

## American Airlines Trafficking Ring (Puerto Rico Airport Group 1)

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<b>A. When the organization was formed + brief history</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• In 1999 this group of American Airlines employees began smuggling and distributing cocaine within the United States from Puerto Rico.<sup>1</sup></li><li>• Twenty-three individuals connected to this group were indicted. Wilfredo Rodriguez-Rosado seems to have been the leader and recruited the others.<sup>2</sup> Nine individuals were current employees of American Airlines. These employees (including several bag handlers) held positions allowing them access to the cargo loading area of the planes.</li><li>• The DEA reported that the organization was responsible for smuggling 9,000 kilograms (over 10 tons and over \$19 million worth) of cocaine into the United States using American Airlines aircraft.<sup>3</sup></li><li>• This group was busted by the DEA during “Operation Heavy Cargo”. The members were indicted on four separate charges of conspiracy and aiding and abetting the conspiracy of possession with attempt to distribute.<sup>4</sup></li></ul>
<b>B. Types of illegal activities engaged in,</b>
a. In general
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Drug Trafficking</li></ul>
b. <i>Specific detail: types of illicit trafficking activities engaged in</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Trafficked 9,000 kilograms of cocaine to various airports around the continental United States</li></ul>
<b>C. Scope and Size</b>
a. Estimated size of network and membership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 23 Individuals including 9 American Airlines employees</li></ul>
b. Countries / regions group is known to have operated in. (i.e. the group’s operating area)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Puerto Rico and the United States</li></ul>
<b>D. Leader Characteristics</b>
a. Who is/are the leader(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Wilfredo Rodriguez-Rosado</li></ul>
b. Leadership timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Information not found.</li></ul>
c. Leadership style (autocratic, diffuse, etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Little is known about this, but the indictment noted that some of the co-conspirators used intimidation against other co-conspirators in order to maintain control over the drug trafficking activities.<sup>5</sup></li></ul>
<b>E. Organizational Structure</b>
a. Topology (cellular, hierarchical, etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Seems to have been a loose network, although the DEA graphic of the co-conspirators divided them into those operating at the airport and those operating outside the airport with Rodriguez-Rosado as the connector.<sup>6</sup></li></ul>
b. Membership – is there formal or informal membership in the organization or network? What role do informal or nonmembers play in trafficking and other criminal activities?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Information not found.</li></ul>

Information derived from several sources and searchable databases.

All research conducted according to the project manual.

c.	Command and Control (decentralized or centralized)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information not found.</li> </ul>
<b>F. Resources</b>	
a.	Financial
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The infrastructure for the group was not that substantial and consisted of homes and a few businesses. The forfeiture claim in the indictment was for \$18 million and listed the homes and businesses that were used.</li> </ul>
b.	Human
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information not found.</li> </ul>
c.	Logistical
	i. Forgery, safe-houses, etc.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The network had a number of residential and commercial properties in Puerto Rico.<sup>7</sup> The members used various houses and properties to prepare and package travel suitcases.<sup>8</sup></li> </ul>
	ii. Key routes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information not found.</li> </ul>
d.	Transportation
	i. Land
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information not found.</li> </ul>
	ii. Sea
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information not found.</li> </ul>
	iii. Air
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used American Airlines aircraft to smuggling cocaine into the United States.<sup>9</sup></li> </ul>
	iv. Intermodal container
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information not found.</li> </ul>
<b>G. Trafficking Methods and Modalities</b>	
a.	Corruption
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information not found.</li> </ul>
b.	Concealment <sup>10</sup>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Used travel suitcases, each filled with about 30 kilograms of cocaine, to smuggle the drug into the United States. Once in the United States, other employees would take the suitcases and distribute them to the various destinations.<sup>11</sup></li> <li>Air cargo containers were also used to store the suitcases while on the plane</li> </ul>
c.	Deception
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information not found.</li> </ul>
d.	Circumvention (avoiding border entry points) <sup>12</sup>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>By putting the suitcases on planes in Puerto Rico bound for the United States, passage through Customs was avoided.</li> </ul>
<b>H. Prior / Existing Relationships</b>	
a.	Other criminal organizations (cooperative and conflictual)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The group is reported to have contracted out its services to other trafficking organizations as a method of getting South American cocaine to the United States.<sup>13</sup></li> </ul>
b.	Corrupt politicians, law enforcement, political parties and other state entities, etc.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information not found.</li> </ul>
c.	<i>Specific detail: Any alliances / past dealings with terrorist groups.</i>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None that is known</li> </ul>
<b>I. Ideological / Ethnic / Familial Orientation (if any)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information not found.</li> </ul>
<b>J. Technical Sophistication</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information not found.</li> </ul>
<b>K. Penchant for Innovation</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information not found.</li> </ul>
<b>L. Activities in United States</b>
<p>a. Includes both criminal and non-criminal activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distribution of cocaine</li> </ul>
<p>b. <i>Specific detail: trafficking activities ; logistical activities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Once the product reached the United States, other members involved in the ring would pick up the suitcases and take them to their destination.<sup>14</sup></li> </ul>
<p>c. Linkages with US groups</p> <p>i. Market/transaction links</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information not found.</li> </ul>
<p>ii. Stable supplier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information not found.</li> </ul>
<p>iii. Franchise arrangement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information not found.</li> </ul>
<p>iv. HQ and Branch office</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information not found.</li> </ul>
<b>M. Evaluations</b>
<p>a. Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inside knowledge of the workings of airplanes and airports. Though the group was not very innovative, using the airlines to smuggle in the cocaine was effective. Conspirators who knew the airports and airlines were able to smuggle in a large amount of cocaine over a decade.</li> <li>• Exploited status of Puerto Rico. Because Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States; this group avoided the risk of going through customs. This allowed them easy access to their destinations within the 48 continental states.</li> <li>• Contractual relationship with various drug trafficking organizations provided flexibility and allowed for more business.</li> </ul>
<p>b. Weaknesses and vulnerabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of organizational sophistication and size. The network was relatively small and everyone was connected to each other. The leader was not protected by distance from the group. Because of this everyone connected to the group was arrested.</li> <li>• The lack of support from airport security. The network does not appear to have had any connection with airport security. Because of this, operations were very risky.</li> </ul>
<p>c. Additional insights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Though the group was arrested in September 2009, it may be worth looking into the methods and success of the organization. The way they used the airlines to traffic thousands of kilograms of cocaine into the United States could be a blueprint for other trafficking organizations, especially for those coming to the United States from Puerto Rico. As noted in the analysis of the Bourne Organization, using airlines and</li> </ul>

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baggage handlers is a tried and true method of smuggling.

#### Other Notes

- The evidence is very limited even in the indictment and the gaps in the template reflect a lack of available information in the public domain.

<sup>1</sup> *United States v. Wilfredo Rodriguez-Rosada, et al.*, No. 90-298 (D.P.R. filed Sept. 9, 2009) (Indictment, pg 3) (For following citations, the source will be cited Indictment)

<sup>2</sup> Associated Press. "Nine American Airlines employees face drug smuggling charges". *Guardian.uk.co*. 15 September 2009. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/sep/15/puerto-rico-american-airlines-drugs>>. Date Accessed: 29 April 2011. (For following citations, the source will be cited "Nine American Airlines employees face drug smuggling charges").

And

Indictment at pg 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Indictment in its entirety

<sup>5</sup> Indictment at pg. 7

<sup>6</sup> See Operation Heavy Cargo: DEA Investigation

[http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/states/newsrel/2009/carib091509\\_dto.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/states/newsrel/2009/carib091509_dto.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Indictment at 10-16

<sup>8</sup> *United States v. Wilfredo Rodriguez-Rosada, et al.*, No. 90-298 (D.P.R. filed Sept. 9, 2009) (Indictment).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Indictment at pg 6.

<sup>12</sup> United States Department of Justice. "23 Individuals Indicted and Arrested for Drug Trafficking" *DallasMorningNews.com*. 15 September 2009. <http://aviationblog.dallasnews.com/archives/2009/09/aa-employees-allegedly-at-cent.html>. Date Accessed: 29 April 2011

<sup>13</sup> "Nine American Airlines employees face drug smuggling charges"

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.