



Three brought to federal court in Miami, accused of conspiring to transport cocaine

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A Colombian and two Ecuadoreans have appeared in Miami federal court accused of conspiring to transport cocaine on a boat intercepted by the U.S. Coast Guard near the Galápagos Islands in South America.

It's only the latest of many similar cases involving boats intercepted at sea, far from Miami, whose crew members are then brought here for trial.

The case that unfolded 450 miles northwest of the Galápagos began April 7 when a U.S. patrol aircraft sighted a go-fast boat. Dependable, a U.S. Coast Guard cutter nearby, launched a boat with a boarding team to investigate and, if necessary, seize the go-fast, according to a criminal complaint filed in court by a special agent of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

When the Coast Guard boat approached, the go-fast boat ignored it, and its crewmen began throwing objects into the water, according to the complaint.

“The boarding team gained positive control of the TOI [Target of Interest] and commenced a right of visit boarding that yielded three persons on board,” according to the complaint.

They were identified in the complaint as Eddi Cecilio Arana Míderos of Colombia, and Rubén Hernando Bustos Pereira and Roque Jacinto Montano Girón, both of Ecuador.

Coast Guard personnel boarded the boat after determining that it was a stateless vessel since it was not flying a national flag, had no name painted on the hull and its crewmen did not possess any registry documents, the complaint said. However, it noted that it had a number painted on the side.

Arana Míderos told Coast Guard personnel that the boat had been registered in Colombia, but when contacted, Colombian authorities could neither confirm nor deny that this was the case, the complaint said.

As a result, Coast Guard officials decided “to treat the vessel as a vessel without nationality and conduct a full law enforcement boarding,” the complaint said.

It added that the boarding team then reported sighting approximately 20 bales on deck, which later were found to contain about 930 kilos of cocaine.

“All three defendants admitted their involvement in the drug-smuggling conspiracy and that they knew they were transporting drugs on board the vessel,” the complaint says. “All three defendants also admitted that the vessel was going to Mexico and all were paid between \$2,000 and \$3,500 to transport the drugs.”

A DEA spokeswoman said she could not comment on the case because it’s still active in court.

Arana Míderos’ attorney could not be reached for comment, and Montano Girón’s attorney, Héctor Flores, declined to comment.

But Marc David Seitles, Bustos Pereira’s attorney, indicated that his client is a victim of the enforcement system.

“Yet another impoverished fisherman with a second grade education facing a minimum of 10 years in federal prison,” Seitles said in an email message. “This is fighting the war on drugs? Laughable.”

Many Latin American defendants in similar prior cases have told U.S. enforcement officials that they are fishermen or farmers who have been coerced or threatened by drug traffickers into transporting cocaine on boats.
