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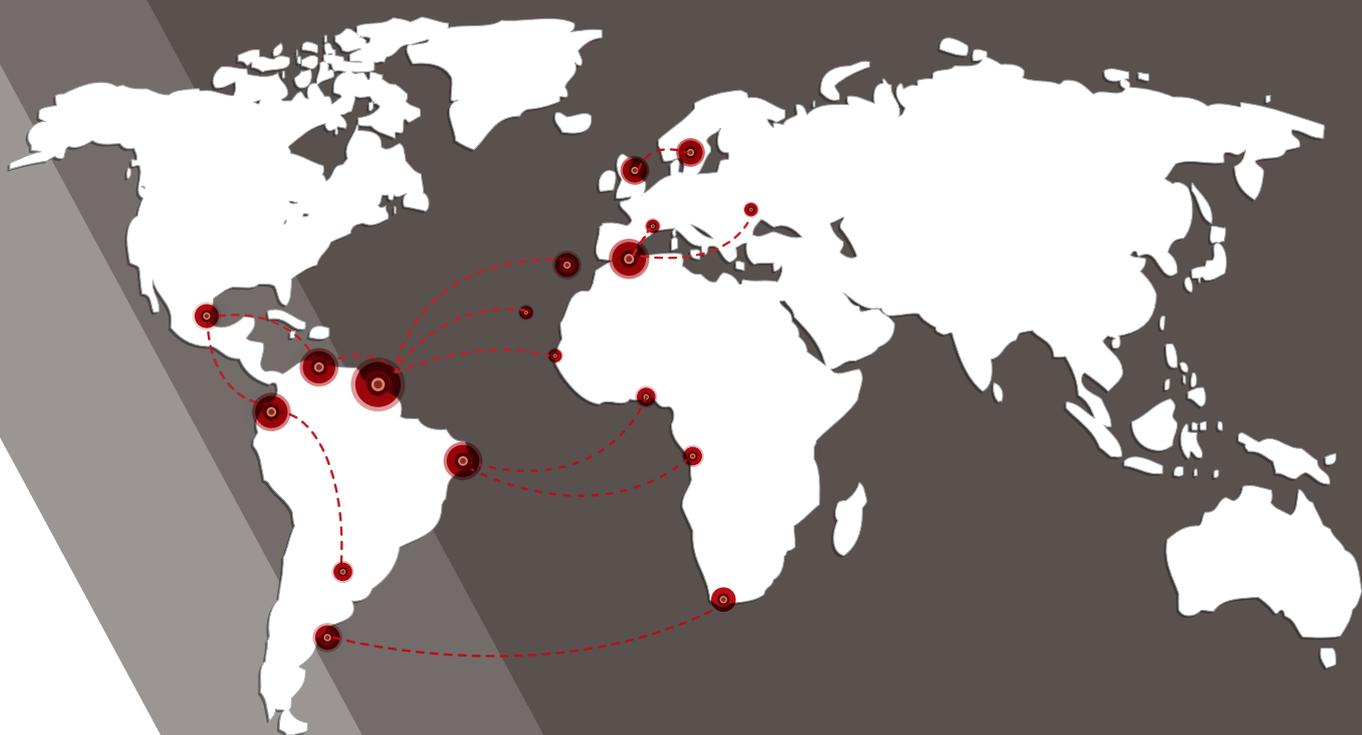
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INSTITUT NATIONAL DES HAUTES ÉTUDES DE LA SÉCURITÉ ET DE LA JUSTICE

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Illicit drug trafficking using small airfields:  
an exploratory study



For the french gendarmerie with the support of the MILDT

This executive summary overviews the study on “drug trafficking through the use of unmonitored airfields and improvised landing platforms”, carried out for the French general direction of the national gendarmerie<sup>1</sup> with the support of the French Interministerial Mission for the fight against drugs and drug addiction (MILDT<sup>2</sup>). The exploratory aspect of this work aims at maintaining the analytical prospective and to stimulate this debate on a long-term basis. After having explored the situation in several countries including France, we analyze the nature of the public response in order to identify the fallacies and deliver our recommendations.

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Translated by Paola BRIENZA

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(1) To answer to specific needs from Gendarmerie des Transports Aériens (GTA) - Air transportation gendarmerie.

(2) MILDT: Mission interministérielle de lutte contre la drogue et la toxicomanie.

## THE APPROACH OF THE PHENOMENON CONFIRMS ITS WORLD-WIDE INSTALLATION

### The reactivation of an air bridge between producer and consumer countries in America

Drug smuggling through light aircrafts is not a recent phenomenon. Yet, this kind of contraband between the United States and the Andean countries developed itself throughout the late part of the 1970's, through the creation of an aerial bridge between the countries on both sides (supply and demand) of the market. This phenomenon reached its height throughout the mid-80's. In 1995, following the implementation of strict airspace control norms in the Andean countries, the smugglers temporarily shifted from general aviation to maritime vector. At the turn of the century, following the gradual improvement of maritime anti-drug systems, the cartels reactivated the non-commercial air routes to supply the drug market in the USA.

Moreover, in response to the tough control over the Andean airspaces, the Venezuelan airspace was favored as a point of departure for the merchandise, due to its fewer controls. This engendered the creation of an air route which is estimated transporting 20% of the cocaine destined to the United States; the light aircrafts<sup>3</sup> move through the Caribbean and Central America. The effects of this new « commercial » route are tangible through the high homicide rates in countries such as Honduras, associated with the activities surrounding the transit of the drugs (clandestine runways, dropping of the products etc.).

### Following the construction of a wall<sup>4</sup> between the United States and Mexico, the ultra-light was favored as a means of illegally trespassing of the border

The trespassing of the borders concerns, for the most part, migrants wishing to reach American soil. However, on a parallel front, we find the increased use of light aircrafts as a means of importing illegal drugs at a level that has been continuously distressing the American authorities since 2008. Furthermore, the small aircrafts are often substituted by business planes that enter the country in perfect legality, on the Mexican and Canadian borders alike. Moreover, American intelligence shows a significant increase of ultra-

light aviation and drones that illegally trespass the Canadian and Mexican borders in order to supply the drug markets in the USA<sup>5</sup>.

The U.S. Customs Border Protection (CBP) declared the detection of 223 ultra-light aircrafts in 2011, double the amount registered in 2009.

### Secondary routes in South America since 2009

Another consequence of the reinforcement of airspace norms in Colombia is the increase in the number of light aircrafts departing from Bolivia with destinations such as Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina. This dynamic shows that part of the cocaine transported by general aerial routes diversifies itself through this transit towards the southern cone of Latin America. Regardless of the South American market, this route could constitute a relay towards Europe through Africa.

### Increase in transatlantic air routes

A transatlantic route is used by light aircrafts loaded with cocaine, connecting South America (Venezuela in particular), to Western Africa, to then transport the drugs towards the European market. This route alone could engulf 10% of the air transit originating from Venezuela, estimate that has tripled since 2006<sup>6</sup>. Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde distinguish themselves as the principal targets of this route. The initial aircrafts used by smugglers for transatlantic crossings were modest business jets, yet they are now being replaced by improved models such as aircrafts of superior quality, capable of transiting longer distances and multiplying by four the amount of drugs that can be carried throughout each flight.

Moreover, exactly like the « Air cocaine »<sup>7</sup> case, large carriers have been identified by the British services. Thus, the Boeing found in Mali in 2009 is not an isolated case<sup>8</sup>. Stocked in western Africa, the drugs traveled to Europe through aerial, maritime and terrestrial routes.

(3) "Airpower in the interagency: Success in the Dominican Republic"- May/June 2012, *Air and Space journal*.

(4) The border between the United States and Mexico measures 3500 kilometers ; through the implementation of the 2006 *Secure Fence Act* , a double wall of 1,125 km was constructed between California and Texas.

(5) *National Drug Threat Assessment*2011.

(6) Source : JIATFS radar coverage.

(7) Involved the discovery of a Boeing 727 carcass calcinated in Mali, that was used to transport at least 3 metrics tons of cocaine.

(8) Moreover, the British intelligence services have been monitoring, since 2010, individuals wishing to use large carriers such as the Ilyushin, Antonov or Tupolev, capable of transporting several tons of cocaine MAOC-N meeting, October 8th 2010.

## Europe : an established phenomenon

Currently, this phenomenon is also emerging in Europe<sup>9</sup>. The southern part of the Iberian Peninsula is the European region the most heavily touched by the smuggling of drugs through general aviation. The same phenomenon can be found at different intensities throughout Europe; for example between the United Kingdom and the continent (Belgium, France, and The Netherlands). Italy, the Balkans and Greece, seem to be equally concerned by the phenomenon, although the local authorities seem to be lacking proper awareness.

Europol identified flights between Morocco, Italy and Hungary. Similarly to the situation assessed on the American continent in terms of transporting drugs to Europe (second greatest market of illegal drug consumption), the use of light and ultra-light aviation underwent a significant expansion<sup>10</sup>.

## The Iberian Peninsula, principal gate-way for the entrance of illicit drugs from Africa through light aviation

Since 2005, there is a real increase in the rotations of private aircrafts between Andalusia and Morocco, mainly aimed at importing cannabis. The Spanish and Moroccan radars detected over 49 flights throughout the year 2010<sup>11</sup>, practically twice as much as in the year 2009. These rotations would allegedly be the product of 3 to 4 transnational criminal organizations implanted in the south of Spain, organizing 2 to 3 flights per week. To a lesser

extent, Portugal is also affected by this trade considering that the criminals use the borders to avoid being intercepted by the police. The most recent observations indicate that the traffickers have adapted their *modus operandi* to the north-American surveillance model by shifting to ultra-light aircrafts and helicopters in order to avoid the radar spans and the increased control over the airfields. Moreover, the shipments of cannabis resin are not regularly accompanied by cocaine cargos, thus confirming the strengthening of the Latin-American cartels in Morocco.

In parallel, increasingly significant shipments of cocaine are imported directly from Western Africa or Latin America by private jet. These flights frequently transit through the Canary Islands and land in international airports.

## North-western Europe: indicative elements but scarce interception

The trafficking of drugs by general aviation in Western Europe is mostly identified between the UK and the continent (Belgium, Netherlands, and France). Numerous indicative elements of this phenomenon exist and the interception by the authorities of 16 aircrafts since 2006, confirm this trafficking route towards the United Kingdom. Some of these cases involve a direct implication on the part of users of private airfields and pilots.

## STATE OF AFFAIRS IN FRANCE: A FALSE IMPRESSION OF A MINOR PHENOMENON

The transportation and the establishment of trade routes for illegal drugs are amongst the primary challenges faced by drug traffickers. In order to deal with these issues, the latter have developed several different approaches: producing the drugs closer to the area of consumption to diminish the costs associated with transportation and detection (for example, the indoor cannabis cultures and synthetic drugs), or focusing on the mode of transportation and its capacity not to draw the attention of the authorities. Thus, aerial, terrestrial and maritime vectors are used to attempt to avoid the national control devices. Throughout these recent years, criminal organizations, aiming at the maximum efficiency of their shipments, have been exploiting the general aviation vector, which is identifiable as non-commercial civil-aviation.

## In France, a body of evidence suggest a development of the phenomenon

France is susceptible to be particularly impacted by this presently contained threat: the country is in fact equipped with a high density of airfields.

Referring to our working definition of platforms, we can identify approximately between 500<sup>12</sup> to 1 800<sup>13</sup> of these landing strips, if we include the ultra-light aircrafts runways. Moreover, there is a lack of permanent security forces on the majority of these sights, characteristic that is not likely to change in the near future. Thus, the combination of increasing technical capacities of general aviation and undemanding regulations could result in an attractive vector of transportation for drug traffickers. A retrospective analysis of this *modus operandi* indicates that it is not an entirely new phenomenon. Throughout the 80's and 90's, numerous affairs (French West Indies, Pas-de-Calais, Normandy) were treated by local courts and the local press, yet no single organ has a clear comprehensive overview of the phenomenon. It is only during the so-called Beziers affair in 2008, when a helicopter was intercepted in a rural zone carrying almost 560 kg of cannabis resin implicating actors in this domain, that there was a national focus on the issue and an initial collective awareness of this mode of transportation.

However, according to certain entities, such an MO is nothing but a smoke-screen. Thus the present study targets

(9) Europol, « Notification of the OC-SCAN threat, : diversification of the use of light aircrafts for the illegal trafficking within and/or destined to the EU. » May 2010.

(10) Europol, "EU organized crime threat assessment-OCTA 2011", The Hague, 28 April 2011.

(11) 38 flights detected throughout the first 6 months of the year 2011.

(12) Official Journal of the French Republic, Journal Officiel de la République Française, issue n°29, n°0159, July 10th 2012.

(13) Dussourd J, Report on the safety in secondary airports (Rapport sur la sûreté dans les aérodromes secondaires), Ministry of Interior, 2008.

the phenomenon, beyond the epiphenomenon, by cross-analysing information originating from multiple sources. The ten cases identified since the year 2000, show that the updated responses to such crimes result from external factors such as an unexpected discovery, intelligence provided by third countries or local residents, suggesting the pseudo-absence of an established strategy on the part of the repressive services in terms of the use of general aviation as a vector.

### Diversity in the modus operandi

The drugs that are discovered consist for the most part of cannabis resin, cocaine and synthetic drugs. The main aircraft movements illustrate the cross-border liaisons between France, the United Kingdom and Spain by aircraft, confirming the vector's efficiency in overcoming geographical obstacles such as the Pyrenees and the English Channel. Drug trafficking in the French West Indies is still mainly carried out through maritime vectors. However, the transportation of drugs by the vector of light aircrafts is bound to increase for the following reasons: the first reason is tied to a number of routes that are virtually unmonitored by radars (several grey zones tied to the geographical composition of the islands and the obsolescence of the radars themselves). Secondly, the increased airspace control in the neighboring countries, mostly due to the North-American influence, renders the French departments on the American continent particularly vulnerable to the dropping of drug cargos.

In the light of these movements, the airfields located in these border regions appear to be fundamentally exposed, especially considering the fact that the roads are increasingly monitored. Numerous MOs coexist rendering the exertion of control an extremely delicate matter. The most common method is applied as follows: the drug cargos are hardly dissimulated, transported in sport bags, the pilot does not turn in a flight plan, the transponder is switched off, there is no radio contact or transmission, the flight is carried out at the break of dawn or at night, the headlights are off and the aircraft flies at low altitude. The risks involved in such opera-

tions are extremely high, requiring an extreme dexterity on the part of the pilots or the use of equipment with goggle night vision.

Another modus operandi, located on the opposite side of the scale from the latter, is centered on the benefits of business aviation, far-removed from the formalities tied to the use of commercial flights. The organizations that use jets are capable of mobilizing an aircraft and its team in a rapid manner. This adaptability also allows them to fragment the trip through multiple layovers. A jet can travel several thousand kilometers, easily crossing the Atlantic Ocean. The pilots respect the aeronautical and flight obligations (opening and closing of flight plans). Business aviation is thus characterized by flexibility, for example the possibility of changing one's destination throughout the flight itself. It is therefore extremely difficult for the investigators to identify the illicit use of aircrafts and to predict their landing destination. The Bourget airport is the first European platform for business aviation, surpassing the one in London, with a yearly average of over 50 000 transits.

The choice of the aircraft is crucial in terms of the distance that can be covered. We thereby notice that when the distances are short (tens of kilometers), the choice tends to fall upon an ultra-light aircraft or a drone, devices with smaller radii of action but having more landing options. On average the quantity of the smuggled drugs is around 80 kg. Passenger aircrafts or helicopters are preferred to cover medium distances (few hundred kilometers), with on-board cargos of approximately 300 kg. Finally, the jets are used to travel long distances (thousands of kilometers) and carry between hundreds of kilos and a couple of tons in their underbelly.

In the former case, the aircrafts come from South America; Venezuela, Brazil, and often carry out a layover in Africa to then land on European soil. Also, the services surrounding air navigation are limited to the verification of the last flight plan and not the flight-plan history per se.

## HETEROGENEITY IN PUBLIC RESPONSES ACROSS NATIONS

### The Americas: control over the airspace between the producing and consuming zones

The Air Bridge Denial Program (ABDP), founded in 1995, implemented a strict control of the air space aimed at fighting drug trafficking via light aviation. This program rests on the development of real-time exchanges of intelligence information with the help of a radar span allowing the identification of clandestine flights (transponder switched off), and with the help of the military to operate aerial interceptions<sup>14</sup> in the Andean zone and the Caribbean<sup>15</sup>.

To do so, the Joint Inter-Agency Task Force-South (JIATFS), an inter-ministerial entity in the USA (associating the judicial police, the armed forces, the customs), is in charge of cross-examining the sensors that detect suspect aircrafts through classic intelligence dedicated to the trafficking of drugs by general aviation. This agency deals with 13 000 to 15 000 traces per day, which allows for the daily identification of 3 to 4 suspect flights<sup>16</sup>. The JIATFS is also in charge of operational missions, such as the coordination of international interception actions in competence zones that are external to the United States.

(14) The norms forbid all aircrafts from crossing the airspace without authorization, and if the aircraft does not comply with orders it can be neutralized in flight.

(15) Bilateral agreements allow for the interception of flights in foreign air space.

(16) This agency points out that 80% of its intelligence originates from traditional means, whereas the remaining 20% is achieved through multi-sensor detection systems (radars, etc.)

### **An adaptation of border-control oriented towards Ultra-light aircrafts and drones**

On top of the radars that were installed on the borders throughout the 1980's, the United States are now focusing on the reinforcement of their detection capabilities in terms of ultra-light aircrafts and drones. In this perspective, a law was passed entitled "Ultralight Aircraft Smuggling Prevention Act" (2011-2012) which allows for the prosecution of pilots and owners of ultra-light aircrafts and drones implicated in the smuggling of drugs<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, the American administration recently adopted a new real-time detection system (including drones) adapted to the identification of light aircrafts<sup>18</sup>.

### **In the USA, the surveillance of airfields is considered essential but difficult to implement**

The *National Northern Border Counternarcotics* established in 2012<sup>19</sup>, laid the foundations for targeting actions in terms of general aviation. The risks are evaluated through a cartography that takes into consideration several criteria like the accessibility and protection of the platforms. A free hot-line number is distributed as a means of creating awareness amongst those in charge for the airfields. It is important to note that the United States have opted for an inter-ministerial model when it comes to repressive structures as the determining mean to effectively fight the criminality tied to general aviation.

### **Colombia : a centralized service**

In Colombia, on top of a strict control over the airspace, the police forces have a specialized unit dedicated to general aviation and supported by the civil aviation. These specialized policemen annually inspect, one by one, the hundreds of secondary airfields and aircrafts that are based on the sight. Each aircraft has to obtain a yearly certificate of the aforementioned specialized department and declare all modifications undergone by the aircraft itself (paint, technical modifications, sale, loaning of the aircraft). Finally, this service produces dedicated intelligence.

### **Venezuela: dichotomy between the strengthening of surveillance over general aviation since 2009 and the actual observation of clandestine flights**

Due to the significant increase in clandestine flights, in 2008 the Venezuelan government implemented a control

plan to fight this phenomenon. The plan provides a reinforcement of the radar-coverage, the means of interception and a stricter control over both civilian and military aircrafts, as well as the destruction of clandestine runways. However, considering the registered radar observations, it is legitimate to question the concrete implication of the Venezuelan authorities in the war on drugs.

### **Western Africa: a total absence of control except for the French project, « Malian wings »**

Regardless of the international projects that determine the current airport security norms, general aviation in Africa is not subjected to these security checks. For the time being only the French initiative, known as "the Malian wings", is working towards the amelioration of the current situation. The Malians experimented with the implementation of this initiative in 2011, with the hope that such a model might be exported to other African states.

Moreover, the initiatives undertaken by the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), as well as the EU, such as the Aircop project and the anti-trafficking airport cells (CAAT), have identified as their long-term objective the targeting of general aviation. This is due to fact that the general aviation mainly uses the Africans airport structures to smuggle the drugs.

### **Morocco: a reinforcement of the collaboration with the European Union**

Morocco improved its counter-actions in order to reduce the threats to state sovereignty within its airspace and to counteract the frequent rotations of aircrafts between Spain and the United Kingdom. To do so, the Moroccan authorities are reinforcing their radar-detection capabilities and the cooperation with Spain through the creation of joint teams for intelligence-analysis. Furthermore, in order to improve the fluidity and rapidity of the circulation of intelligence information, two centers of police cooperation (Morocco-Spain) have been created, the first located in Algeciras (Spain) and Tangiers (Morocco), involving on the first part the Gendarmerie Royale and the Guardia Civil, on the second part.

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(17) A prison sentence, not exceeding 20 years, and a 250,000 dollar fine are current penalties (the sum of the fine is identical to those applied for the illegal trespassing of the air space).

(18) These ultra-lights stand out because of their weak radar signal and a cruising speed that is inferior to those of reached by tourism aircrafts.

(19) <http://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/news-releases-remarks/office-of-national-drug-control-policy-releases-northern-border-drug-control-strategy>

### European initiatives at the embryonic state

Europol insists on its growing interest in the use of general aviation for criminal purposes. Aside from the trafficking of drugs which constitutes a major issue, the Den Haag institution is now addressing the trafficking of arms, of clandestine migrants, the transportation of cash, precious stones, artworks, all through the vector of general aviation. To date, Europol is collecting numerous elements on these threats, with the final objective of constituting a permanent working-group concerning these issues.

In parallel, three years ago the "airport group" belonging to the Pompidou Group (Council of Europe), set up a sub-group bringing together representatives of the European (and non-European) repressive services to increase awareness and the exchange of valid operational practices. Thanks to these exchanges this sub-group was able to constitute approximately twenty indicators of risk.

### The Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre for Narcotics (MAOC-N)

Founded in 2007 as an organ of cooperation amongst the European and North American anti-drug agencies, the MAOC-N is an operational centre of intelligence-analysis for maritime drug-smuggling. Although its charter makes reference to aerial smuggling, these concepts have yet to find a practical implementation within an agency currently and exclusively oriented towards maritime vectors. However the interest shown towards general aviation as a means of smuggling drugs remains visible, especially concerning the will to better monitor transatlantic flights. Both inspired by, and complementary to, the JIATFS, the MAOC-N could become a key structure in counteracting this phenomenon. For example, the collection, exploitation and exchange of specialized intelligence and the coordination of the police as well as European air defence, could be facilitated by an interagency coordination.

### Spain : the most effective European response

Being the most exposed European nation, in 2011 Spain reinforced its policies regarding the smuggling of drugs via general aviation by implementing a national plan. The two main pillars of this response are the customs and the Guardia Civil, closely associated to both the police and the air force. This plan implies a strengthening of radar-coverage (specifically the integrated system of external vigilance-SIVE) and cooperation with the Portuguese and Moroccan authorities. The efforts deployed in terms of operational intelligence have already produced some of the desired effects; improvements in the detection, interception, and monitoring of secondary airfields. Between 2011 and 2012 alone,

these measures have allowed for the identification of 208 improvised landing strips and secondary airports and 132 clandestine landing strips. 354 aircraft and platform inspections were carried out, and 38 clandestine flights were detected, along with 118 suspect aircrafts. Also, 43 planes and helicopters were scrupulously inspected. Regardless of the structural difficulties tied to inter-ministerial cooperation amongst the three main repressive bodies, these searches resulted in three investigations.

### Portugal: a constructive involvement of the civil aviation

Although the budget problems heavily impacted the execution of targeted plans of action, the Portuguese services have acknowledged the proportion of the threat they are faced with. Their actions are focused on the improvement of the cooperation with the Spanish authorities and better scrutiny of secondary airports and platforms. The Portuguese civil aviation is involved in these containment efforts, benefiting from the knowledge and experience of the United States's civil aviation.

### The Netherlands: increased oversight of aircrafts piloted by coordination centers

The Dutch customs created a control centre whose intergovernmental vocation<sup>20</sup> is also directed towards general aviation. This « *brain dump* » guides the inter-ministerial action, facilitates the exchange of mutual knowledge between safety and security matters. An exchange protocol with Germany and Belgium allows for the mutualisation of radar coverage and the emission of a warning-system.

Risk-analysis of airfields are produced on the basis of the information collected by the governmental registers<sup>21</sup>, open sources (OSINT) and the intelligence accumulated through the surveillance of the airfields<sup>22</sup>. Special attention is paid to discrepancies between the flight plans turned in to the competent authorities and the trajectories of the radars. This unique focal point carries out approximately 200 inspections of private aircrafts with the aid of canine units, as well as having placed certain secondary airfields under surveillance, using automatic licence-plate readers, surveillance cameras, placing bugs in the infrastructures as aircraft hangars and sound-sensors to detect possible night flights.

Despite the multiplication of the control-systems, the Dutch services have not managed to unveil concrete cases concerning the trafficking of drugs. Certain agents have mentioned the adaptation of the smugglers to this system, allegedly using the long beaches on the Dutch coast to take-off and land in a discreet manner.

(20) Grouping of both civil organizations (Police, civil aviation) and military institutions (air force)

(21) Chamber of Commerce, land registry, pilot licenses, and aircraft registers.

(22) Aircraft owners, background checks of aircraft owners, type of use, passenger access, security of the aircrafts hangars and identification of the cars that circulate in the aerodromes.

## The United Kingdom: actions centred on intelligence and international cooperation

The « United Kingdom Border Force » and the « Serious Organised Crime Agency » (SOCA), possessing specialized intelligence, and with the support of the local police, are the principal agencies to intervene in affairs involving the use of general aviation in the trafficking of drugs through platforms located on UK soil. Also, the civil aviation services, known as the Control Authority, are associated with the monitoring of the platforms. Furthermore, these services promptly revoke the licences of pilots involved in the transportation of illegal drugs.

The SOCA draws some of its specialized knowledge from international networks and the operational intelligence systems it has set up in Africa and Latin America, partially through its participation to the JIAFTS and the MAOC-N.

The creation in the near future of the National Crime Agency should revive the attention brought to general aviation through the definition of clear strategic orientations, as well as reinforced surveillance and border-coordination (Joint Border Security Threat Assessment).

In addition to the regular flight plans, pilots engaging movements to or from British soil will be obliged to fill out a GAR (General Aviation Report).

Joint operations including the UKBA supervised by the SOCA, targeting general aviation, are carried out to increase the efficiency of the struggle against organized crime. The distinction is made between the necessary intelligence and the elements related to the specific investigation.

In conclusion, the use of this mode of transportation is undergoing a significant increase which seems to be drawing only partial attention from the services concerned by the illicit trafficking of drugs. For example, within Europol, this threat is given the same importance as one would find within other European structures dealing with these issues. European organizations incite the member-states to increase their awareness of drug trafficking via light aviation. They express the necessity for coordination, especially in regards to the trans-border movements that are easily achieved with these types of vehicles. The challenge resides in the capacity to develop coherent and collaborative responses in controlling general aviation in Europe and the joint intervention of the authorities of the member-states.

## AN EXCEEDINGLY TIMID FRENCH PUBLIC RESPONSE

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### Public responses are under dimensioned despite the undeniable presence of the phenomenon

For the purposes of this reflection, the term public-response is hereby defined as the repressive actions counteracting the trafficking of drugs through unmonitored airfields. The agencies involved cover the spectrum of the anti-drug structures; Police, Customs, the *Gendarmerie* and the judicial branch. Within this system, a specialized unit of the *Gendarmerie* dedicated to air transport has the mission, amongst others, of monitoring the application of the norms and regulations by the actors operating the platforms themselves (pilots, aircraft owners, platform managers, Air-club managers...). Considering the current weight of the maritime and road vectors, these forms of transportation has yet to become a priority in the eyes of the specialized forces in the domain.

### Public action of a reactive nature

As far as the trafficking of drugs by general aviation concerned, the nature of public action is generally reactive and not proactive. In reality, the problem of “unmonitored airfields” is specific to the capacities of the aircrafts to land on monitored airfields (like private jets), or on the contrary on private areas like helipads on private properties, or the dumping of cargos in the sea.

The range of airfields is extremely disparate. For example, if the after-math of the September 11th attacks implied a continuously renewed, meticulous and permanent scrutiny of the national and international safety and security regulations in international<sup>23</sup> airports, secondary airfields have seen the presence of state actors diminish in their sphere.

These patterns can be explained by the shift in state-priorities towards those passages considered to be strategically sensitive. Also, the ranking of secondary airfields (DGAC law, 6th of April 2010, regarding the safety of secondary airfields), allows assessing the sensitivity of each platform and its safety classifying these in three categories of increasing risk: G1, G2, G3.

This model, based on the similar constructions used throughout the war on terror, could prove efficient if placed within a context dominated by the infractions to Common law, which include the trafficking of drugs. The prefects are in charge of applying the safety and security norms in the airfields located within their perimeter of competence. Yet, once again, the application of these regulations is extremely disparate, especially in regards to measures dictated by local governmental decrees (orders of the prefect) on the accessibility and circulation of the so-called “runway” zones.

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(23) Organization of International Civil Aviation (Organisation de l'aviation civile internationale - OACI ); European Agency for Aviation Safety (Agence européenne de la sécurité aérienne – EASA ); General Directorate of Civil Aviation ( DGAC),

### The necessity of intelligence in facing the vulnerabilities of secondary airfields

These unmonitored airfields are characterized by specific vulnerabilities, defined by the Prefect Dussourd in his 2008 report on secondary airfields, pointing out the "difficulty in detecting and monitoring a large part of the general aviation flights"<sup>24</sup>.

To quote Dussourd: "we don't have the means to control everything"<sup>25</sup>. This is where the role of intelligence becomes primordial in this sector. Currently, the intelligence available is disparate and scattered amongst different services that have propensity to contextualize and withhold elements in the absence of an inter-ministerial dynamic. A customs' service, the Division of operative services, is developing an expertise in regards to general aviation, partially due to the fiscal monitoring obligations but also increasingly tied to criminal analysis.

However, certain structures, like the National Centre of air operations CNOA, cooperate with several governmental agencies on issues concerning intrusions into the French airspace without proper flight plans, or having suspect-behaviour in flight.

The presence of liaison agents (gendarmerie, police, customs), contributes to the transmission of information to the respective headquarters dealing with the trajectory of the aircrafts through the use of military means and radar coverage.

### International cooperation reveals itself to be essential

The use of the aerial vector imposes, by its nature, coordination and rapidity of the services concerned once the information regarding an aircraft containing drugs is transmitted by the services of a third country.

For many, part of this response implies a minima European involvement, in terms of the European airspace being frag-

mented by the pre-eminence of national sovereignty. Moreover, the crossing of borders through the use of this type of vector is relatively easy, requiring the possibility on the part of public authorities to pursue an aircraft beyond their proper airspace. Several bilateral agreements allow for the incursion in a neighbouring county's airspace, the time necessary for the local authorities to take over.

Within the Schengen agreement exists a norm, currently in application, dealing with trans-border crime and cooperation between nations, and demanding a common perception of threat in the domain of the European airspace. However, this remains the hardest part due the establishment of penal policies that relegate the trafficking of drugs by general aviation to a secondary agenda, or the weight of the aviation lobby that endorses the application of "soft law" (regulations based on the security and safety codes of good conduct in this domain), in order to protect the freedom of circulation.

Other countries located on different continents are currently facing the same threat. For example, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), in its 2011 yearly report, in regards to the use of general aviation (particularly in Western Africa) stated: "the use of private jets, aircrafts capable of penetrating deep into the African territory, is becoming the alternative method for transporting cocaine from Western Africa to Europe"<sup>26</sup>.

This practice has been in place for several years in both Latin America and Africa alike. The span of the phenomenon was such that the Peruvian and Columbian authorities had to set up, with the support of the United States, the aforementioned Air Bridge Program in the 1990's. Through this system, the number of illegal flights detected in Colombia decreased from 657 in 2003, to 32 in 2009, a reduction of 95%. Brazil and the Dominican Republic have acknowledged the menace and are following in the footsteps of nations implementing such plans.

(24) Dussourd J, Report on the safety in secondary airports (Rapport sur la sûreté dans les aérodromes secondaires), Ministry of Interior, Paris, 2008.

(25) Ibid

(26) The use of private jets, capable of travelling far into the African territory, is becoming an alternative method of smuggling cocaine from Western Africa to Europe\_ UNODC annual report, 2011.

## KEYS FIGURE

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- France - number of valid licences in 2011, all aircrafts included : **74 267**.
- France - number of aircrafts disposing of a valid certificate of navigability, in 2011, general aviation: **8 211**.
- France - number of ultra-light aircrafts disposing of a valid ID card in 2011: **13 040**
- **20%**, it's the ratio of cocaine supposedly transported through light aviation in the USA.
- **223**, it's the number of clandestine Ultra-light aircrafts detected on the US border in 2011.
- **43**, it's the number of suspected transatlantic crossings by plane identified by the British in 2010.
- **49**, it's the number of illegal flights detected in Spain in 2010
- **12**, it's the total number of accidents involving light aircrafts registered by the Moroccans between 2008 and 2011.
- **354**, it's the number of inspections of airfields and improvised platforms carried out by the Spanish between 2011 and 2012.
- **55 000 U.S. \$**, the price of a kilo of cocaine in Europe, **35 000 US \$** in the USA and **2 500 U.S. \$** after it leaves the laboratories in Colombia.
- **1800**, it's the number of secondary airfields and improvised-platforms exposed in France by the Prefect Dussourd
- **3 million**, it's the number of non-commercial air movements in France.
- **560 kilos**, it was the quantity of cannabis transported by helicopter in the Béziers affair (South-west of France).
- **1.5 tons**, it was the quantity of cocaine transported by the private jet that intercepted in the Canary Islands (Spain) in 2012.



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