially women and children through impactful and evidence-based awareness campaigns; Promoting friendly co-operation amongst parties with a view to attaining streamlined Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA), end-to-end investigation, prosecution of traffickers and asset recovery;

"Improved research activities focused on combating human trafficking; Evacuation of Nigerian Victims of trafficking trapped in different countries that are willing to return home"

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28 arrested and cocaine lab dismantled in hit against drug traffickers

On an action day conducted across Romania, law enforcement executed 40 search warrants and intercepted 19 members of a criminal network engaged in migrant smuggling. Europol supported this operation, which is the result of a common investigation between Hungarian, Italian, Romanian and Slovenian authorities. The criminals concealed the migrants among merchandise or squeezed them into compartments in modified vehicles, displaying the utmost disregard for their safety and well-being.

Among those detained are the five Romanian leaders of the group, who are believed to have been responsible for the logistics and management of the criminal activities. The other suspects were criminal associates in charge of recruiting drivers or accommodating migrants in so-called safe houses, two of which were found in Italy. The criminal group is suspected of having been involved in over 30 smuggling incidents since January 2023, illegally transporting at least 726 migrants across European borders.

8 arrested for smuggling migrants across the Turkish-Bulgarian border

Bulgarian authorities, supported by Europol, dismantled a criminal network smuggling migrants from Türkiye via Bulgaria and Serbia towards Western Southern Europe. The investigation, involving Greek and Romanian authorities, was conducted in the framework of a regional Operational Task Force set up to investigate migrant smuggling networks using Bulgaria as a transit country.

The investigation was initiated at the beginning of 2023 when Bulgarian authorities found migrants smuggled by this network. So far, national authorities have detected 15 smuggling incidents. The smuggling network allegedly facilitated the illegal secondary movements of over 700 irregular migrants towards other parts of the EU. The suspected ringleaders, predominantly Syrian nationals, coordinated the smuggling activities while maintaining contacts with smugglers and hawaladars in Turkey and Greece, as well as in other countries along the smuggling route. The suspects facilitated the transportation of migrants from the Turkish-Bulgarian border to accommodations in the region of Sofia. After a short stay there, they were further transported to the Bulgarian-Serbian border.

19 migrant smugglers detained in Romania

On an action day conducted across Romania, law enforcement executed 40 search warrants and intercepted 19 members of a criminal network engaged in migrant smuggling. Europol supported this operation, which is the result of a common investigation between Hungarian, Italian, Romanian and Slovenian authorities. The criminals concealed the migrants among merchandise or squeezed them into compartments in modified vehicles, displaying the utmost disregard for their safety and well-being.

Among those detained are the five Romanian leaders of the group, who are believed to have been responsible for the logistics and management of the criminal activities. The other suspects were criminal associates in charge of recruiting drivers or accommodating migrants in so-called safe houses, two of which were found in Italy. The criminal group is suspected of having been involved in over 30 smuggling incidents since January 2023, illegally transporting at least 726 migrants across European borders.

EUROPOL

International crackdown nets synthetic drugs worth USD 1.05 billion

An international operation coordinated by INTERPOL against drug trafficking in Southeast Asia led to record seizures of synthetic drugs valued at some USD 1.05 billion.

With the value of drugs seized stemming from just 58 seizures, the operation highlighted the considerable profits crime networks make from the synthetic drug market and the threat posed to all regions by transnational organized crime groups.

The operation involving Australia, Cambodia, Korea, Myanmar, Thailand, the United States, and Vietnam, also revealed information about the evolution of trafficking routes and threats. A seizure of nearly 900 kg of crystal methamphetamine in Sydney was traced back to the United States.

This aligns with intelligence suggesting that the source of Australia's methamphetamine is shifting from Southeast Asia to North America, driven by closer ties between Australian transnational organized crime groups and Mexican cartels, indicating changes in global drug trafficking routes.

Increased transregional organized crime threats focus of INTERPOL Americas meeting

INTERPOL's Americas Regional Conference has ended with a call for enhanced cooperation against the multiple threats posed by organized crime networks and the associated increase in violence.

INTERPOL Vice President for the Americas, Valdecy Urquiza, who chaired the conference said, "Transnational crime networks exploit the gaps between our systems and jurisdictions, and they grow stronger where we are divided. Through our combined efforts, we can close these gaps. This conference has provided an opportunity to forge new partnerships, reinforce existing ones, and strengthen the bonds of trust and cooperation that are critical to fighting crime on a regional and global scale."

During the meeting, delegates were also updated on results of cooperation via INTERPOL in combatting financial crime and addressing cyber and cyber-enabled crime, as well as capacity building development programmes in the region.

Police recover over USD 40 million from international email scam

A global stop-payment mechanism developed by INTERPOL has helped Singapore authorities make their largest ever recovery of funds defrauded in a business email compromise scam.

A commodity firm based in Singapore filed a police report stating that they had fallen victim to a business email compromise scam, in which a scammer obtains access to or impersonates a business email account to deceive employees into transferring money to their bank account.

The firm had received an email from a supplier requesting that a pending payment be sent to a new bank account based in Timor Leste. The email, however, came from a fraudulent account spelled slightly different to the supplier's official email address.

Unaware, the firm transferred USD 42.3 million to the fake supplier, only discovering the crime four days later when the genuine supplier said it had not been paid.

INTERPOL

OSCE and Spain's National Police enhance capacities of Moldovan border police officers to detect forged documents and impostors

The OSCE's Transnational Threats Department, in partnership with the Spanish National Police (SNP) and close co-operation with the OSCE Mission to Moldova, held a two-week training course in Chișinău on identifying forged documents and impostors at border crossing points. Nineteen officers, including 12 women and seven men, from the Moldovan Border Police participated in the course, which included both an introductory and an advanced component.

Participants were briefed on new trends in the forgery of documents, refreshed their knowledge on the international regulations for the issuance of travel documents, and learned new techniques for verifying the identity of impostors in operational settings, such as at border crossing points. They also worked with real travel and identification documents analysing the techniques for forgery that lead to traveling on a stolen identity.

Regional anti-trafficking conference concludes with strong commitment to combat human trafficking in supply chains across South-Eastern Europe

A regional conference addressing human trafficking in global supply chains, hosted by the OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and the OSCE Mission to Montenegro, in collaboration with the Ministry of Interior of Montenegro, concluded today in Budva, Montenegro. The event brought together around 40 participants from nine countries, including representatives from government agencies, embassies, businesses, chambers of commerce, trade unions, and civil society organizations. Representatives from the EU also attended. Key outcomes included updating stakeholders on the latest developments in integrating human rights due diligence into legal and regulatory frameworks in the EU and globally and their implications for the private sector, including beyond EU borders. Best practices from countries outside South-Eastern Europe, including Germany and Norway, were also shared.

"The EU's new laws on due diligence and forced labour present a unique opportunity for non-EU countries to lead and gain trade advantages by adopting ethical practices, particularly in combating human trafficking for labour exploitation. It's not just compliance—it's good business," said the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Human Trafficking, Dr. Kari Johnstone.

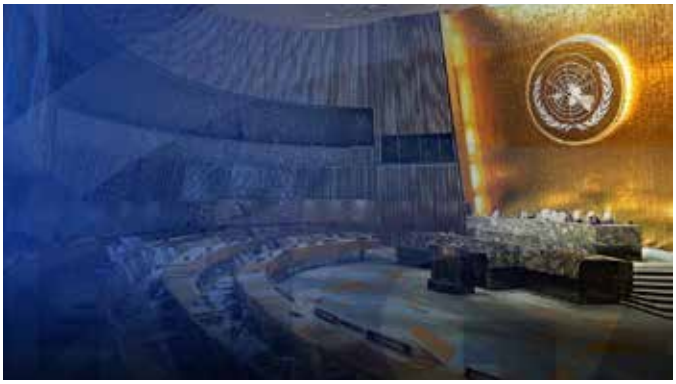
OSCE hosts training on analysis in countering the financing of terrorism for Montenegro

As part of a comprehensive initiative to bolster counter-terrorism efforts in Montenegro, the OSCE course brought together six experts, including three women and three men, from five Montenegrin agencies responsible for the fight against terrorism, equipping them with essential skills to combat the evolving threat of terrorism financing.

Participants explored key aspects of intelligence work, such as the intelligence cycle, grading systems, data sanitization, and dissemination methods. Through hands-on experience with various analytical tools, they gained insights into current terrorist threats in the region, which can further enhance Montenegro's ability to sharpen both its strategic and operational approaches in countering terrorism effectively.

OSCE
Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

IOM Champions Migration Solutions at UNGA 79



Under the theme “Unity in Diversity for the Advancement of Peace, Sustainable Development, and Human Dignity for Everyone, Everywhere,” the International Organization for Migration (IOM) will actively engage in discussions to demonstrate how human mobility can drive progress in these areas.

Heads of State and Governments will converge at the Summit of the Future to tackle global challenges, aiming to advance peace, security, and sustainable development. A key expected outcome of the Summit is the adoption of a Pact for the Future with two annexes: a Global Digital Compact and a Declaration for Future Generations. These agreements are expected to emphasize the need for international cooperation to maximize the benefits of migration while safeguarding the rights of people on the move.

Regular migration pathways are vital for addressing labor shortages, promoting development, and adapting to the evolving dynamics of migration influenced by climate change, conflict, and urbanization. These pathways should be designed to address the drivers and structural factors affecting future generations.

IOM, UNHCR Commend Ecuador’s Efforts to Regularize Venezuelan Refugees and Migrants

The IOM and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, praised Ecuador’s new presidential decree introducing an extraordinary regularization process for Venezuelans and their families who currently lack regular status in the country. This initiative is expected to benefit some 100,000 people, according to Government estimates.

Ecuador hosts the fifth largest number of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the Americas. The regularization will assist thousands who registered for a previous process in 2022 but were unable to complete the necessary steps to finally obtain their visas. They could not obtain regular status because of practical barriers to meet the requirements, including providing necessary documentation such as passports or valid national IDs, and covering the costs of additional paperwork.

The process will allow Venezuelans who are in Ecuador irregularly to access a type of visa called Temporary Residence of Exception, which initially lasts two years and can be renewed for another two years. Beneficiaries will join the approximate 97,000 people already regularized.

Australia and IOM Unveil New Initiative to Boost Support for Migrant Workers from Pacific

The Director General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Amy Pope and Pat Conroy, Australia’s Minister for International Development and the Pacific, today announced the launch of a new initiative to enhance support for migrant workers and their families participating in the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme.

The programme “Family-Centred Assistance to PALM Workers” will be a three-year regional pilot that addresses the opportunities and challenges associated with labour migration, helping migrant workers who are filling important labour shortages in Australia integrate into the country, and then improve their transition when they return home.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION
IOM·OIM
THE UNITED NATIONS MIGRATION AGENCY

Frontex Strengthens Cooperation with UNHCR for Enhanced Border Management

Frontex and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, signed an agreement today to strengthen collaboration on border management and humanitarian protection across Europe. The two organisations agreed to exchange information and expertise to promote and support effective border management.

In the face of increasingly complex migration challenges, the two organisations are stepping up efforts to ensure Europe's borders remain secure while respecting the rights and dignity of those seeking safety. This enhanced partnership marks a significant commitment to upholding principles guaranteeing access to asylum while ensuring control of migration flows in a humane manner.

The Letter of Intent was signed at the Frontex headquarters in Warsaw by Frontex Executive Director Hans Leijtens and UNHCR Regional Director for Europe Philippe Leclerc.

EU external borders: Detections down 39% in first 8 months of 2024

The number of irregular border crossings into the European Union fell by 39% to 139,847 in the first eight months of this year, according to preliminary data collected by Frontex.* The largest decreases in irregular border crossings were again recorded on the Western Balkans and Central Mediterranean routes, with 77% and 64%, respectively.

With 2,900 officers and staff deployed across the continent, Frontex continues to assist Member States in protecting the European Union's external borders.

The Central Mediterranean route continues with a significant downward trend in recent months. For the January-August period, this migratory route saw a 64% drop in crossings to 41,250. The decrease in the Central Mediterranean is largely due to preventive measures taken by the Tunisian, Libyan and Turkish authorities

"Smart Energy Management System for Unmanned Surface Vehicles" – A Frontex Research Initiative

Frontex is excited to present the results of the "Smart Energy Management System for Unmanned Surface Vehicles" project funded by its Research Grants Programme.

The project aimed at enhancing the performance of unmanned surface vehicles (USVs). With increasing demands for maritime safety and protection of EU borders, this initiative marks a significant advancement towards more efficient, cost-effective, and environmentally sustainable maritime surveillance solutions.

A key outcome of the project is the development of a fully electric USV prototype, featuring photovoltaic panels and an advanced Smart Energy Management System. During the final demonstration at the River Tejo near Lisbon, conducted in real-world conditions, the Smart Energy Management System extended the vehicle's range by up to 20%. Additionally, the photovoltaic panels provided an extra 25-50% range. The demonstration proved that without these two components, mission completion under adverse conditions would have been impossible, while under favourable conditions, the vehicle was able to operate solely on energy generated by the panels.

FRONTEX

How AI can strengthen law enforcement: Insights from Europol's new report

A newly published report by Europol's Innovation Lab explores the ways in which artificial intelligence (AI) can revolutionise law enforcement operations. By harnessing AI's advanced capabilities, law enforcement agencies can process vast datasets more efficiently, enhancing their ability to detect and counter criminal activity. AI tools can streamline decision-making processes at both operational and strategic levels, enabling authorities to better identify and address criminal threats at their core.

Open in modalAI and policing

The report also delves into the implications of the recently adopted EU Artificial Intelligence Act, which imposes regulations on law enforcement's use of AI. Key provisions include a ban on certain applications, such as real-time biometric identification in public spaces, and stringent oversight of high-risk AI systems. While these regulations present challenges, they also foster innovation by encouraging the creation of regulatory sandboxes. The report underscores that AI's advantages must be carefully weighed against potential risks to ensure fairness, transparency, and the protection of privacy. Close collaboration between law enforcement agencies, technology developers, and policymakers will be crucial for the ethical and effective deployment of AI.

Europol's Executive Director Catherine De Bolle said, "Artificial intelligence will profoundly reshape the law enforcement landscape, offering unprecedented tools to enhance our ability to safeguard public safety. Europol is committed to staying at the forefront of these technological advancements. This report from the Innovation Lab not only reflects our dedication to the responsible adoption of AI, but also serves as a guide for the broader European law enforcement community as we navigate this new era of digital policing."

Key takeaways from the report:

• **Enhanced Law Enforcement Capabilities**: AI technologies can significantly improve law enforcement operations, from advanced data analytics to biometric systems.

• **Improved Operational Efficiency**: AI's ability to handle large datasets and utilise Natural Language Processing (NLP) can streamline workflows while upholding privacy standards.

• **Real-Time Insights in Crisis Situations**: AI tools can rapidly analyse unstructured data, providing critical insights for decision-making in emergency situations.

• **International Cooperation**: AI-driven tools, such as machine translation, are vital for seamless international collaboration in cross-border investigations.

• **Technical Infrastructure and Expertise**: The successful development and deployment of AI in law enforcement requires robust technological infrastructure and specialised expertise.

• **Navigating Legal and Ethical Challenges**: Integrating AI responsibly requires navigating complex legal frameworks, ensuring accountability, transparency, and protection of civil liberties.

• **Bias Mitigation and Training**: Comprehensive training programmes and measures to address bias in AI systems are essential to promote fairness, justice, and impartiality in law enforcement practices.

About Europol's Innovation Lab

Europol's Innovation Lab is dedicated to identifying, promoting, and developing cutting-edge solutions that enhance the operational capacity of EU law enforcement agencies. By leveraging new technologies, the Innovation Lab helps investigators and analysts work more effectively, reducing redundancy, fostering synergies, and optimising resources.

Aligned with the strategic goals of Europol's 2020+ Strategy, the Innovation Lab remains at the forefront of law enforcement innovation and research. Its work is structured around four core pillars: managing projects to support operational needs, monitoring technological trends, maintaining networks of experts, and serving as the secretariat for the EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security.

Digital Challenges

This report is part of Europol's ongoing efforts to highlight how digitalisation has transformed both crime and policing, particularly as technology, encrypted communication and data complexity escalate.

By fostering innovation and enhancing international collaboration, Europol is working to equip law enforcement agencies with the tools and knowledge to stay ahead of criminals exploiting digital technology.

AI-POWERED MOBILE AUTONOMOUS SURVEILLANCE SYSTEMS FOR MORE EFFICIENT BORDER SECURITY

By Getter Oper, Chief of Strategy and Communications @DefSecIntel Solutions and Dr Martin Lints (phD), Research Engineer @DefSecIntel Solutions

European Union Member States have altogether 45 000 km of external border. Of that 12 000 km are land borders and 33 000 km are sea borders. European Border and Coast Guard Agency (the Agency or Frontex) has identified the following main irregular border crossing routes: Eastern land borders, Western Balkan, Eastern, Central and Western Mediterranean and Western African. Additionally, it is known that the English Channel crossing is a large problem area.

The security context and landscape have crucially changed, which requires a novel approach for security. The Russian aggression against Ukraine has had a high impact on European (internal) security.

Besides Russia and Ukraine, we also cannot forget Africa and European Union southern border with problems presented by the immigration flows from that direction. Complex challenges affecting Europe, including at the European Union external borders, are forcing members states to act differently- compared with previous years, if not even decades. We can see, as a response to these complex challenges, internal border controls

with the objective of improving security, even in the Schengen area.

According to EU policies, the EU helps its member states by coordinating and facilitating cooperation and joint actions against internal security threats such as terrorism or cross-border crime. In addition, the border security covers customs security, law enforcement, external border control, actions related to Schengen and internal borders, preventing and fighting terrorism, combating crimes such as human trafficking, online child abuse, cybercrime and trafficking in firearms and drugs . With Russian agression towards Ukraine came widespread tactics of testing out eastern border by Russian hybrid warfare units, adding another task to the long list of border guard units. These are challenging tasks, taking into account different terrains, and sea-land and coastal dimension as well as limited resources. To add more complexity into fulfilling those tasks, border guard units are facing continued challenge to recruit and train manpower to man problematic areas.

We have witnessed how complex challenges border security end-users are facing, but is there a comprihensive solution?

EU coordinated approach

In the ever-evolving landscape of border security, the need for innovative solutions has become increasingly crucial. We can see, as a response to complex

challenges, the EU and its Member States taking a more proactive and comprehensive approach to border management and security. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) has been empowered with a stronger mandate and increased resources to coordinate the EU's external border control efforts. Frontex is now able to deploy its own equipment and personnel, in addition to coordinating the activities of national border guards. This enables a more unified and effective response to irregular migration, cross-border crime, and other security threats at the EU's external borders.

Furthermore, the EU has been investing in the development of various information systems and technological solutions to improve border surveillance and information-sharing between member states.

However, changing geopolitical situations and dynamically changing user needs require a rapid response with efficient and relocatable mobile systems. It´s important that funding and promoting innovation and technological developments are not just continuing with traditional static surveillance systems as these often fall short in providing the comprehensive coverage and adaptability required to address the complex challenges faced by modern border security operations.

Just to give a few examples: Coastal infrastructure security has been under deeper scrutiny for the last couple of years and this has been exacerbated by 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. Due to international waters enabling any ships to travel next to any coast, it is difficult to safeguard coastal and underwater infrastructure from any bad actors. The sea routes of immigration pose their challenges as well.

Aside from coastal border security, challenges have also increased on the land borders. In the past years we have seen spikes of migratory flows and pressure both on Eastern

borders, which has resulted in increased investment in Eastern Border security, with Member States that are neighbouring Belarus and Russia, investing large sums of money building border walls and supplying the borders with technical observation means. Yet, there are many limitations in capabilities and efficiency, which is why mobile autonomous systems could be considered instead.

Mobile autonomous systems advantages

Mobile and efficient situational awareness is vital in sea and land border guarding, particularly in areas with limited border infrastructure and sparse human patrols. Mobile multi-domain autonomous surveillance systems offer several advantages over stationary systems. Firstly, they provide greater coverage and flexibility. Stationary systems are limited to monitoring a fixed area, whereas mobile systems can dynamically adjust their positions to track targets or respond to changing circumstances. This allows them to cover a larger geographic area and provide more comprehensive surveillance.

Secondly, mobile systems are less predictable and easier to conceal. Stationary systems are obvious and easily avoided by potential subjects of surveillance. In contrast, mobile systems can be hidden or blend into the environment, making them harder to detect and evade. This enhances their covert monitoring capabilities.

Thirdly, mobile systems can navigate challenging terrain and access hard-to-reach locations that stationary systems cannot. This expands the range of areas that can be effectively monitored, including remote, rugged, or inaccessible locations.

Multi-domain mobile surveillance solutions combine the best technologies for cost-efficiently covering territories with automated missions, which save time and minimize serious threats for end users.

Furthermore, mobile autonomous systems can be rapidly deployed and redeployed as needed. They provide a flexible, agile, and responsive surveillance capability that can be tailored to different operational requirements. Stationary systems, on the other hand, are limited to their fixed locations and cannot easily be moved.

Finally, mobile systems can be integrated with advanced technologies such as facial recognition, object tracking, and predictive analytics to enhance their surveillance capabilities. These technological integrations are more challenging to implement with stationary systems.

Enhancing efficiency by AI-assisted technology

While advancements in sensors and unmanned vehicles have automated data collection, they have also introduced the challenge of managing data overload. However, technology, especially AI-enhanced mobile surveillance systems can make the difference and offer more efficient surveillance and control. Mobile autonomous surveillance systems are enhancing situational awareness and deliver unparalleled efficiency in border surveillance. Unlike static surveillance towers or systems, autonomous platforms can be place where needed and change the position accordingly. Automated drones can be sent out

for verifications. This mobility allows for rapid deployment, the ability to cover hard-to-reach areas, and the flexibility to respond to emerging situations in a timely manner.

Systems, equipped with the AI-powered analytics capabilities enable advanced decision-support features. By leveraging machine learning algorithms, the systems can recognize patterns, identify potential threats, and provide valuable insights to border security operators. The systems can accurately detect and classify potential threats, providing border security personnel with real-time alerts and actionable intelligence. AI plays a crucial role in simplifying regular tasks for operators and increasing efficiency. As summary, this enhanced situational awareness allows for more informed decision-making, leading to more effective and efficient border control operations.

AI-enhanced autonomous surveillance platforms for multimodal surveillance and comprehensive situational awareness enabling long-range automated detection of drones, people, and vehicles. These advanced solutions leverage the power of artificial intelligence, seamlessly blending cutting-edge sensors, robust mobility, and real-time data processing to create a comprehensive and adaptive security framework.

Mobile surveillance systems with the integration of AI-driven radars, big data analytics, including employ advanced computer vision, object detection, and machine learning algorithms to continuously monitor and analyse the border environment with cameras, radars and EW. By processing data from a network of high-resolution cameras, thermal imagers, and other specialized sensors, the systems can accurately detect and classify potential threats, providing border security personnel with real-time alerts and actionable intelligence.

Cost-efficiency

Based on public spending documents, on average, building a border with physical barriers and existing technical surveillance solutions has been costing on average €1 million per km.

Although not a direct replacement for other types of border security infrastructure, the mobile surveillance platform can cost between €1-2 million (depending on the integrated sensors and AI analytics) and can have automatic surveillance radius of up to 20 km, which, aside from covering the border line itself (where visible), can give information ‘in depth’ and provide reaction time, all-weather capability and mobility.

Mobile platforms greatly reduce human involvement in the detection of targets. The AI-enhanced workflow will be extensible to existing border sensors and provide comprehensive picture of what is happening both on the demarcation line and also in depth, in an automated way. In terms of cost-effectiveness, mobile autonomous systems may be more efficient, as a single mobile unit can potentially replace multiple stationary cameras or sensors. This can lead to reduced infrastructure and maintenance costs.

To conclude, the superior mobility, flexibility, covertness, and technological integration of autonomous mobile surveillance systems make them a more effective and advantageous solution compared to traditional stationary systems in many security and surveillance applications. We have very good different European solutions available, which can be tailored based on specific needs, and ready to be tested and demonstrated to security end-users.

MIGRANT SMUGGLING IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The following are extracts from the UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants, Migration Smuggling in Southeast Asia (Vienna, UNODC, 2024): www.unodc.org

Migrant smuggling in Southeast Asia is determined by three key trends. The first is the confluence of: aspirations for migration in countries of origin, such as Indonesia, Bangladesh and Cambodia; demand for low-wage labour in countries of destination like Thailand and Malaysia; and limited and expensive legal channels for safe and regular labour immigration to match up these needs. The second is the existence of substantial populations in the region, particularly people from Myanmar, in situations of forced displacement and/or statelessness, who are seeking international protection and have limited legal channels to do so. The third is the prevalence of corruption among certain public officials in countries of origin, transit and destination, which acts as a driver and enabler of migrant smuggling, as well as contributing to impunity for perpetrators.

These trends characterize the features of migrant smuggling in the region, driving demand for migrant smuggling among migrants and refugees and leading them to seek out smugglers in person and by phone (rarely on social media) to request their services, rather than smugglers actively recruiting clients.

Because of the lack of regular channels for labour migration, employers are frequently involved in organizing smuggling for prospective employees, with serious consequences for those employees' vulnerability to forced labour, human trafficking and other abuses.

Refugees from countries like Myanmar (particularly Rohingya people), Afghanistan and Somalia often lack travel and identity documents. They face a lack of prospects for stability, safety and economic and educational opportunities in their countries of origin or in countries of first displacement (e.g., Bangladesh, I.R. Iran, Ethiopia). Climate-related factors also exacerbate the situation. Therefore, smugglers may be their only option, or the least bad option, to achieve a sustainable solution and be granted international protection. The link between smuggling and labour migration is, furthermore, also relevant for refugees, who commonly seek opportunities for income generation in low-wage sectors.

So, the smuggling industry fills a market niche to supply the demand for mobility outside of regular channels, for a profit, in a region with a vast and diverse geography. Smugglers transport people across long and remote land borders on various different types of vehicles, as well as on foot, and on multiple smaller and larger vessels across the Bay of Bengal, the Andaman Sea, the Gulf of Thailand, and between Malaysia and the many islands of Indonesia. Smugglers

from countries of origin outside the region collaborate with smugglers in the region to organize smuggling by air, using forged and fraudulent documents.

Smuggling of migrants is made possible in Southeast Asia, as in other world regions, by corrupt practices. Public officials share in smuggling profits; are bribed to ensure compliance; and obstruct criminal investigations. But corruption also acts as a driver of demand for smuggling, as migrants and refugees perceive that they need smugglers to manage requests for bribery and other abuses by public officials during the journey.

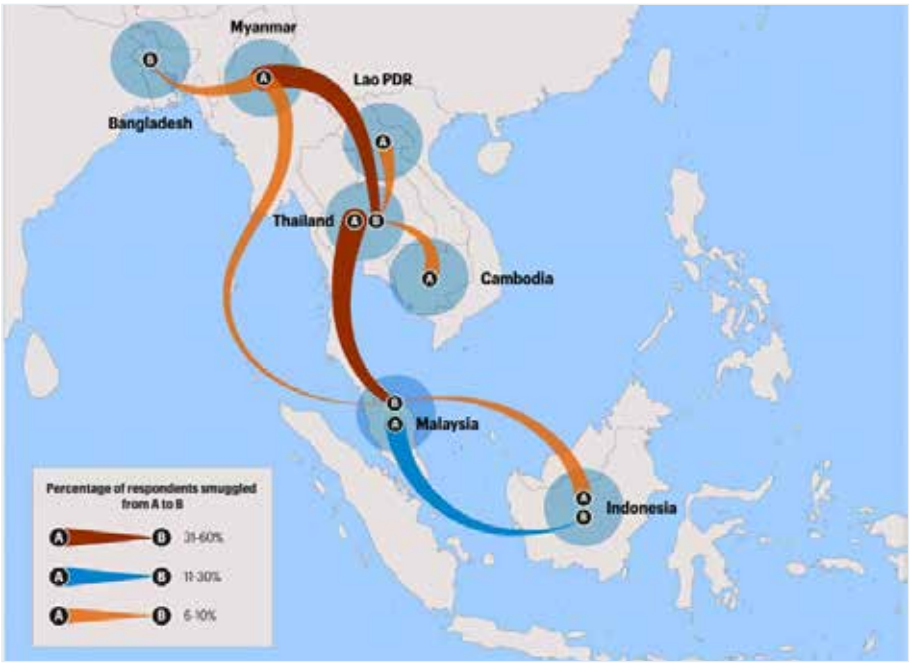
Actors in the smuggling industry range from multi-service brokers, employers and smuggling organizations offering full travel packages, to lower-level actors operating only at individual border crossing points.

While smuggled migrants and refugees are vulnerable to victimization by other crime groups active in the region in crimes such as drug trafficking and human trafficking, the research did not indicate that smuggling actors are linked to these groups.

Individual smuggling fees, ranging from 100s to 1,000s of US dollars, are rarely traceable as they are received mostly in cash or through informal money transfer systems.

Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand are important origin and destination countries for smuggling of migrants within and outside Southeast Asia, and key transit hubs for smuggling in the region and globally.1 The UNODC Observatory on Smuggling of Migrants carried out quantitative and qualitative field research during 2022-2023 on migrant smuggling from, through and to Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand, in partnership with the Mixed Migration Centre (MMC) (for more details, see section 7 – Methodology below).

This StoryMap analyses smuggling of migrants by land, sea and air within Southeast Asia, with a



focus on Myanmar, Indonesia, Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) and Viet Nam as major origin countries; and from outside the region: Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Somalia. The analysis sets out key findings on migrant smuggling routes, drivers of smuggling, smugglers and their modi operandi, smuggling fees and abuses perpetrated against smuggled people. The full version of the StoryMap, including interactive maps and case studies of smuggled people interviewed for this research, is available online at: www.unodc.org/unodc/es/data-and-analysis/som-observatory.html

Special Points of Interest on Migrant Smuggling in Southeast Asia

1. Tens of thousands of people from Myanmar, from other parts of Southeast Asia and from outside the region are smuggled to, through and from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand every year.

2. Of 4,785 migrants and refugees surveyed in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand for this research, 83% said they were smuggled.

3. Demand for migrant smuggling among refugees and migrants is driven by a perception of lack of opportunities for regular migration in contexts of:

- conflict, violence and persecution;
- statelessness and lack of travel and identity documents;
- limited access to regular migration channels to apply for international protection and for labour migration; and
- corruption.

4. People also reported that they approached smugglers because they think smuggling will be easier than regular migration or independent irregular migration.

5. Among smuggled people surveyed, almost half (48%) stated that they would have taken the journey anyway, knowing what they did now about the conditions, 40% said that they would not have and 12% were undecided.

6. Corruption is a major enabler of migrant smuggling. One in four smuggled people surveyed had to give officials a gift, money or a favour in exchange for a service. Corruption in this context mainly consists of:

a) collusion between smugglers and corrupt officials; and

b) payments of bribes to corrupt officials by smugglers or smuggled people.

7. Corruption is also a driver of demand for smuggling, as smuggled people perceive – whether accurately or not – that they need smugglers and brokers to deal with state authorities, because of corruption. Twenty-eight percent of smuggled people surveyed for this research reported that smugglers assisted them in dealing with authorities.

8. Climate-related issues influenced the decision to migrate for one in four smuggled people surveyed and are particularly relevant for smuggled Bangladeshis.

9. Smuggled people surveyed generally interacted with smugglers they perceived as individual actors (65%) or loosely structured groups (13%). The research also found

indications of higher levels of smuggler organization (perceived by 8% of smuggled people surveyed), particularly among smugglers operating from Myanmar and Bangladesh to Malaysia and Indonesia.

10. In most cases, the person to be smuggled or their family and friends initiate contact with smugglers (69%). Smugglers actively approached people intending to migrate in less than one-third of cases (31%).

11. Three percent of smuggled people surveyed said they felt pressured by smugglers to use their services.

12. Social media is rarely the first point of contact with smugglers. Eighty-seven per cent of people seeking smuggling services contacted the smuggler by phone or in person, and only 13% via social media.

13. Rohingya people who are already displaced in Bangladesh are smuggled by sea directly to Malaysia or are first smuggled by sea back to Myanmar, for onward smuggling by sea or land to Malaysia. Bangladeshis are sometimes smuggled to Malaysia along the same routes as Rohingya people.

14. Migrant smuggling from outside Southeast Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Somalia) usually begins by air on commercial carriers and generally involves forged or fraudulent travel and/or identity documents. Almost one third of smuggled people surveyed were

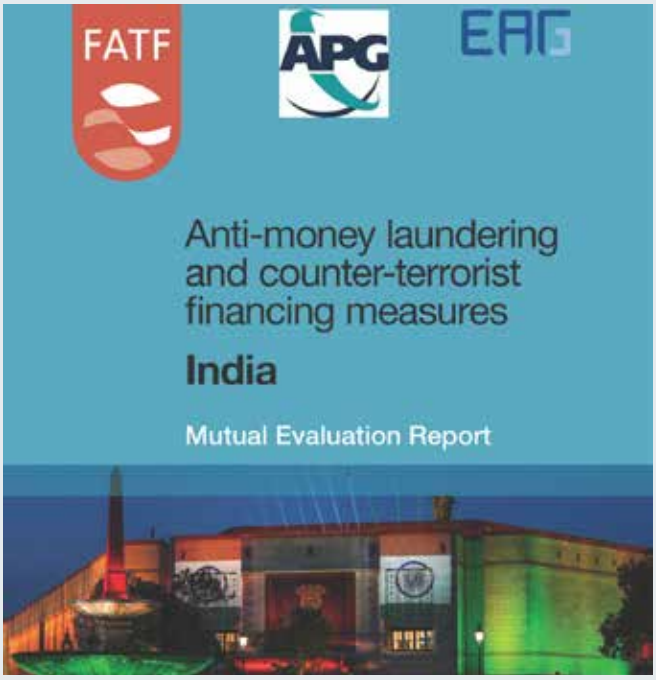
provided with forged or fraudulent travel or identity documents by smugglers.

15. Though a wide range of fees was cited (from US$19 to $6,650), smuggled people surveyed paid an average of the equivalent of $2,380 in smuggling fees, in cash, by bank transfer and, in the case of some Afghans, partly through hawala.

16. Smuggled migrants and refugees surveyed perceive military and police, smugglers, and to a lesser extent border guards and criminal gangs, as likely to perpetrate abuses during the journey. These include: physical violence; asking for bribes; extortion; unlawful killing; and sexual violence. Three out of four smuggled people surveyed experienced some form of abuse during their journeys. This is particularly prevalent among Somalis, Cambodians and people from Myanmar.

17. People smuggled to, within, and from Southeast Asia are subjected to forced labour and trafficking for forced labour, perpetrated by smugglers and by employers with or without connections to the smugglers. When smuggling is linked to the brokering of jobs, as is often the case for Rohingya and Chin people from Myanmar, as well as for Indonesians, Cambodians and Laotians, risks of debt bondage and trafficking are high.

India's measures to combat money laundering and terrorist financing



India has achieved a high-level of technical compliance across the FATF Recommendations and has taken significant steps to implement measures to tackle illicit finance. Nevertheless, it is critical that the country continues to improve its system as its economy and financial system continue to grow, in particular ensuring that money laundering and terrorist financing trials are completed and offenders are subject to appropriate sanctions; and taking a risk-based and educative approach with non-profit organisations.

A joint FATF-APG-EAG assessment of the country's measures to tackle illicit Finance concludes that India has implemented an anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing (AML/CFT) framework that is achieving good results, including on risk understanding, access to beneficial ownership information and depriving criminals of their assets. Authorities make good use of financial intelligence and co-operate effectively, both domestically and internationally.

India is the largest country in the world by population and has the largest diaspora. It is a lower-middle income country with one of the world's fastest growing economies that is currently the world's fifth largest economy. India's main money laundering risks originate from illegal activities within the country, these risks relate primarily to fraud, including cyber-enabled fraud, corruption and drug trafficking. India pursues money laundering related to fraud and forgery in line with predicate crime risks to a large extent, but less so with some other offences such as human trafficking and drug trafficking. The country needs to address the backlog of money laundering cases pending conclusion of court processes.

India faces serious terrorism and terrorist financing threats, including related to ISIL or Al Qaeda. India as a strong emphasis on disruption and prevention and has demonstrated its ability to conduct complex financial investigations. However, India needs to focus on concluding the prosecutions and convict and appropriately sanction terrorist financiers.

The country needs to ensure that measures aimed at preventing the non-profit sector from being abused for terrorist financing are implemented in line with the risk-based approach, including by conducting outreach to non-profit organisations on their terrorist financing risks.

India has made significant steps in financial inclusion, more than doubling the proportion of the population with bank accounts, encouraging greater reliance on digital payment systems, and making use of simplified due diligence for small accounts. These efforts have supported financial transparency, which in turn contribute to AML/CFT efforts.

Despite the size and institutional complexity of the Indian system, Indian authorities cooperate and coordinate effectively on matters dealing with illicit financial flows, including the use of financial intelligence. India also achieved positive results in international co-operation, asset recovery and implementing targeted financial sanctions for proliferation financing.

Indian authorities also have a comprehensive

understanding of the money laundering, terrorism and proliferation financing risks but need to do more to share insights on these risk across all relevant stakeholders.

There is a good understanding of risk and application of preventative measures in the financial sector, especially by commercial banks, although less so by some other smaller financial institutions.

Financial Institutions are taking steps to apply enhanced measures to politically exposed persons (PEPs), however, India needs to address the issue of lack of coverage of domestic PEPs from a technical compliance perspective and ensure reporting entities fully implement these requirements. Implementation of preventative measures by the non-financial sector and virtual asset service providers, and supervision of those sectors, is at an early stage. India needs to improve implementation of cash restrictions by dealers in precious metals and stones as a priority given the materiality of the sector.

Following the assessment, India is placed in “regular follow-up” and in line with procedures, will report back to the Plenary in three years.

Asia-Pacific nations unite to stamp out illicit tobacco

Transnational crime syndicates trading in illicit tobacco will be put on notice by customs officials from 20 Asia-Pacific nations attending an Australian Border Force (ABF) led initiative in Singapore.

The inaugural Asia-Pacific Illicit Tobacco Initiative 2024 will enhance regional cooperation, strengthen national supply chains, increase information sharing and set the platform for future joint operations targeting the criminal networks involved in the trade.

ABF Commander Ken McKern said illicit tobacco was an issue that extended beyond the borders of individual countries and required a united response.

“The trade in illicit tobacco globally diverts billions of dollars of vital tax revenue from governments - which could have been used to fund health, education and other essential community services - to criminals, funding transnational crime, corruption, and terrorism,” Commander McKern said.

“The trade is both domestic and international in scope and requires cooperation between local, state, federal, and international entities to combat.

“The Asia-Pacific Illicit Tobacco Initiative 2024 will build on previous successful activities and reignite a regional approach to combat illicit tobacco.

“The initiative will also provide further information and intelligence from our global customs partners to enable the ABF and Australian partner agencies to continue to disrupt and prosecute criminals engaged in the importation and supply of illicit tobacco in Australia.”

Australia’s interim Illicit Tobacco and E-cigarette (ITEC) Commissioner, Erin Dale, said a key priority for her is addressing illicit tobacco at the source to prevent and deter these products from reaching Australian shores.

“International collaboration is vital for the success of Australia’s efforts to combat illicit tobacco, ensuring that our policies are understood globally. I applaud the efforts of the ABF in driving this inaugural initiative,” Commissioner Dale said.

The ITEC Commissioner is a new role established by the Australian Government to address the complex challenges posed by illicit tobacco and e-cigarettes.

Eliminating the illicit trade in tobacco would gain governments globally an estimated US$31.3 billion every year, and from 2030 onwards, more than 164,000 premature deaths every year would be avoided, according to the World Health Organisation.

Representatives from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, People ‘s Republic of China, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vanuatu and Vietnam attended.

New plan to combat human trafficking launched in Brazil

Human trafficking is an ongoing challenge in Brazil, with forced labour being the most prevalent form. The victims are mainly young men, aged 18 to 29.

Following closely behind is sexual exploitation – the second most widespread form of trafficking. Worryingly, other forms of exploitation are becoming more visible, such as children trafficked for illegal adoption, frequently facilitated by advanced digital technologies.

These insights come from the new National Report on Trafficking in Persons prepared by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The document draws on public data to shed light on the current state and recent dynamics of this crime nationwide.

Guiding light in the fight against crime

In response to these evolving challenges, Brazil has launched its IV National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons, a strategic blueprint that will guide the government's actions and policies against this crime for the next four years.

The document outlines 26 priority actions distributed across 107 activities, focusing on areas such as strengthening the response to forced labour and improving intelligence centres dedicated to human trafficking investigations.

"Human trafficking continues to challenge authorities, whether due to its complexity and low visibility or due to the use of new ways of recruiting and exploiting victims," said Ricardo Lewandowski, Brazil's Minister of Justice and Public Security. "One certainty remains: this is not a crime that can be faced by States in isolation."

Cooperation at the core

"Combating trafficking requires cooperation between government bodies, civil society, universities and international organizations," Lewandowski added.

This is exactly how the new National Plan was developed: with the collaboration of many experts from diverse backgrounds.

"The progress made by the Brazilian government in developing and implementing public policies on human trafficking is remarkable," said Elena Abbati, UNODC Brazil Representative, emphasizing UNODC's commitment to supporting a coordinated response to this crime.

A worker arrives at a gold mining site, or garimpo, deep in the Brazilian Amazon.

Local action with global impact

One of the key objectives of the National Plan is addressing human trafficking at the state and municipal levels, tailoring actions to the local social and economic realities.

In the Tapajós river basin, a gold mining area located in the Brazilian Amazon, efforts to combat this crime are already underway.

There, up to 40 per cent of gold miners are potential victims of forced labour, according to a recent UNODC study.

The study was conducted as part of the UNODC Tapajós Project, which seeks to better understand the prevalence of human trafficking in the region, as well as to prevent and reduce it.

Since 2023, UNODC has provided technical support to local experts working to eradicate forced labour.

The UNODC held its first multidisciplinary training

in the region, focused on identifying, referring and assisting trafficking victims. The training featured an innovative simulated interview exercise based on a real case of forced labour in a local mining site.

New anti-trafficking teams for new results

Tthe Brazil's Federal Prosecutor's Office announced the creation of four specialized anti-trafficking units focused on preventing, identifying and suppressing human trafficking.

Federal prosecutors assigned to the new units will lead investigations and initiate legal actions related to trafficking cases across different regions of the country.

Moreover, the units are expected to help with the formation of Joint Investigation Teams with other countries to dismantle transnational criminal organizations and tackle trafficking at the international level.

"Given its complexity and transnational scope, human trafficking requires not only exceptional qualifications on the part of prosecutors but also a centralized support structure," explained Hindenburgo Chateaubriand, Deputy Attorney General of Brazil.

UNODC delivers X-ray technology training for firearm detection to Moldovan practitioners

The Republic of Moldova's geographical position, between Ukraine and the European Union (Romania), makes it a potential transit point for illicit activities, including arms trafficking. In response to a request for assistance, UNODC through its Global Firearms Programme (GFP) conducted a training course on the use of X-ray technology for detecting firearms, their parts, and ammunition. The training took place in Constanta, Romania, with support from the Romanian Ministry of Interior and the International Airport "Mihail Kogălniceanu" Constanta.

During the three-day training, 16 participants from the Republic of Moldova improved their ability to accurately detect and analyze firearms X-ray images. This training enhanced their skills in detecting firearms hidden or disguised among everyday items. The training employed an interactive, practical learning approach, incorporating UNODC's advanced training materials for X-ray operators. Participants received the UNODC Training Manual on the analysis of firearms X-ray images, containing over 1,000 images, including pistols, revolvers, rifles, shotguns, and emerging threats such as firearms with polymer parts. The manual also covers trafficking in ammunition and manufacturing equipment, providing comprehensive information about ammunition manufacturing tools and their parts.

The first day focused on theoretical aspects of X-ray functionality and detection capacities. The second day was dedicated to group work and practical exercises using the UNODC Training Manual, followed by a computer-based training session replicating real-world scenarios. The final day included a study visit to the International Airport "Mihail Kogălniceanu" Constanta, where participants exchanged experiences with Romanian counterparts and observed the scanning process.

AGENCY NEWS AND UPDATES

BOC-NAIA intercepts PhP 6.8 Million worth of illegal drugs

The Bureau of Customs-Ninoy Aquino International Airport (BOC-NAIA), in close collaboration with the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) and the NAIA Inter-Agency Drug Interdiction Task Group (NAIA-IADITG), successfully intercepted parcels containing illegal drugs at the Central Mail Exchange Center (CMEC) in Pasay City.

A thorough physical examination of the seized parcels revealed a total of 4,877 grams of kush (high-grade marijuana) from four parcels, with a total estimated street value of PhP 6,839,560 and seven vape cartridges containing cannabis oil with an estimated street value of PhP 11,760.

All confiscated drugs are now in the custody of PDEA, and the consignees will be subjected to further investigation and filing of charges under Republic Act No. 9165 (Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002) and Republic Act No. 10863 (Customs Modernization and Tariff Act).

BOC Commissioner Bienvenido Y. Rubio reiterated the agency's dedication to protecting the country from illegal substances, stating, "Our resolve to prevent the entry of illegal drugs into the Philippines is stronger than ever. This operation highlights our unwavering commitment to safeguarding our communities."

BOC Port of Subic Thwarts Smuggling Attempt, Seizes PhP 136.59 Million in Illicit Agricultural Products and Cigarettes

The Bureau of Customs (BOC) – Port of Subic has intercepted illegal shipments of agricultural products and cigarettes, with a combined value of approximately PhP 136.59 million.

Five 40-foot containers said to contain 13,250 cartons of frozen fish egg balls, with an estimated value of PhP 21 million. However, the shipment was made the subject of a verification request from the BOC's Intelligence Group Deputy Commissioner Juvymax R. Uy, and led to issuance of Alert Order against the same.

Upon physical examination, Customs officials discovered that the containers actually contained fresh carrots and yellow onions instead of frozen fish egg balls. Likewise, the shipment lacked necessary documentation, including the requisite Certificate of Product Registration from the FDA, a Sanitary and Phytosanitary Certificate, and proper declaration of the actual contents, breaching multiple regulatory measures such as DOH FDA

Administrative Order No. 2020-0017, Department of Agriculture Circular No. 4, Series of 2016, and Republic Act No. 10863, or the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act (CMTA), particularly Sections 1400 and 1113 (f). Warrants of Seizure and Detention were promptly issued against the subject shipment and the forfeiture proceedings are ongoing.

Additionally, 1,986 master cases of cigarettes from Taiwan, valued at approximately PhP 115.5 million, were discovered in two 40-foot containers. The shipment was falsely described as containing "Packages Tissue" (household items). This misrepresentation violated several regulations, including the National Tobacco Administration's Circular No. 03 Series of 2004 and Bureau of Internal Revenue Circular No. 79-2022, relating to Section 1113 (f) of the Customs Modernization and Tariff Act (CMTA).

Aircraft Seized Upon Arrival in Guinea-Bissau with 2633 Kg of Cocaine

Guinea-Bissau's Judicial Police has seized 2.63 tonnes of cocaine found on an aircraft at the country's international airport, after information was shared by international partners that an aircraft would be flying to the country from Venezuela loaded with cocaine.

After landing at the Osvaldo Vieira International airport, the rapid intervention from the aforementioned Guinean authorities resulted in the seizure of 78 bales along the passenger's cabin.

Besides the 2633 Kg of cocaine seized, the Guinean authorities were able to arrest the five crew members, including two Mexicans, one Colombian, one Ecuadorian, and one Brazilian.

This large-scale international operation supported by MAOC-N, was made possible through extensive cooperation and information sharing between several partners, including the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Portuguese Judicial Police (PJ) and the Colombian Air Force.

Over 2,000kg of Cocaine Seized in SEACOP-supported Anti-Drug Operations in Peru

Peruvian authorities from DIRANDRO, SUNAT, and the Navy, in collaboration with the SEACOP-trained team, achieved two significant anti-drug operations, seizing more than 2000 kilograms of cocaine.

These operations were conducted during a narcotics search training on vessels, facilitated by the Technical Interventions Task Force (GOIT) of the Spanish Police. This success highlights the critical role of coordinated efforts in combating drug trafficking.

The involvement of DEVIDA, the focal point of the project, along with the collective intelligence and inspection work of DIRANDRO, SUNAT, the Navy, and the Ministerio Público, has become a powerful force against drug trafficking organisations.

SEACOP supports 700Kg cocaine seizure in the Pacific

A major drug interdiction operation was successfully carried out at the Port of Callao, Peru in a coordinated effort involving Peru's DIRANDRO, Mexico's Marine Secretariat, with the full support of SEACOP.

Authorities seized more than 700 kilograms of cocaine hidden within a container of scrap metal.

The drug trafficking organisation had attempted to disguise their illicit cargo, which included both cocaine base paste and cocaine hydrochloride, by distributing it across multiple containers bound for Mexico.

This operation highlights the power of international cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking, showcasing the critical role that partnerships play in maintaining global security.

While conducting a thorough inspection of the pick-up truck, trailer, and sport utility vehicle, CBP officers noticed anomalies throughout the frame of the trailer. With the assistance of a CBP

canine team, officers discovered 234 packages of drugs concealed within the frame of a trailer. The packages contained approximately 4 million blue fentanyl pills, which is the largest fentanyl seizure in CBP history.

CBP officers seize 187 pounds of cocaine hidden within commercial passenger bus

CBP officers assigned to the San Ysidro Port of Entry made a significant discovery, intercepting approximately 187 pounds of cocaine concealed within the rear cargo area of a commercial passenger bus.

The discovery took place when CBP officers encountered a 51-year-old man driving an empty commercial passenger bus who was applying for admission into the United States from Mexico. Following initial inspection, CBP officers referred the driver and bus for further examination.

In the secondary inspection area, a non-intrusive scan of the bus was performed using the port's imaging system. The scan revealed irregularities in the bus's rear cargo hold area. A CBP K9 team responded and alerted officers to the potential presence of narcotics. Upon further examination, CBP officers discovered dozens of suspicious packages concealed within the rear cargo hold.

CBP officers extracted a total of 70 packages from inside a non-factory compartment located in the side walls of the bus. Testing confirmed the packages contained cocaine with a total weight of 187.92 pounds.

More than 45 million illicit cigarettes seized in five days across two states

The Australian Border Force's crackdown in the illicit tobacco market claimed a significant win, with more than 45 million illicit cigarettes and close to 6,500kg of tobacco being stopped at the border within five days.

The quantities were detected within 10 separate sea cargo consignments received from China, the United Arab Emirates, Singapore, India, and Vietnam.

Each of the shipments – whereby seven arrived at the Sydney Container Examination Facility, and three at the Melbourne Container Examination Facility – were misdeclared as various miscellaneous items.

In total across all 10 detections, 45,150,000 cigarettes and 6,480kg of loose tobacco were found, with an estimated evaded excise duty of approximately $75,305,539. All of the product has been seized to be destroyed.

Over 1600 arrests made and $93m worth of drugs seized as part of national Operation Vitreus week of action

Police across the country arrested 1600 people, laid more than 2900 charges and seized over $93 million of drugs last week as part of a national week of action targeting illicit drug and organised crime activity.

Operation Vitreus is a joint initiative between all Australian state and territory police, Australian Federal Police (AFP), Australian Border Force (ABF), Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission (ACIC), Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC) and New Zealand Police.

Focused on detecting, disrupting and enforcing illicit drug and organised crime activity, the sole aim of the operation is to reduce the availability of illicit drugs – and the associated life changing harm they present – within the community.

This year's week of action saw a total of 528 search warrants executed throughout Australia and New Zealand.

Migrant smuggling gang dismantled as head of Teesside-based crime group gets 20-year jail term

The figurehead of an organised crime group that attempted to smuggle

migrants into the UK has been jailed for 20 years following a major National Crime Agency (NCA) investigation.

Mohammed Kheder Zada 25.12Muhammad Zada, 43, and his five associates were found guilty in July of transporting migrants in vans and a refrigerated lorry after a six-week trial.

Pareiz Abdullah, 41, Khalid Mahmud, 50, Marek Sochanic, 40, Gurprit Khalon, 67, and Bestoon Moslih, 41, held key roles within the people smuggling network.

They were responsible for recruiting drivers and facilitating the movement of people into the country from mainland Europe.

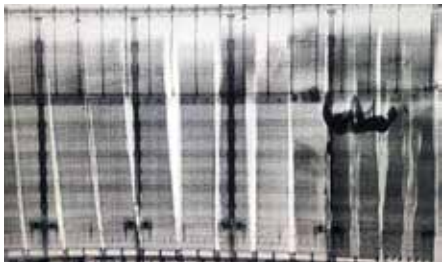
Zada coordinated at least five conspiracies to smuggle 35 Iraqi-Kurdish and Vietnamese migrants into the UK from France, Belgium and the Netherlands in 2017.

NCA investigators believe he is likely to have successfully smuggled hundreds of migrants into the UK illegally prior to these attempts.

President of Slovenia praises results from cross-border judicial cooperation

Since 2020, Slovenian authorities have worked on more than 1 300 cross-border cases at Eurojust. The Slovenian authorities initiated 1 070 of these cases whereby they requested cooperation with other authorities, following their own national investigations. In 304 cases, the Slovenian authorities were a requested party. Recently, Slovenian authorities worked together with Italian authorities to arrest a dangerous Italian fugitive criminal leader in Koper, Slovenia. Authorities from Slovenia were involved in 18 joint investigation teams (JITs). This cooperation tool allows authorities to directly exchange information and evidence in real time and jointly carry out operations, making judicial cooperation easier and more efficient.

Three Syrians spotted by the border police, in a terminal of the Constanța Port, hidden in two trucks arrived from Turkey



In the RO-RO terminal in the Port of Constanța police border guards carried out the control over a truck with a semi-trailer, arrived from Turkey.

Following the checks carried out, two foreign nationals were discovered hidden in the cargo compartment of the semi-trailer. During the checks, it was established that they are citizens of Syria. Following the extension of the investigations, a third Syrian citizen was also identified, hidden separately from the two, in another vehicle.

As a result of the findings, the border police officers carry out investigations, under the coordination of a prosecutor from the Prosecutor's Office attached to the Constanța Court of Appeal, regarding the commission of the crime of illegal crossing of the state border and to identify and establish the involvement of each person in the commission of the crime, and in accordance with the legal provisions in force, the persons in question were returned to the Turkish authorities, according to the legal provisions.

16,000 contraband cigarettes, hidden in a truck carrying refrigerators

At the Giurgiu Border Crossing Point, a 50-year-old Romanian citizen presented himself to enter the country, driving a truck, consisting of a tractor and a semi-trailer . According to the documents presented, the driver was transporting refrigerators from Turkey to Romania.

After carrying out the control over the vehicle, the border police noticed several packs of cigarettes hidden in the chassis of the semi-trailer.

Based on the joint action plan for preventing and combating customs fraud, illegal migration and tax evasion, the support of a mobile team from the Bucharest Regional Customs Directorate – Mobile Team Service was requested. During the unsealing, unloading and checking of the transported goods, a specially designed niche was discovered in the front of the semi-trailer, in the space between the inner wooden floor and the outer metal floor (chassis).

OPEN-SOURCE INTELLIGENCE: ENHANCING ABILITIES IN THE "BORDERLESS" OPIOID EPIDEMIC BATTLE

By Peter De Bie, Babel Street

There's a deadly surge at the world's borders presenting imminent threat to the public -- it's the "borderless" opioid epidemic. Borders are the frontlines -- and often the last lines of defense -- in the fight against fentanyl and other synthetic drugs; it is there where the battle to detect, identify, and seize illicit drugs and materials used in the production of illicit synthetic narcotics is waged.

Per the Center for American Progress, internationally, an array of actors, both in the licit and illicit economies -- and predominantly in China and Mexico -- play a significant role in the production and trafficking of fentanyl. The illegal drug trade is a worldwide issue with many points of entry, and the illicit synthetic drugs market is highly dynamic with many substances and an ever-expanding array of precursors surfacing the market every year.

For Customs and Border Protection (CBP) personnel, the opioid epidemic fight is ultra-challenging

in that it is fast-moving, continually evolving, and transnational with sophisticated, well-financed adversaries. Bad actors continue to exploit technology to further their criminal activities in the areas of recruitment, communication, illicit products, strategy and operations. Countering these efforts is daunting, and the opioid threat is growing more potent and life threatening as time goes by.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says there have been three distinct but interconnected waves of the opioid overdose epidemic. The first started in the 1990s with increased prescribing of opioids to treat pain. This was followed by a second wave beginning in 2010 characterized by heroin overdose deaths. The third wave of the opioid epidemic began in 2013, driven by synthetic opioids, with fentanyl emerging as the most prevalent opioid involved in overdoses during this third wave. And recent data suggest that there is a nascent fourth wave -- illicitly manufactured fentanyl that has been rapidly introduced into the illicit drug supply by drug dealers mixing it with other drugs.

Supporting Information Analysis at Speed and Scale

Opioids cross borders through a variety of vectors. From a practicality perspective, officers and agents cannot open every package. From a safety perspective, the physical act of opening cargo also poses

a very real and significant threat, as the handling of opioids in their concentrated form can cause death through contact or inhalation. CBP personnel and law enforcement are seeking to leverage alternative means to identify and track shipments and narcotics activity.

About five years ago, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) sounded the alarm, urging a multi-pronged integrated strategy comprising early warning and trend analysis with national forensic and counternarcotic capacity building and international law enforcement operations collaboration. UNODC says monitoring is paramount to understanding the synthetic drug market evolution to help inform both effective policy and response.

Further, UNODC advocates innovative investigative techniques, including the monitoring and disruption of the illicit manufacturing and online marketing, sales, distribution and related financial flows via the Internet and dark web, to foster the collaboration and exchange of vital intelligence and information to facilitate a multilateral response.

Five billion people currently use the Internet, creating 2.5 quintillion bytes of online data every day. Properly examined, this information can provide the vital insight needed to combat the international drug trade. For example, analysis of advertising technology-based geolocation and telemetry data can be used to identify potential drug sales and track the movements from persons of interest. This information can potentially be used to build the case for search warrants.

Those on the counternarcotics frontlines recognize technology and data must be part of the solution. Open-source intelligence (OSINT) is increasingly playing a vital role in fostering international

collaboration and guiding more strategic intelligence-led operations for improved impact.

With it, CBP forces charged with stopping narcotics at the borders are enhancing their abilities to shore up means of detection, while safeguarding personnel from the dangers inherent in handling these illicit substances. Moreover, they are systematically "locking arms" with other nations to stem the tide of cross-border drug trafficking.

OSINT is intelligence produced by collecting and analyzing publicly accessible information (PAI) to support investigative practices. Access to OSINT enhances situational awareness by gathering and analyzing PAI from a variety of sources, such as social media, news reports, and government websites. By monitoring these sources, OSINT allows CBP personnel to stay informed about current events, emerging threats, and significant trends to guide informed operations based on the most up-to-date information available. Collectively, this helps agents and officers do more by fortifying, enhancing and supporting the following areas:

- Tactical and strategic intelligence
- Situational awareness
- Indications and warning
- Identity and threat intelligence
- Illicit actor tactics, techniques and procedures

Tracking Digital Trails Across Borders

OSINT use for counter narcotics has been recognized as a force-multiplier, augmenting agent and officer capabilities to support data analysis at speed and scale beyond human capacity to identify patterns, predict trends, and provide insights for more effective prevention, detection, and response strategies.

OSINT has both a local and global significance. Locally, it helps empower officers and agents to do more by giving them the tools to focus efforts. Globally, because OSINT is unclassified data, it can be used to support cross-border coordinated efforts for greater impact. All too often, issues with information sharing often hinder a global coordinated and collaborative effort. Since OSINT leverages publicly available information that is non-classified, it eliminates this significant barrier to information sharing among agencies.

There has been much written in recent years on staffing shortages impacting CBP agencies and impeding the legitimate flow of goods across borders. Global Trade and Customs Leader at Ernst & Young, Dan Dreyfus has urged the use of data and technology to boost productivity. "For example, information on cargo movements can be shared in real time between different countries, enabling customs and border agency officials to more accurately predict when cargo loads that require inspection or intervention are likely to arrive, allowing for more effective forecasting of staffing needs," said Dreyfus in an interview.

Key Technology Considerations

There are a few best practices for the application of OSINT technology in the CBP realm.

Look for solutions that minimize the onus on operational and frontline staff. The availability of OSINT solutions as a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) deployment means

teams can avoid time-consuming and complicated software installs, patches and upgrades, and start using the technology – and realizing its benefits – quickly.

As with any software solution, usability is key. Depending on the goals of the program, agencies can expect to start using the technology in as little as 15 minutes after onboarding and training. Beyond this, properly trained users can learn to flex and expand their expertise within hours.

Narcotics trafficking involves communications and transactions taking place in numerous languages. This underscores the value of OSINT in multilingual comprehension for discovery and retrieval of relevant documents across hundreds of languages, with cultural context, and translation.

Ensuring the use of OSINT in accordance with policy and privacy guidelines is paramount. OSINT solutions can be tuned to match the legal and privacy framework of the organization, and adhere to data governance best practices, such as appropriate privacy regulations, international privacy laws such as GDPR, and other federal and local laws.

Restricting the Physical and Digital Flow of the Opioid Drug Trade

The illegal narcotics trade is a plague on communities worldwide, bringing with it crime, violence, and significant loss of life.

The pervasiveness of technology means that the same internet and digital platforms used by organizations and individuals to achieve legitimate economic gains are also in use by illicit drug traffickers. CBP and law enforcement agencies need to leverage these same technologies to mitigate both the physical and digital flow of the opioid trade across borders.

Using technology through the integration of PAI and OSINT has emerged as a quintessential force-multiplier for CBPs on the frontlines of this fight. With it, agencies gain unparalleled access to vast amounts of data, comprehensive analysis, pattern recognition, and predictive analytics, empowering personnel with the situational awareness needed to stay ahead of drug traffickers at all levels of operations.

OSINT is helping border agencies mount a more complete, consistent, efficient, and robust risk assessment/threat identity capability using PAI/CAD across multiple mission sets. By detecting previously unknown delivery avenues or identifying facilities and transport vectors being used in trafficking, nations can enhance their effectiveness in breaking up traffic rings and in stemming the tide of opioid distribution, use and deaths.

BORDER SECURITY REPORT

ODYSSEUS PROJECT - INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO ENHANCE THE SECURITY OF EU BORDERS

This development is part of the ODYSSEUS project that has received funding from European Union's Horizon Europe Innovation Programme under Grant Agreement N°101073910

Overview:

Recent estimates from the World Economic Forum suggest that transnational travel will increase by 50% over the next ten years, reaching 1.8 billion arrivals by 2030. With increasing travel on land and sea, delays and queues at border crossings are common, causing frustration for citizens and burdening border staff. In Europe, airports have somewhat improved border crossing with facial recognition booths for European citizens with RFID-enabled passports, but significant queues remain. For non-European citizens, the situation is worse. Border control for land and sea relies heavily on staff to check passports and control luggage,

leading to delays and queues even without many travellers. Solutions are required that further develop on the technologies deployed at airports to bring seamless travel experiences at all borders.

At the same time, the need to maintain physical and fiscal security at the border is paramount; preventing the entry of illicit and harmful materials across borders. Manual inspections of vehicles and baggage at the border is time consuming and impactful on the quality of the border crossing experience for passengers. Such a problem necessitates the use of high-speed, targeted detection solutions based on the latest technological advancements in through-barrier inspection.

The ODYSSEUS Project:

ODYSSEUS is an EU-funded HORIZON Innovation Action project. The project aims to combine multiple technologies into a single, seamless border-crossing scenario that allows EU and non-EU citizens to travel across borders with minimal disruption, while reducing the workload for Border Authorities. The highly secure and automated border check solution, based on novel digital technologies, will strengthen border controls by fusing multiple identity verification and cargo screening solutions, generating risk information for each vehicle and passenger, to facilitate Border Authorities.

The consortium comprises 14 partners from across the Europe, including 4 Border Agencies. The consortium is in the second year of collaboration, advancing its value proposition through 6 multidisciplinary work packages that will ultimately culminate in the delivery of 3 real life, operational scenarios at land, sea and train borders, comprising multiple pilots in several locations within the EU. The outcome of each pilot will inform on a number of recommendations for future borders security operations to enhance the experience and safety of the border crossing scenario for passengers.

The Approach:

The core of the ODYSSEUS platform lies in its data collection and management layer, where identity and other travel-relevant data are received from travellers before their journey. Upon arrival at the border, vehicle, luggage, and cargo analytics are collected and processed to ensure no illegal or illicit goods are detected. By interconnecting with existing legacy systems like AFIS, ABIS, and EES, ODYSSEUS computes a risk score for each passenger and vehicle, allowing seamless border crossing or alerting Border Authorities for deeper inspection based on the analytics and risk score. User-friendly interfaces connect processed data and extract knowledge with Border Authorities to easily identify cases of identity fraud, smuggling, and human

X-ray inspection of privately owned vehicles

trafficking.

The platform consists of two core elements: identity verification and the screening of vehicles, luggage, and cargo. These elements are fused to decide whether passengers/vehicles can pass the border without stopping or require deeper inspection. Before arriving at the border, travellers download a universal mobile app to manage the identity verification process. A seamless onboarding process enables citizens to verify their identity through an ePassport with High Level of Assurance based on eIDAS, using Optical Character Recognition, NFC-based passport information retrieval, AI-powered liveness detection, face detection, and matching. The passport is stored and uploaded as a Virtual Passport, enabling secure management of identity information through a smartphone, creating a Mobile Passport. Health certificates for COVID-19 vaccination or negative tests, along with visa documents, are also uploaded to the mobile app. All information is stored in a secure eWallet, powered by DLT, validated through external APIs with legacy systems, while behavioural verification runs continuously in the background, analyzing mobile behavioural patterns to ensure that only the legitimate owner can access the eWalle.. This authentication combines over 14 independent behavioural traits, including movement, device usage, biometrics, and transactional patterns, to continuously verify the user.

As the passenger/vehicle approaches the border, UAVs scan the vehicles using thermal cameras to count passengers and assess stress/anxiety conditions. High-resolution cameras perform face recognition and capture images of license plates and vehicles to detect changes. Upon closer arrival, unobtrusive X-Ray scanning detects potential illegal/illicit goods. High-resolution cameras perform face recognition of passengers or travellers approaching the border. The Faceless Person Counting solution measures the number of people in the vehicle. All information is sent to the ODYSSEUS platform for processing and fusion through the Decision Support System (DSS), generating an overall score for the passenger/vehicle. If no risk is detected, the passenger/vehicle crosses the border seamlessly. If a risk is detected, they are directed to a deeper inspection lane. Border Authorities are informed about the risk factors through a unique user interface, facilitating the control process.

Border Security Technology Development for vehicle inspection.

X-ray inspection of privately owned vehicles

ODYSSEUS will deliver a world-class solution for occupied vehicle inspection, identifying threats and contraband without interrupting traffic. It uses state-of-the-art algorithms to detect anomalies and facilitate fast inspection. The occupied vehicle inspection solution combines patented temporal X-ray backscatter and transmission imaging technologies to provide detailed images of

vehicle contents without manual inspection. Transmission X-ray imaging classifies materials into organic, inorganic, and metallic, while backscatter X-ray identifies organic materials like explosives, drugs, and people. The ODYSSEUS X-ray imaging solution offers ultra-low doses (less than 0.1uSv per scan), far below the ANSI N42.46 limit of 0.25uSv, ensuring safety without compromising image quality or detection rates.

UAV assisted vehicle scanning based on thermal and high-resolution cameras

As security demands at BCP escalate, the need for advanced technologies like UAVs has become crucial in ensuring thorough and efficient inspections. The ODYSSEUS UAV, equipped with both high-resolution and thermal cameras, offers a novel solution for pre-scanning vehicles before they enter secured zones. The high-resolution cameras enable accurate license plate recognition and detection of potential vehicle modifications, making the technology particularly valuable for frequent travellers. Meanwhile, thermal imaging plays a critical role in detecting passengers who haven't registered in the ODYSSEUS platform prior to arrival, especially at night or in low-visibility conditions. By adapting these scanning technologies to the UAV platform and processing data on board and in real time, this solution ensures both efficient and comprehensive

UAV assisted vehicle scanning based on thermal and high-resolution cameras

inspections. The synergy between the onboard processor and these camera systems enhances surveillance, with high-resolution imaging excelling in daylight and thermal cameras providing critical support in low-light scenarios, significantly improving security and operational efficiency at border crossings. UAV-assisted scanning represents a broader trend toward automation and advanced data processing in border security, reducing reliance on manual inspections and enabling faster, more reliable threat detection.

Seamless Identity Verification at border crossing – the Odysseus Platform

The core of the ODYSSEUS platform consists of generic services such as data storage, a decision support system service based on machine learning with Explainable AI (XAI), connectors to data collecting services, and flexible integration with any provider of the service of a given type. The platform implements border crossing flows for travellers and provides a portal for traveller self-service. It enables the communication between processes and services, corelates the tasks and give real time information to the users.

Digital and Virtual Passport

ODYSSEUS aims to leverage existing virtual passport implementations in counties like Australia, aiming to gather information from passports stored in the cloud, alongside biometric identifiers, which gives Australian citizens the opportunity for document-free travel between Australia and New Zealand. With support from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) digital travel credentials are rapidly becoming a hot topic, and support the requirement to address seamless border crossing

scenarios, by removing the need for passengers to carry their passports on them. ODYSSEUS will deliver the means for citizens to manage their appropriate Digitial travel credentials through a dedicated mobile App that will be used as a self-sovereign identity token of the user and an access credential for cloud counterpart of the DTC.

AI-powered Continuous Behavioural Verification

Behavioural Verification is an AI-powered security solution that continuously analyses a traveller's unique mobile behaviour, such as typing speed, swipe gestures, device holding, and location patterns, to confirm their identity while using their DTC mobile app. Unlike passwords or PINs, which can be easily compromised, Behavioural Verification is challenging to replicate because it relies on behavioural patterns unique to each person, making them difficult to mimic. Also, unlike the one-off protection barrier of passwords, Behavioural Verification system continuously authenticates users in the background. Within ODYSSEUS this technology is used it ensure enhanced security of the DTC wallet that carries the travel credentials, allowing travellers to pass through borders seamlessly without manual identity checks and stronger security.

Faceless GDPR Compliant Travellers Counting

The Faceless GDPR compliant travellers' counting component is designed to monitor different areas and provide relevant alerts and metrics. In restricted areas, it detects human presence and raises alerts for border authorities, while in travellers' used areas, it estimates crowd-related metrics. The system is composed of several key components:

1. Crowd counting: Estimates the population in a specific area and sending notifications to the Decision Support System (DSS).

WorldBorderSecurity.net

World Border Security Network (**WorldBorderSecurity.net**), a global network for agency officials at the borders.

The purpose of the network is to encourage and facilitate inter-agency co-operation and communication.
Members of the network will be able to:

- communicate securely
- share information
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- view past presentations
- keep up-to-date with the latest technology developments
- share training opportunities
- and more...

WorldBorderSecurity.net is open to all World Border Security Congress government agency delegates past and present.

Access is restricted to government and intergovernmental personnel; border, customs, immigration agency officials and specialist law enforcement officers.

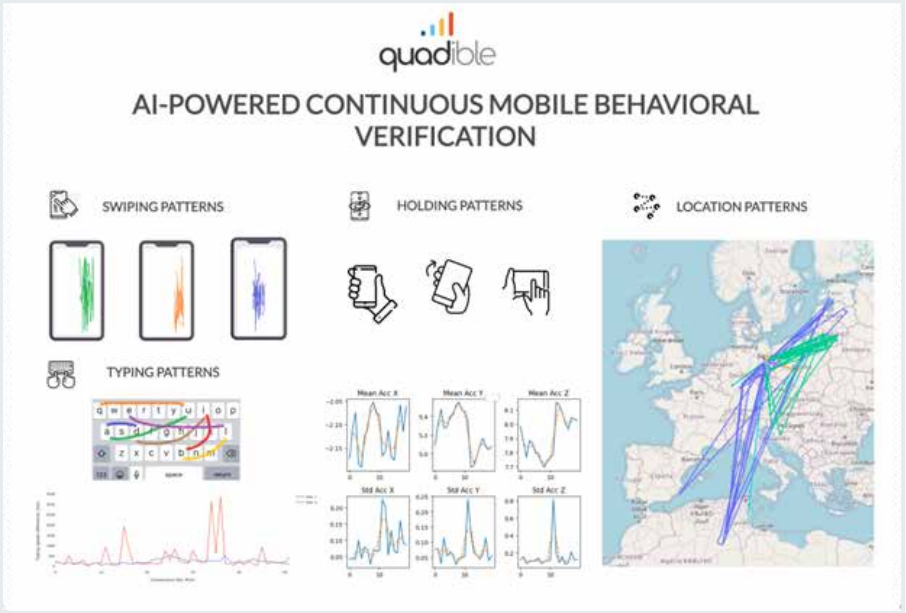
Non-delegate agency officials will also be welcome but by member invitation only.

2. Object detection: Identifies abandoned objects and notifies the DSS.
3. Human presence in restricted areas: Detects unauthorized presence in specific areas and sends alerts to the DSS.

Despite of the diversity of the above-mentioned components they share the same architecture, with the distinction being the algorithms used for detection. A camera, either existing CCTV or newly installed, monitors the area, and a computational unit processes the video to generate the required metrics. These results are sent to the ODYSSEUS platform through an asynchronous communication channel. The DSS 'consumes' the data (messages or alerts) for risk assessment evaluation, while border officers are taking the final decisions, avoiding false alerts, confusion, unpleasant interactions between guards and individuals and crowd control problems.

Multi-Modal Fusion and Decision Support System

The Decision Support System (DSS) at the core of ODYSSEUS assists practitioners in making risk-based, privacy-enhanced, and security-related decisions based on customizable preferences and historical data. It provides automated recommendations for systematic border checks, including identity, health, and security checks, facilitating travel for bona fide travellers, continuous



border surveillance, situational awareness, and combating identity and document fraud. Leveraging seamless identity verification, secure DLT virtual passports, continuous behavioural authentication, unobtrusive X-Ray screening, UAV-assisted cameras, and faceless person counting, ODYSSEUS offers a fused multi-modal risk estimation for travellers and vehicles. The DSS follows the AI as a Service (AIaaS) paradigm, ensuring transparency and fairness through explainable AI (XAI).

X-AI for Privacy and Trust Enhancement

The AI components in ODYSSEUS raise questions about the fairness and transparency of DSS recommendations. The XAI module will ensure recommendations are understandable for Border Authorities, security practitioners, LEAs, and researchers. It addresses technical and human challenges, making AI decisions transparent and interpretable. The XAI module will remove bias, ensuring fairness through continuous evaluation and using unbiased datasets. Extensive testing will further eliminate bias, enhancing trust in AI-driven decisions.

Pilots:

The ODYSSEUS platform and its technologies will be demonstrated through comprehensive scenarios and validation campaigns. Demonstrations in real-life settings will showcase improvements in border crossing experiences, such as non-stop travel, no queues, and secure document storage. For Border Authorities, benefits include reduced workload, fewer random inspections, and enhanced intelligence on risky travellers and vehicles. Validation campaigns will highlight significant improvements in

traveller experience and intelligence for Border Authorities, derived from multiple identity verification technologies and multi-modal screening. Pilots will be conducted at land and sea borders, on roads, onboard ships, and inside trains. An agile approach with two iterations will incorporate feedback and best practices. After each pilot cycle, a thorough assessment will validate the Technology, Societal, Operational, and Legal Readiness Levels and evaluate user acceptance. Training curricula will be provided to LEAs and Forensic Institutes to enhance their operational capabilities.

IMPACT:

The ODYSSEUS project will focus on a holistic solution that delivers impact across multiple, user-centred capabilities. These aim to increase the detection and awareness level at border crossings, by minimizing required user interventions whilst minimizing the risk of data privacy breaches. Three key impacts are targeted within the project:

1. Improved border crossing experience for travellers and border authorities' staff, while maintaining security and monitoring of movements across air, land and sea EU external borders, supporting the Schengen space, reducing illegal movements of people and goods across those borders and protecting fundamental rights of travellers.
2. Improved security of EU land and air borders, as well as sea borders and maritime environment, infrastructures and activities, against accidents, natural disasters and security challenges such as illegal trafficking, piracy and potential terrorist attacks, cyber and hybrid threats.
3. Improved customs and supply chain security through better prevention, detection, deterrence and fight of illegal activities involving flows of goods across EU external border crossing points and through the supply chain, minimising disruption to trade flows.

CONCLUSION

The ODYSSEUS Project aims to enhance EU border security by integrating advanced technologies for seamless and secure border crossings. It combines identity verification, cargo screening, and risk assessment to facilitate efficient travel while maintaining high security standards. The project involves multiple pilots across land, sea, and train borders, with a focus on improving the traveller experience and operational efficiency for Border Authorities. Please register interest with the ODYSSEUS stakeholder Community here: https://lnkd.in/dVtANGZG

UN counter-terrorism chief highlights Da'esh surge, calling for global action

Vladimir Voronkov, head of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), also highlighted the danger posed by ISIL-Khorasan, the Da'esh affiliate in Afghanistan, resulting in heightened threat levels in Europe.

These included the attack by the group on the Crocus City Hall near Moscow that killed over 140 concert goers and wounded more than 500. ISIL-K also increased propaganda "possibly inspiring" actors to attack "soft" targets, raising concerns at high-visibility sporting events, according to a UN report.

"The group is considered the greatest external terrorist threat to the continent," Mr. Voronkov said.

He underscored that terrorism continues to remain a significant challenge for the international community, one that no State can tackle alone.

"To eradicate the terrorist threat, we need inclusive, multilateral responses that are firmly grounded on political strategies, compliant with international law and informed by all-of-society and all-of-government approaches," he stressed.

West Africa and the Sahel

The terrorism landscape in West Africa and the Sahel remains challenging and complex, with Da'esh-affiliated groups expanding their areas of operation in the region and demonstrating resilience and adaptability despite sustained counter-terrorism efforts.

Mr. Voronkov warned that should Islamic State West Africa Province and Islamic State in the Greater Sahel extend their influence in northern parts of West Africa and Sahel, a vast territory stretching from northern Nigeria to Mali could fall under their effective control.

Mozambique, DR Congo, Somalia

In other parts of Africa, Da'esh affiliates stepped up their activities in northern Mozambique as well as in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

This has resulted in a "dramatic increase" in terrorist attacks and civilian fatalities.

The Da'esh-affiliate in Somalia also became stronger, swelling its ranks and enhancing its financial infrastructure.

Afghanistan

Mr. Voronkov stated that two of the risks he highlighted over the years have unfortunately materialised.

These involved the ISIL-K, the Da'esh affiliate in Afghanistan, which improved its financial and logistical capabilities and intensified recruitment efforts.

"The activity of Da'esh and other terrorist groups in Afghanistan remains a significant concern. We must unite to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a hotbed of terrorism," he urged.

Syria, Iraq

The second risk pertained to the resurgence of the Da'esh core, which has claimed responsibility for ISIL-K's global attacks, aiming to use them for propaganda.

In early January, Da'esh launched a coordinated campaign across its self-proclaimed "provinces", including a surge of operations in Iraq and Syria, Mr. Voronkov said.

He called for sustained counter-terrorism efforts to prevent the group from capitalising on these gains.

Towards that end, he highlighted the need to address the "dire conditions" in camps and detention facilities in northeastern Syria, urging Member States to intensify efforts to repatriate their nationals from these camps.

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STRENGTHENING PORT SECURITY WITH RF TECHNOLOGY

By Jaimie Brzezinski, Editor/Head of Content, CRFS

Seaports play a critical role in global commerce. Beyond their economic significance, they are also essential for food and energy security. However, their size, complexity, and strategic importance make them vulnerable to a wide range of security threats—from communication disruptions to smuggling and terrorism.

- Disrupted communications and interference
- Remote-controlled IEDs
- Vehicle trafficking
- Uncrewed aerial vehicles (UAVs)
- Uncrewed surface vessels (USVs)
- Uncrewed underwater vehicles (UUVs)
- Illegal ship-to-ship transfers
- Attacking submarine cables

The diverse security challenges ports face mean they can benefit from multi-sensor surveillance systems. One often-overlooked solution is Radio Frequency (RF) technology, which can be easily integrated into existing port security infrastructures. It enhances existing security systems by offering real-time monitoring of the electromagnetic spectrum for wireless threats.

Ports rely heavily on RF-based systems, including wireless networks and communication systems. These RF signals are essential for many crucial functions, including coordinating cranes, IoT devices, and GPS systems. However, relying on these systems introduces vulnerabilities, as they are susceptible to both unintentional interference and deliberate attacks.

Unintentional interference could be the result of congested frequency bands and lead to operational breakdowns. In contrast, targeted RF attacks could cripple communication or navigation systems, leaving ports exposed to accidents or critical incidents.

By constantly scanning and analyzing the RF spectrum, security personnel can detect unusual activity, manage frequency allocation, and geolocate potential threats—responding to issues before they escalate into larger problems. This might mean identifying a jammer interfering with GPS signals, detecting unauthorized RF activity,

or even geolocating a drone operator before their uncrewed aerial vehicle (UAV) enters restricted airspace.

Integrating RF technology into port security systems provides a powerful tool for detecting and addressing modern threats. As criminal tactics evolve and the maritime landscape becomes more complex, RF sensors offer a proactive, reliable means of protecting this critical infrastructure.

Download the White Paper at: www.border-security-report.com/crfs-port-protection

UNHCR commits to sustainable solutions to Nigeria's forgotten displacement crisis

The UN Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) top operations and protection officials are calling attention to the plight of 3.7 million forcibly displaced people in Nigeria and the need to accelerate sustainable solutions for them.

Commending the government for respecting its international legal obligations and welcoming over 100,000 asylum-seekers and refugees from almost 50 countries, Raouf Mazou, UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Operations, and Ruven Menikdiwela, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, pledged to increase the self-reliance of forcibly displaced people in Nigeria after a visit to the country.

Over 3 per cent of the world's 120 million forcibly displaced people are Nigerians. More than 3.6 million are forcibly displaced within their own country by factors ranging from conflict instigated by non-state armed groups to communal clashes exacerbated by scarce resources. The number of internally displaced people (IDPs) has been gradually increasing and many continue to rely heavily on humanitarian assistance.

The high-level visit focused on sustainable solutions to this forgotten crisis, emphasizing a whole-of-society approach led by the government and harnessing the expertise of diverse actors including the UN, other development partners, member states and the private sector.

"We cannot watch this protracted situation endure, with families dependent on assistance year after year," said Mazou. "Refugees and IDPs have repeatedly told us that they would prefer a job rather than be given a handout. In the town of Banki, I met men and women who have returned home and are ready to rebuild their lives. We hear them and are helping to build livelihood opportunities."

In practice, sustainable programming means supporting the government, helping displaced communities get back to work, ensuring they have access to government services including social safety net programmes, working closely with the private sector to create value chains, setting up innovative financial instruments to encourage investments in communities at risk, and more. This is in line with Nigeria's Renewed Hope Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Secretary General's Action Agenda for IDPs.

UNHCR is already working with the government to help displaced communities farm thousands of hectares of land, develop irrigation systems, tackle food security and increase rural employment.

During the five-day visit, the delegation travelled to Benue state in the north-central region. They also visited Borno state in the northeast, where they met returnees from Cameroon. Over 30,000 people have returned since the start of the year and the intention is for them to also benefit from social and economic inclusion activities.

"Solutions are the highest form of protection," Menikdiwela said. "This requires humanitarian, development and peace partners to work together."

UNHCR Representative in Nigeria, Arjun Jain added "While UNHCR in Nigeria is always prepared to respond to humanitarian emergencies, we will be catalytic in supporting the government to find solutions to forced displacement in line with our responsibility for protection and solutions."

The Assistant High Commissioners were joined by UNHCR's Regional Director for West and Central Africa, Abdouraouf Gnon-Konde, who will prioritize sustainable solutions for the forcibly displaced across the region, contingent upon the protection environment, labour opportunities and conditions, and the availability of development and private-sector funding.

Rallying Together to Protect Children Against Trafficking in Madagascar”

This year marked the 10th edition of the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, with a spotlight on the theme “Leave No Child Behind in the Fight Against Human Trafficking”. The focus was clear: to protect the world’s most vulnerable – children – who account for a staggering one-third of trafficking victims globally. To honour this day, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in collaboration with Madagascar’s National Bureau against Trafficking in Human Beings (BNLTEH) and with support from the International Labour Organization (ILO), organized a series of activities in the city of Nosy Be, Madagascar from July 29 to 31, 2024. These events aimed to raise awareness in local communities and drive efforts to fight against child trafficking, particularly in this region where the sexual exploitation of minors within the tourism sector remains a challenge.

Uniting Against Child Trafficking: A Three-Day Movement

The initiative kicked off with an awareness campaign targeting local communities and about 450 children, were trained to recognize signs of child sexual exploitation and the risk factors. Law enforcement officers, previously trained in anti-trafficking measures, were present to sensitize people on how to identify victims.

On July 30, the official ceremony for World Day Against Trafficking in Persons brought together key government representatives, including the Ministers of Justice, Labor, Public Security, and the Gendarmerie who underscored Madagascar’s commitment to combatting human trafficking. They announced the establishment of a new local anti-trafficking unit in Nosy Be and unveiled plans to enhance the capacity of magistrates to effectively tackle this issue.

The community’s response was just as powerful. Civil society actors, including the youth and women’s associations, lawyers, and NGOs, set up information booths offering free legal consultations and urged victims to seek justice through formal channels rather than relying on traditional conflict resolution mechanisms.

Strengthening the Fight: Building a Safer Future for Children

Complementing these initiatives, the Ministry of Tourism and Handicrafts, in collaboration with a local NGO, End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT), organized a workshop for stakeholders in the tourism industry. The workshop aimed to strengthen vigilance among private entities, particularly those in the hospitality and transportation sectors, requesting their cooperation in preventing human trafficking in Madagascar.

The United Nations remains firmly committed to supporting Madagascar in strengthening its anti-trafficking initiatives. It is employing a multi-sectoral approach, with the goal of ensuring that “no child is victimized, and no trafficker goes unpunished” as stated by UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

CBP officers seize over $516K in cocaine at Del Rio Port of Entry

U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Office of Field Operations officers at Del Rio Port of Entry seized more than $516,000 in cocaine.

The seizure occurred at Del Rio International Bridge when a CBP officer referred a Gray Dodge 3500 pick-up, pulling a black utility trailer for secondary inspection. CBP officers conducted a secondary examination of the vehicle and trailer that included utilization of a CBP non-intrusive inspection system. Upon a physical examination, CBP officers discovered 23 packages containing a total of over 38 pounds of alleged cocaine, hidden within a compartment within the floorboard of the vehicle.

BORDER SECURITY REPORT

Sponsored by: secunet

DIGITAL TRAVEL CREDENTIALS ARE ON THE RISE – BUT HOW TO SECURE IDENTITY DATA?

By Michael Schwaiger, secunet Security Networks AG

Since its introduction, the electronic passport (eMRTD) has become an indispensable proof of identity for border control. With the inclusion of an RFID chip containing the holder's biometric features, new applications have emerged – for example with Automated Border Control (ABC) Gates, which have significantly reduced long queues at airports.

However, the pressure continues to increase. New regulations are leading to increasingly complex border control processes. The introduction of the European Entry/Exit System (EES) also plays a role, as it means that third-country nationals and their biometric data must be recorded in full. The typical control tasks of a border control officer are therefore becoming more complex, while the time pressure – especially at airports – remains the same despite the additional tasks. Digital travel credentials are now set to pave the way for a future in which the traditional use of passports changes.

The idea of Digital Travel Credentials

Digital Travel Credentials (DTC) were developed by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and accelerate the verification of travelers' identities. The concept is based on the ICAO eMRTD electronic passport, which contains the holder's facial image, personal data and selected security features.

DTCs are created in digital form on the traveler's smartphone before the journey, the passport data is then checked by the relevant authorities in the country of entry. At the airport, the DTCs are only retrieved using biometric facial recognition – without having to fully read the physical passport at border control. If all identity data has been collected beforehand, only a brief check is required on site, without compromising the security of the check.

Multiple benefits for industry, travelers and authorities

DTCs give travelers the opportunity to carry out pre-checks before arriving at the border crossing. In addition, they bundle the necessary travel documents beyond the digital boarding pass on the smartphone without compromising security. They can avoid potential errors and additional costs during travel application processes, such as visa applications, flight bookings or the creation of an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA), thanks to automated data transfer. The smartphone serves as the sole data storage device – only the traveler controls where the data is used.

Airports will become more economically attractive for passengers to stay and consume, also thanks to short connecting flights through the digitalization of processes. In view of their already limited resources, the police and authorities can also carry out self-service processes more quickly, focus on higher-risk travelers and reduce false alarms. Less crowded halls enable fewer extensive screening facilities, while the integration of smartphones makes passenger guidance easier, saves money and staff.

Secure Travel Identities: The secunet security triad

The security architecture for the DTC process is a triad: a mobile component, a central component and a border control component. User-friendliness, security and effective process acceleration through the overall system are decisive for the acceptance of the utilization of such components regardless of the user. secunet, Germany's leading cybersecurity company, fulfils these requirements with its Secure Travel Identities (STI).

Secure Travel Identities need to compensate for the loss of optical document features and guarantee the validity and protection of the biometric data and facial images used while also being user-friendly for all participating parties. To ensure this, travelers need to be enabled to use their smartphones, deciding for themselves which identity data to hand over. A central administration system capable of risk evaluation, which enables reliable, fast and secure access to police background systems and public key infrastructures (PKI), ensures their secure storage and transmission. An ABC Gate then reads the traveler's facial image and compares the biometric data with their live image.

secunet is meeting these challenges by implementing a consistent DTC workflow across its entire border control portfolio. Proven SDKs enable the creation of DTCs in customer applications, and secure server components like secunet easyserver accept, store, manage and validate DTCs with state-of-the-art technology such as morphing attack detection and face recognition. Border control systems like secunet easygate, easykiosk and bocoa ensure the smooth and secure use of DTCs in travel processes.

What the future could look like

When the traveler has entered all relevant data in a mobile app, i.e. from an airline, before starting their journey, the app can already read the electronic passport, compare it via a selfie and, if necessary, fill out an entry questionnaire. Data is transmitted via a secure cloud platform made in Germany, which allows border control authorities at the destination to check the traveler's identity in advance and, for example, carry out a risk assessment of the traveler. Once at the airport, ABC Gates take a live facial image for biometric identification of the traveler. After this has been done, the traveler only needs to hold their closed passport up to the RFID reader for a moment.

Modern, digital passenger processes are necessary to ensure the competitiveness of airports and airlines in the future. DTCs offer a solution, as they enable smooth and fast border crossings without compromising security and thus save travelers, airports and border control authorities valuable time. What's more, they act as a basis for the use of a digital identity – at border control and beyond.

US, Uzbekistan sign Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement

The United States signed a Customs Mutual Assistance Agreement (CMAA) with the Republic of Uzbekistan today in Washington, D.C., strengthening law enforcement and Customs support between the two nations.

"This marks an important milestone in U.S. relations with Uzbekistan, expanding on our already close partnership on border security and trade efforts," Troy A. Miller, CBP's Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Commissioner, said during his opening remarks. "U.S. Customs and Border Protection appreciates our partnership with Uzbekistan in pursuing our mutual goal of stronger law enforcement and more efficient trade facilitation."

Akmalkhuja Mavlonov, Chairman of the Customs Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan, echoed Miller's sentiment, saying, "Our cooperation with CBP is of strategic importance for strengthening border security and improving customs control processes. I am very pleased with today's meeting, as it provides us with a unique opportunity to discuss such key issues as optimizing customs control procedures, using modern technologies and developing international cooperation.

Once entered into force, the CMAA will allow the United States and Uzbekistan to exchange information, thus strengthening the collaboration between the two countries. This CMAA reflects the United States' commitment to a continued relationship and collaboration with Uzbekistan's custom authorities on a wide range of issues, including securing the countries' borders against terrorists, combating drug traffickers, and disrupting the operations of transnational criminal organizations.

CMAAs are bilateral agreements between the United States and its international partners that are enforced by their respective customs administrations. They provide the legal framework for the exchange of information and evidence to assist countries in the enforcement of customs laws, including duty evasion, trafficking, proliferation, money laundering and terrorism-related activities. CBP and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement are the implementing agencies for the United States.

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Bilateral Meeting Between ASEANAPOL Secretariat and KNPA Director General for Detective Affairs Focuses on strengthening efforts to combat transnational crime

A high-level bilateral meeting took place in Seoul between ASEANAPOL Secretariat Executive Director David Martinez Vinluan and Senior Superintendent General Yoo Jae Seong, Director General for Detective Affairs of the Korean National Police Agency (KNPA). The discussions focused on strengthening transnational cooperation to address shared security challenges between South Korea and the ASEAN region, particularly in combating organized crime.

Senior Superintendent General Yoo expressed KNPA's concerns about the growing threats from transnational crimes such as drug trafficking, cybercrime, and human trafficking, which have significantly impacted Korean citizens living in ASEAN countries. He also highlighted South Korea's increasing role as a transit and destination point for narcotics, which poses a serious threat to national security and public safety. Yoo emphasized the need for a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between ASEANAPOL and KNPA to enhance collaboration and ensure a coordinated approach to these mounting security threats.

Superintendent General Yoo also addressed the issue of Korean fugitives hiding in ASEAN countries, seeking ASEANAPOL's support in locating and apprehending these individuals. He underscored the importance of intelligence sharing and close collaboration in law enforcement operations to successfully arrest and prosecute these criminals.

In response, Executive Director Vinluan outlined ASEANAPOL's ongoing initiatives to foster greater cooperation among ASEAN member police forces, particularly through intelligence sharing, joint operations, and capacity-building efforts. He reaffirmed ASEANAPOL's commitment to working closely with external partners like South Korea and expressed strong support for the proposed MOU, emphasizing its importance in formalizing and expanding cooperation on shared security concerns.

Strengthening Global Cooperation Against Narcotics Crime

ASEANAPOL Secretariat Executive Director David Martinez Vinluan participated in the 2024 International Conference on Narcotics (ICON). The event, hosted by the Korean National Police Agency (KNPA), brought together key stakeholders and experts from around the world to address the pressing challenges posed by narcotics crimes on a global scale.

KNPA Commissioner General Cho Ji Ho, in his opening remarks, underscored the gravity of the narcotics crime crisis, stressing that it has become a severe global threat, with far-reaching consequences that transcend national boundaries. He emphasized the urgency of a collective and coordinated international response, as no single nation can tackle this issue in isolation. To address this, the KNPA launched the Asian Narcotics Crime Response Alliance (ANCRA), aimed at fostering enhanced regional cooperation in combating narcotics-related crimes. As part of the conference agenda, the KNPA also hosted a detailed debriefing session on the INTERPOL Lionfish – Mayag II operation, showcasing the outcomes and lessons learned from this major international law enforcement operation targeting illicit drug trafficking networks.

Presentations highlighted the complexity and evolving nature of narcotics crimes, particularly the increasingly sophisticated methods employed by transnational criminal organizations. Presenters focused on the need for innovation and agility in law enforcement responses, as well as the importance of real-time intelligence-sharing and joint operations across borders.

The overwhelming consensus among the participants was clear: strengthening international collaboration and enhancing operational cooperation among nations is critical to effectively combat the illicit drug trade. This consensus reflects the shared understanding that the fight against narcotics crimes requires a unified, coordinated, and sustained global effort. Key discussions centered on best practices for information exchange, cross-border investigations, and capacity-building initiatives that empower law enforcement agencies to stay ahead of criminal syndicates engaged in drug trafficking.

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CROSS-BORDER SMUGGLING AND ITS THREAT TO NIGERIA'S ECONOMY

By George-Okoli Francisco Chidi, Director of Programs West African Action Network on Small Arms (WAANSA) Nigeria.

Cross-border smuggling has long plagued Nigeria's economy, undermining national revenue, damaging local industries, and threatening security. As Africa's most populous nation and largest economy, Nigeria shares extensive land and maritime borders with neighboring countries such as Niger, Benin, Chad, and Cameroon. According to former Minister of Interior Abba Moro, as of 2013, "there are over 1,499 irregular/ legal and 84 regular/legal officially identified entry routes into Nigeria."

These porous and inadequately monitored borders create significant opportunities for smugglers. The illicit movement of goods across Nigeria's borders affects the country's economic stability and exacerbates security challenges, making it an issue that demands both national and regional attention.

The Scope Of Cross-Border Smuggling In Nigeria

Nigeria's borders are hotspots for cross-border smuggling, driven by the country's porous boundaries,

weak enforcement, and economic disparities with neighboring nations. Smuggling covers a wide range of goods, including fuel, rice, textiles, electronics, drugs, and small arms. This unchecked flow of goods poses major challenges to Nigeria's economy and security apparatus.

One of the most pressing issues is the smuggling of petroleum products, particularly fuel. Nigeria, a major oil producer, provides fuel to its citizens at subsidized rates, making it significantly cheaper compared to neighboring countries like Niger, Benin, and Cameroon. This price difference incentivizes the illegal movement of fuel across the borders. According to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), "Nigeria loses an estimated 100,000 barrels of crude oil per day to theft and smuggling, translating into billions of dollars annually" (NNPC Report, 2020). This depletes national revenue and exacerbates fuel shortages domestically, as the siphoned petrol is sold to neighboring countries at much higher prices.

Similarly, agricultural products such as rice are smuggled into Nigeria despite government efforts to protect the local rice industry. Rice, a staple food in Nigeria, has been the focus of tariffs and import restrictions aimed at boosting local production. However, smugglers bypass these laws, bringing in large quantities of rice through Nigeria's land borders. The influx of cheaper foreign rice undermines domestic farmers, causing instability in the agricultural

Nigera-Niger border in Jibiya Katsina State in Northern Nigeria

sector. Former Comptroller General of the Nigeria Customs Service, Hameed Ali, remarked in 2019 that, "The volume of rice coming into this country illegally is mind-boggling and a threat to Nigeria's agricultural revolution."

Economic Consequences

The economic impact of cross-border smuggling is enormous. The Nigerian government relies heavily on import duties and customs revenues, much of which are lost due to the high volume of goods entering the country illegally. In 2020, Nigeria closed its borders for over a year to curb smuggling and boost local production. While this reduced the inflow of illegal goods, it also caused economic hardship, particularly in the border regions, and strained relations with neighboring countries.

Smuggling has dealt a severe blow to Nigeria's manufacturing and agricultural sectors. Local industries struggle to compete with cheaper smuggled goods, leading to the collapse of industries, job losses, and increased poverty. For instance, Nigeria's textile industry, once thriving, has suffered due to the influx of smuggled textiles from China and other countries. Likewise, the continued smuggling of agricultural products like rice, poultry, and sugar undermines domestic producers, making it harder for Nigeria to achieve food self-sufficiency. In 2016, the Director-General of the Nigerian Textile Manufacturers Association lamented, "Smuggling has destroyed Nigeria's textile industries, leading to a loss of patronage" (Daily Trust, July 2016).

Furthermore, smuggling extends beyond goods and creates severe security concerns. Illegal arms are trafficked across Nigeria's borders, intensifying the country's struggles with insurgency and violent crime. Smugglers use the same weak border points to transport small

arms, contributing to the rise of militant groups like Boko Haram in the northern regions. The Small Arms Survey Report (2020) highlighted that "The unregulated flow of small arms into Nigeria is fueling violence in the north and making the fight against terrorism far more difficult."

Security Implications

Cross-border smuggling also poses severe security risks. Nigeria's porous borders allow not only goods but also weapons and drugs to enter the country illegally. Arms smuggling has been linked to the rise of militant and terrorist groups, such as Boko Haram and ISWAP (Islamic State West Africa Province), in northern Nigeria. The unchecked flow of small arms and light weapons fuels violence and instability, further complicating Nigeria's efforts to maintain security and control over its territory.

In addition, smuggling networks often intersect with human trafficking and drug trafficking syndicates, compounding the challenges faced by law enforcement agencies. Nigeria's northern borders, in particular, are vulnerable to such criminal activities, as they are difficult to police and are exploited by various illegal actors.

Efforts To Curb Smuggling

Nigeria has implemented several measures to tackle cross-border smuggling, though success has been mixed. The Nigerian Customs Service (NCS) plays a key role in intercepting smuggled goods and enforcing border security. However, issues such as corruption, inadequate manpower, and a lack of modern technology hinder the effectiveness of these efforts. The leaders of criminal organizations often have significant connections, enabling them to bribe officials or exploit weak monitoring systems, which further complicates the problem.

In recent years, Nigeria has sought greater collaboration with neighboring countries through bilateral and multilateral agreements. Regional bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have facilitated discussions on trade and border security. However, stronger cooperation and the implementation of joint border patrols and information sharing among regional security agencies are necessary.

Another area that requires improvement is border security technology. The use of drones, surveillance cameras, and biometric systems could significantly enhance Nigeria's ability to monitor its borders and detect smuggling activities. Although progress has been made, there is still much work to be done in fully integrating technology into Nigeria's border management systems.

Conclusion

Cross-border smuggling remains a significant threat to Nigeria's economy, undermining government revenues, destabilizing industries, and posing security risks. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach, including stronger border enforcement, regional cooperation, and technological innovation. As Nigeria continues its fight against smuggling, it must also ensure that its strategies promote legal trade, create jobs, and support local industries. Only through comprehensive and coordinated efforts can Nigeria secure its borders and protect its economic future.

International experts combine forces to target criminal infiltration in global supply chains

Border agencies around the world have converged at Melbourne Airport this week to counter criminal infiltration of international supply chains.

The Australian Border Force (ABF) hosted officers from the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), New Zealand Customs Service (NZCS), and US Customs & Border Protection (USCBP) for a week of training, tradecraft and capability-building to tackle the threats posed by insiders with in the aviation environment.

Highlights of the week included several practical training exercises focused on aircraft search techniques allowing agencies to learn from each other's experience.

When not on the tarmac, officers discussed intelligence gathering, concealment methods, tools and technologies, and current and emerging threats to borders.

Officers also visited the ABF's detector dog facility, where detector dogs are bred and trained, some of which go on to work for our international partners. Here they re-created a warrant scenario to demonstrate tools and technologies, including the detector dogs and mobile x-ray.

ABF Inspector Costas Karatzas said this week has allowed experts in this field to come together and further the world's best practice to combat criminal infiltration.

"Commercial aviation isn't in the business of drug trafficking, it is the few bad actors who are our target," ABF Inspector Karatzas said.

"Criminals attempt to recruit, exploit or coerce trusted insiders, within global supply chains, for the sole purpose of advancing their illicit drug trafficking ventures. Border agencies are being tested in ways we have never been tested before."

"Continued international collaboration is crucial to staying a step ahead of crime syndicates and uphold Australia's border as a hostile environment for attempts to import illegal goods."

New Zealand Customs Counsellor Canberra, Chris Howley, said "we operate in a complex geopolitical environment in which close collaboration with key partners is crucial for us to stay ahead of emerging threats, especially in the aviation sector.

"Through ongoing engagement with our partners and operational and intelligence cooperation, we are able to better target and tackle the scourge of transnational crime."

Canada Border Services Agency, Director General of International Policy, Partnerships and Operations, Natasha Manji, said "CBSA is proud to work closely with our international partners to improve border security at home and abroad."

"By combining our efforts and expertise, we are positioning ourselves to have the upper hand against the existing and emerging threats that transcend borders."

U.S. Customs and Border Protection San Francisco Field Office, Field Operations Director, David A. Salazar said "we are honored to join forces with our Australian, New Zealand and Canadian counterparts and other international partners to share best practices in a continuing effort to build a resilient network that safeguards our borders while facilitating legitimate trade and travel."

Melbourne Airport General Manager of Aviation Operations Scott Dullard said, "Melbourne Airport is proud of the work Australia's border agencies do to protect the national interest we work closely with them to identify and respond to illegal behaviours.

2025 WORLD BORDER SECURITY CONGRESS:

PATROLLING THE PERIPHERY

The 2025 World Border Security Congress will be hosted in Madrid, Spain on 25th-27th March 2025, cohosted by the Ministry of Interior, National Police and Guardia Civil.

25th-27th March 2025
Madrid, Spain

Spain's vast coastline and strategic location between Africa and Europe present unique challenges for the National Police and Guardia Civil.

Spain has long experience and hard-won expertise in managing one of the world's most complex border environments, facing multiple border challenges.

Spain has approximately 8000 km of coastal borders, both on the Atlantic and Mediterranean, and major island groups in both, the Balearic and Canary Islands. It has land borders with four European nations Portugal, France, Andorra, and the UK, and two separate land borders with Morocco through its territories of Ceuta and Melilla.

Its main challenges stem from its proximity to the African coast. With only thirteen kilometres of ocean at the narrowest point between Punta de Tarifa in Spain and Point Cires in Morocco, this is the closest point between the European Union and Africa, making it an irresistible target for migrants, as well as human and drugs traffickers and other bad actors trying to gain entry to the world's biggest market.

Migration routes from sub-Saharan Africa transit through Morocco and Algeria to reach Spain. Known as the Western Mediterranean route, irregular migrants try to enter Spain, both via the Mediterranean Sea and by land to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla.

Irregular migrants also try to enter Spain via the Canary Islands. Migrants depart mainly from Morocco, Western Sahara, Mauritania, Senegal, and The Gambia and embark on dangerous Atlantic journeys, a distance of 100km from the nearest point but anything up to 1600km from The Gambia.

That thirteen-kilometre crossing is also a massive draw for drug traffickers. The easy availability of powerful speed boats and jet skis makes a point-to-point, high-speed crossing to a waiting vehicle, in a remote bay on the Spanish coast an irresistible opportunity. Increasingly capable drone technology adds a whole new dimension to the border challenges. Modern off-the-shelf drones can make the crossing with 20kg or more of drugs and be across the ocean in minutes.

In recent years we have even seen submersibles and semi-submersibles making the perilous crossing from South America to reach Spain.

Spain's deep experience, expertise, and rich historical connections make its capital, Madrid, an ideal place to re-convene for the next meeting of the World Border Security Congress.

Governments around the world need to continue to invest in their border security, as a wide range of threats, such as combating terrorism, controlling the movement of goods and monitoring personnel across international borders, continue to pose challenges requiring round the clock monitoring.

With new products and technologies continually being developed and introduced to tackle increasing and new security threats, the value of the global border security market is estimated at almost £20bn annually.

Despite the expansion of international agreements in Europe and Asia, reducing the number of secured international borders, threats from international terrorism continues, and cross-border crime and illegal immigration continues to remain a top priority for border security.

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The border security market is likely to feel the impact of cuts in public spending, particularly in Europe and the US, however with concerns over homeland security likely to remain high, means that whilst growth may slow, the market will continue to steadily grow.

Investment in border security in the developing countries of Asia and the Middle East will also continue to grow, supporting the increased spend, whilst international sporting events taking place in developing countries will also drive market growth.

The World Border Security Congress is a high level 3 day event that will discuss and debate current and future policies, implementation issues and challenges as well as new and developing technologies that contribute towards safe and secure border and migration management.

Join us in Madrid, Spain on 25th-27th March 2025 for the next gathering of international border security, protection and migration management professionals.

2025 Outline Congress Topics will include:

Trends in Drugs, Trafficking, SOC and Terrorism – impact across continents

"Drugs on the streets seems to be the insoluble societal problem of our age. It destroys lives and permeates every part of society. It makes law breakers of otherwise law-abiding citizens and through their dealers puts them in direct contact with the criminal underbelly of society. Drugs are the invisible glue that connects organised crime with terrorists, with the city slicker that likes to 'do a line' and with the student on campus, just starting out on their life story. Along the way it corrupts officials and politicians, and sucks billions out of the economies of every country it touches. Terrorists gain an unlimited source of revenue and expertise in illicit transfer and laundering of proceeds from illicit transactions. In this session we will look at any new trends in drug trafficking and look to share any new policy developments and measures that have been successful in countering this evil trade."

Trends in Irregular and Mass Migration

"According to UNHCR figures by May 2024, more than 120 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations. This includes 43.4 million refugees, 63.3 million internally displaced people, 6.9 million asylum seekers and 5.8 million people in need of international protection. But it is not just conflict and persecution that drives migration. Economic and educational opportunities are also major drivers and, in the years to come, climate change will play an increasing role in setting people on the move. Human traffickers exploit these people at their most vulnerable to extort money and drive migrants into slave labour and the sex trade. Whether it is conflicts, natural disasters or economics, the flow of migrants from poor southern countries to rich northern ones is probably only going to increase. So, what are current trends in migration and what further can be done to tackle those bad actors that are ready to exploit these people when they are at their most vulnerable. "

Maritime and Big Rivers

"Rivers create a particular set of problems for border management. Rivers can flow hundreds and thousands of kilometres from the ocean into national territories. Indeed, rivers make up 23 percent of all international borders.

South America has the largest number of international borders made up by rivers—nearly half. Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Suriname, Guyana, French, Guiana, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay. On the Indian subcontinent the rivers Ganga, Brahmaputra and Indus are shared with neighbouring countries, India Nepal, Bhutan, China, Bangladesh and Pakistan. As an example of the complexity the Danube can be navigated by ocean going vessels from the Black Sea 2,400 km into the very heart of Europe, passing through or making up part of the border of ten of those countries. So, how do you manage the intersection of rivers, seas and oceans and the multi-national and multi-jurisdictional complexity of this most challenging of border domains."

OSINT (Open Source Intelligence) at the Border

"How do we disrupt or prevent travel of bad actors? Information sharing between some governments is good, but any gaps will be exploited. Interpol and ICAO are starting to provide greater access to what were previously government access only systems. But is there a role for non-government actors, including industry, to deter or prevent travel of criminals, victims of modern slavery, traffickers and terrorists. The use of OSINT (Open-Source Intelligence) is not new and has been used by the military and national intelligence agencies for many years, but advances in AI, communications technology and the growth in the use of social media and communications apps, means that publicly available data can not only help border law enforcement begin to map out and identify linkages in the wider criminal networks behind smuggling and trafficking. But it can also now provide actionable insights to border agents in real time. How can border and intelligence agencies and their partners in industry cooperate in delivering optimum results from OSINT. "

Identity Management

"Identity Verification is self-evidently the key to effective border management. For all border agencies, verify each person's identity against government databases determines whether an individual is welcome into a country or not. Morphed photo: Use of a morphed image in a genuine document, allowing two individuals to share the same passport. Counterfeit: The complete fake reproduction of a genuine document made with non-genuine materials or using parts of genuine documents. How do we accurately verify documents using the tools available such as biometrics and digital signatures, encryption and watermarking."

The Impact Border Security and Management Can Have on Environmental Sustainability

"Industrial waste typically has a negative value – it costs businesses money to treat it in a way that is safe and does not harm the environment. Costs include treatment, technology and labour costs in line with national laws and environmental regulations. There is therefore an incentive for companies wishing to avoid these costs to

export the waste to other countries with less strict environmental standards, or to illegally dump and dispose of such waste. Source: https://baselgovernance.org/ Illegal trafficking of wildlife one of the most profitable natural resource crimes. It involves the illegal harvesting, trapping or killing of many endangered species of animals or plants for sale to be used as medicine, food, or sold as pets. Whether it is the trafficking in endangered wildlife or the illegal international trade in waste materials, much of it dangerous, border agencies are in the front line in helping to protect the environment."

Emerging Trends in Technology at the Border (Government Perspectives)
"All around the world, governments are looking for that next step in technology that will change the border security paradigm, such as stand-off explosive and drug detection or big data analytics. Some technologies are still on the wish list, but some are now very much on the 'to do' list! One of the biggest drivers in border security going forward will be advent and application of AI, whether it is in enhancing the performance of or automating existing systems, or in analysing terabytes of data. But what systems are on the border security wish list and what work is being done in turning those wishes into reality."

Capacity Building and Training
"Any organisation, whatever is field of operation, is only as good as its staff. And investment in that human capital is one of the most valuable activities that any organisation can participate in. Training promotes the ethics and ideals of the organisation as well as well as improving the skills and knowledge to develop sound border and security management skills based on best practice. As border agencies invest in increasingly sophisticated technology, agency staff will increasingly have to master new skills and ever-changing technical and operational skills. So, how do you develop goals for your training program and the success metrics to measure how effective that training program is?"

CLOSED AGENCY ONLY WORKSHOP TOPICS WILL INCLUDE:

Interagency Cooperation
It is widely acknowledged that interagency cooperation is the key to the effective border management, facilitating the movement of goods and people whilst simultaneously preventing bad actors from travelling and interdicting the movement of illicit goods. But what can be in practical terms on the ground to increase communication, share actionable intelligence and best practise.

Modus Operandi (Drugs and contraband)
In the spirit of interagency cooperation this workshop will facilitate the sharing of on the ground experience, real life case studies and share actionable intelligence on the movement of drugs, illicit goods, illegal waste, heritage goods, wildlife trafficking and modus operandi used to enable these trades.

Modus Operandi (Human Trafficking)
In the spirit of interagency cooperation this workshop will facilitate the sharing of on the ground experience, real life case studies and share actionable intelligence on the movement of trafficked human beings via planes , boats and vehicles and the various methods by which the traffickers enable this movement.

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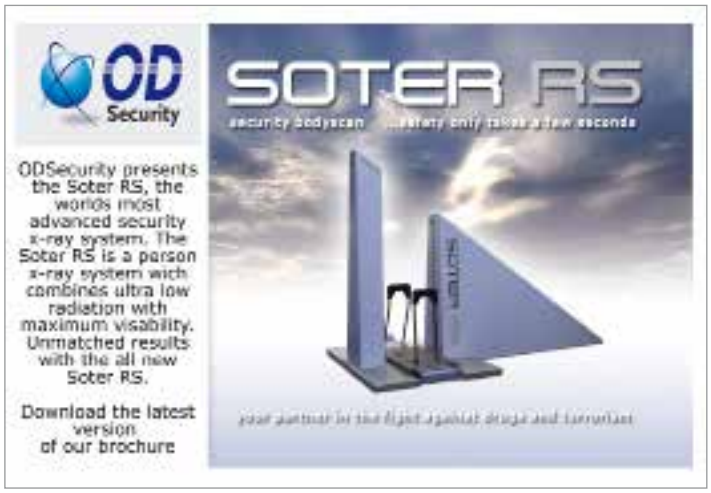

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Countering the Movement of Terrorists Across Borders

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Smiths Detection accelerates partnership with SeeTrue

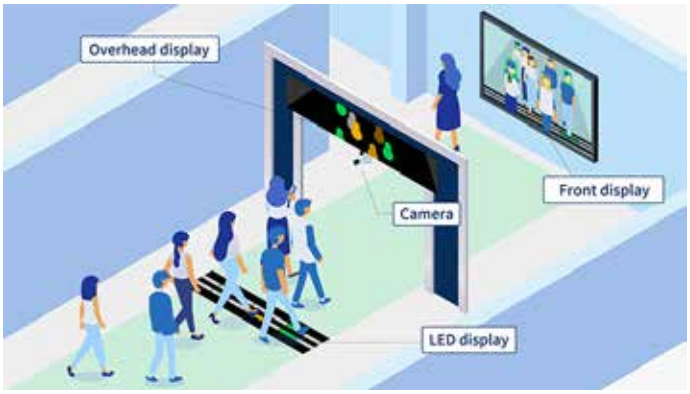
Smiths Detection has announced a major step forward in aviation security technology. Working in partnership with SeeTrue, a provider of AI-based threat detection software, Smiths Detection has successfully integrated and tested SeeTrue's technology into our advanced CT security checkpoint systems with the combined solution now ready for immediate implementation pending certification.

eeTrue's Prohibited Items Detection Software (APIDS ready) engine has been fully integrated, tested, and is now ready for implementation with the HI-SCAN 6040 CTiX to provide advanced carry-on baggage screening using Computed Tomography (CT). Combining Smiths automatic explosives detection algorithms with SeeTrue's prohibited items detection algorithms will provide unparalleled levels of security and operational efficiency for customers. The combination of the SeeTrue algorithmic solution with Smith's HI-SCAN 6040 CTiX will undergo ECAC (European Civil Aviation Conference) testing in the upcoming months.

The collaboration was undertaken as part of Smiths Detection's Ada Initiative. This is our official process which effectively 'onboards' new suppliers to ensure that hardware, software, and algorithms from various products and suppliers work together seamlessly according to responsible Open Architecture principles.

NEC Launches new system using Biometric Authentication Technology

NEC Corporation will launch a new system using biometric authentication technology that is capable of quickly authenticating large numbers of people at one time, even while they are in motion. The system is expected to accelerate admission and reduce congestion for busy events and infrastructure.



In recent years, the number of visitors to airports, train stations, tourist attractions and other amusement facilities in Japan has been rising sharply. At the same time, however, facility expansions and additions to alleviate congestion have not kept pace. At airports in particular, the number of passengers in Japan is projected to double (*) by 2041 compared to 2019, and there is a need to improve the efficiency of passenger services.

Conventionally, when large numbers of people have converged on areas such as theme parks, offices, factories, etc., heavy amounts of congestion have occurred, together with long lines at flapper gates and security screening areas.

This new system features NEC's world-class face recognition technology and matching technology, which evaluates the characteristics of movement and clothing to quickly detect persons in designated areas. Furthermore, the system can continue to biometrically identify persons even as they pass through crowded areas.

CRFS wins the Army Technology Excellence Awards 2024 for lightweight RF sensor weighing less than 2kg

CRFS, a leading innovator in radio frequency (RF) technology, is delighted to announce it won the Army Technology Excellence Awards 2024.

CRFS won the award thanks to the innovative design and exceptional RF performance of its RFeye Node 100-18 LW sensor: a breakthrough in UAV sensing technology.

A NATO member requested that CRFS design this product to enable effective signal management and signals intelligence operations in a conflict zone. The end user already used the TRL-9 RFeye Node 100-18, which delivers transformative capability through its advanced RF performance. However, this sensor was not designed with smaller unmanned system integration in mind, so CRFS rapidly designed the same capability into a much-reduced form factor with no loss of performance.

"On receiving this urgent requirement, our engineering team worked hard to develop a sensor that not only meets the rigorous demands of our military customer but also excels in the harshest environmental conditions. The company's ability to quickly deliver this hugely valuable tool for modern military forces in record time is very impressive," said Matt Hunt, VP of Global Sales.

SPX Communication Technologies unveils Evenlode Lite: Entry-level real-time airborne data link

SPX Communication Technologies have launched Evenlode Lite, an entry-level video downlink system designed for regions new to airborne surveillance or those looking to enhance Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities.

As geopolitical tensions rise and the need for real-time situational awareness grows, Evenlode Lite offers a cost-effective solution for border control, defence, security, and search and rescue teams.

Evenlode Lite is an introductory version of the Evenlode system, operationally proven across the UK, Europe and the Middle East. Comprising an air data terminal and ground data terminal, it provides reliable, secure, real-time transmission of up to 4K video, audio, GPS, and telemetry data from airborne platforms to static or mobile ground teams.

The system enhances civilian and border security and is tailored for integrators and end users in regions across Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, offering a low barrier to entry for organisations seeking to improve ISR capabilities without the complexity and cost typically associated with such systems.

Miratechnologies Completes Major Photovoltaic Park Project at Romania border

Miratechnologies has announced the near-completion of a significant project involving the installation and integration of advanced surveillance systems at three photovoltaic parks in Romania.

The project spans three locations, each covering a perimeter of 2.5 km. As part of the security infrastructure, Miratechnologies has deployed an extensive range of its proprietary systems, including: 2 Magus FPS Plus processing units per location; 24 Magus MiniFPS units on each site; 2,500 meters of sensitive cable ensuring real-time detection capabilities; A total of 50 fixed cameras and 4 PTZ (pan-tilt-zoom) cameras** securing the entire perimeter.

All of these systems are fully integrated into Magus CC, Miratechnologies' powerful Command and Control platform, allowing centralized management of the security systems across the three sites. The project showcases Miratechnologies' ability to deliver cutting-edge security solutions in the renewable energy sector.

Defsecintel Solution launch EIRSHIELD, a ultra-short range Counter-UAS

Estonian defence company Defsecintel Solution came out with a new product: EIRSHIELD, which is a mobile all-terrain Ultra Short Range Air Defence/ C-UAS system with AI-assisted technology.

EIRSHIELD is designed to provide comprehensive protection against a variety of aerial threats, including multirotor and fixed-wing drones and developed against Saheed drones.

In the EIRSHIELD, we have combined cutting-edge sensors, AI-powered tracking, and a variety of effectors, and trough that EIRSHIELD provides a comprehensive and effective solution to counter the growing threat of aerial targets, particularly drones. EIRSHIELD can be used in different platforms, depending of the end-user needs, e.g. BV or van or 4×4 pick-up truck.

The EIRSHIELD system utilizes advanced radar technology to detect potential targets up to 8 km away. RF sensors and an EO/IR camera system work in tandem to verify and classify the detected threats. Once an aerial target is identified, the EIRSHIELD can track and trace it, while also disrupting radio and GNSS signals to impair the target's navigation and control.

Depending on the threat level, EIRSHIELD can be equipped with a range of effectors, including interceptor drones for AI-assisted manoeuvring and engagement, or options such as .50 caliber kinetic effectors or commercially available missiles..

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World Border Security Congress

25th-27th March 2025

Madrid, Spain

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Patrolling the Periphery - Developing Border Strategies Through Co-operation and Technology

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SAVE THE DATES

Spain's vast coastline and strategic location between Africa and Europe present unique challenges for the National Police and Guardia Civil.

Spain faces a constant influx of migrants seeking a better life in Europe. The Canary Islands and the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, bordering Morocco, are popular entry points. Patrolling these vast stretches, especially maritime borders, requires significant resources.

Spain is also a key entry point for hashish from Morocco and cocaine from South America destined for other European countries. The decentralized nature of trafficking groups makes it difficult to infiltrate and dismantle them.

The country, and region's, border security landscape is constantly evolving. By addressing these challenges through international collaboration, innovative technologies, and strategic resource allocation, the international border security community can strive towards a more secure future.

The World Border Security Congress is a high level 3 day event that will discuss and debate current and future policies, implementation issues and challenges as well as new and developing technologies that contribute towards safe and secure border and migration management.

Join us in Madrid, Spain on 25th-27th March 2025 for the next gathering of international border security, protection and migration management professionals.

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