

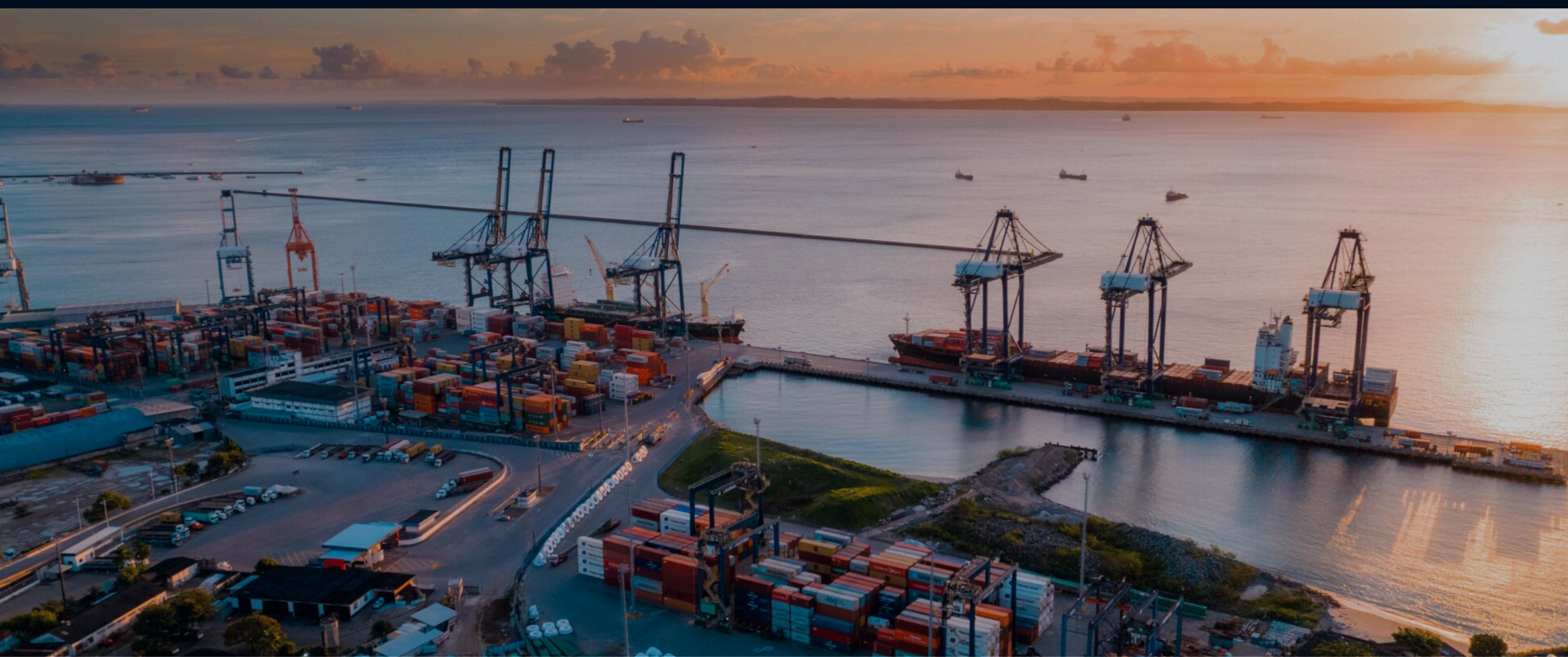


# Northeastern Brazilian ports



RISK ANALYSIS on  
main threats and  
emerging routes

REPORT 005





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## Overview

### Overview of the current security scenario in Northeastern Brazilian ports.

Northeastern Brazil has become one of the fastest-growing maritime logistics regions in South America. Continuous investments in port infrastructure, increasing container throughput, expanding grain exports, and the consolidation of new international shipping services have transformed the region into a strategic gateway connecting Brazil to Europe, North America, and West Africa.

While these developments strengthen the competitiveness of ports such as Pecém, Suape, Itaqui and Salvador, they simultaneously increase their attractiveness to transnational organized crime groups seeking alternative export routes for illicit commodities.

Rather than replacing traditional high-risk ports such as Santos or Paranaguá, criminal organizations are progressively diversifying their operational footprint by exploiting ports with growing international connectivity and comparatively lower historical enforcement pressure.

The Northeastern ports are key locations in these strategies.

For shipowners, this evolving scenario represents a shift in operational risk. Increased exposure to container contamination, insider collaboration, unauthorized access during cargo operations, and underwater tampering requires a proactive, intelligence-driven security posture supported by layered inspection capabilities before departure from Brazilian ports.

In the following pages you will find updated material and new info about the main threats and risk scenarios surrounding these ports. We hope you will find this manual to be a strong, evidence-based guideline for your next port calls in Brazil.

Detection Brazil K9 team.



## REGIONAL SECURITY CONTEXT

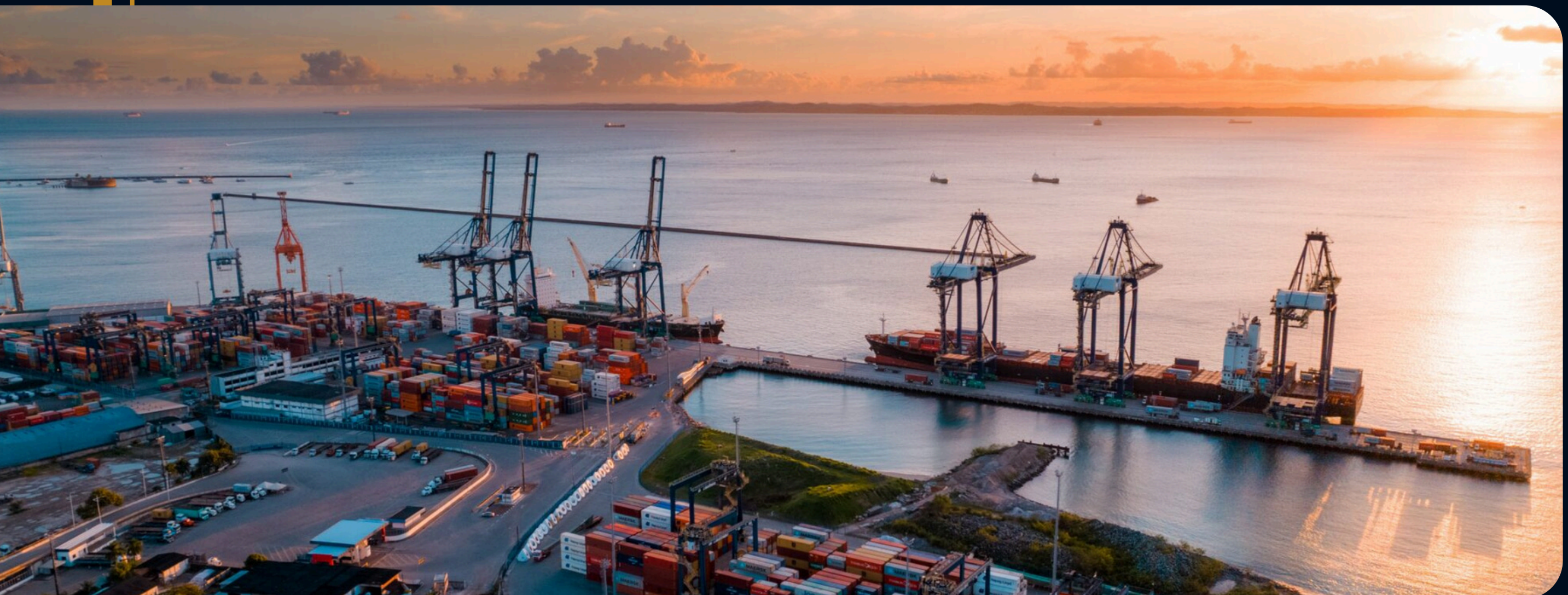


### Recent drug seizures and criminal activity linked to the **Balkan Mafia**

In recent years, law enforcement agencies have identified a clear expansion of cocaine trafficking activities through ports in Northeastern Brazil. Intelligence assessments indicate that organized crime groups are increasingly exploiting the region's strategic geographic location. Recent seizures reinforce this trend: **In 2025, 93% of the cocaine seized in Ceará's customs zones was distributed between the ports of Mucuripe and Pecém,** according to the Federal Police.

#### **PORT OF SALVADOR HAS EMERGED AS A NEW TARGET FOR INTERNATIONAL DRUG TRAFFICKING, LINKED TO THE BALKAN MAFIA**

In 2026 Northeastern ports has attracted increasing attention from the Federal Police. The region is home to vessels that feed the Atlantic route of international drug trafficking, coordinated by the **Balkan Mafia**. According to recent investigations, the ports of Bahia attract logistical supporters of the mafia in Brazil who help conceal drugs for maritime transport departing from Salvador.



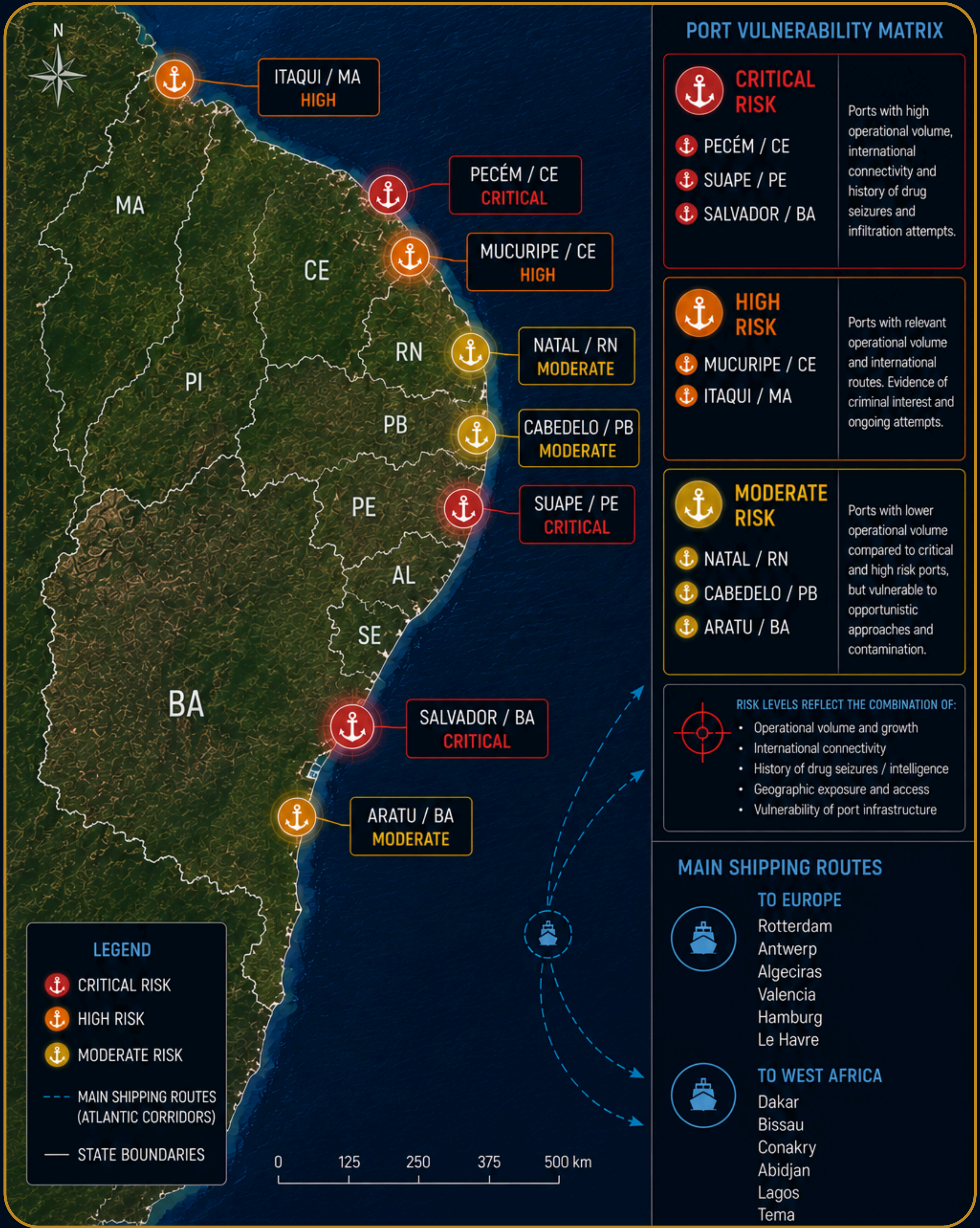
The Balkan clan, one of the largest cocaine trafficking groups in Europe, has driven the illegal trade through West African countries such as Senegal, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Cape Verde for years.

The connection with these African routes prompted an investigation after approximately **2.7 tons of cocaine were seized aboard a sailboat** intercepted in international waters near Cape Verde on the African coast.

As noticed, the clan is now focusing its attention on the Northeastern Brazil , which shares the spotlight with the Port of Santos as a major drug trafficking hub for other countries.



# PORT VULNERABILITY MATRIX - 2026



Beyond these logistic corridors, organized crime increasingly adopts decentralized operational models designed to complicate detection and law enforcement response.



## RISK PROFILES:

### Port of Pecém (CE):

The port appeared second on the list of areas that concentrated the largest quantities of cocaine seized in 2025 in the Northeast. 135 kg were found in 2025 and 29 kg in 2024, representing a 78% jump from one year to the next.

The combination of growing container traffic, expanding export volumes, and strategic Atlantic positioning creates favorable conditions for organized crime to exploit legitimate logistics chains.

### Port of Salvador (BA):

As previously mentioned, the Port of Salvador has strong ties to the Balkan Mafia, positioning it as a strategic hub for shipping cargo abroad. Recent Federal Police investigations revealed that criminal groups managed operations ranging from gaining access to restricted port areas to selecting cargo and concealing drugs inside containers bound for Europe. The port's urban surroundings and high commercial activity demand continuous monitoring throughout vessel operations.

### Port of Suape (PE):

Suape remains the largest logistics complex in Northeastern Brazil, handling significant volumes of containers, liquid bulk and project cargo. The port plays a central role in the shipment of large quantities of drugs, particularly cocaine, to Africa, especially the Gulf of Guinea region, emerging as the continent's primary contemporary drug trafficking corridor. The main drug seizures include cargo often concealed in shipments of fruit, coffee, frozen meat, and manufactured goods.

### Port of Mucuripe (CE):

In June 2026, a Federal Police investigation at the Port of Mucuripe indicated the existence of a structured scheme dedicated to international drug trafficking, with evidence suggesting the use of port facilities to facilitate the export of narcotics and conceal the illicit origin of the proceeds. Previous narcotics seizures demonstrate that despite handling lower cargo volumes than Pecém, the port remains attractive to criminal organizations seeking operational flexibility within the state.

### Port of Itaqui (MA):

The port area has become a target for international drug trafficking, with narcotics frequently concealed within cargo ships. Although primarily recognized for bulk commodities, Itaqui has experienced sustained cargo growth supported by Brazil's northern export corridor. Increasing grain exports and multimodal connections have elevated its strategic importance for both legitimate trade and criminal logistics.

### Ports of Aratu (BA), Natal (RN) and Cabedelo (PB):

Aratu's proximity to major metropolitan infrastructure and integration with Bahia's industrial complex require continuous security awareness despite comparatively lower container throughput.

Recent investigations reveal that the Port of Cabedelo (PB) and the entire city have been targeted by schemes involving criminal organizations linked to drug trafficking. The Federal Highway Police and the Military Police frequently seize large quantities of drugs such as cocaine and hashish, etc.

The Port of Natal stands out as the South American port closest to Europe. This proximity is crucial for criminal groups. The Federal Revenue Service and the Federal Police routinely intercept illicit shipments at the docks, with seizure records totaling tons and involving hundreds of millions of reais.

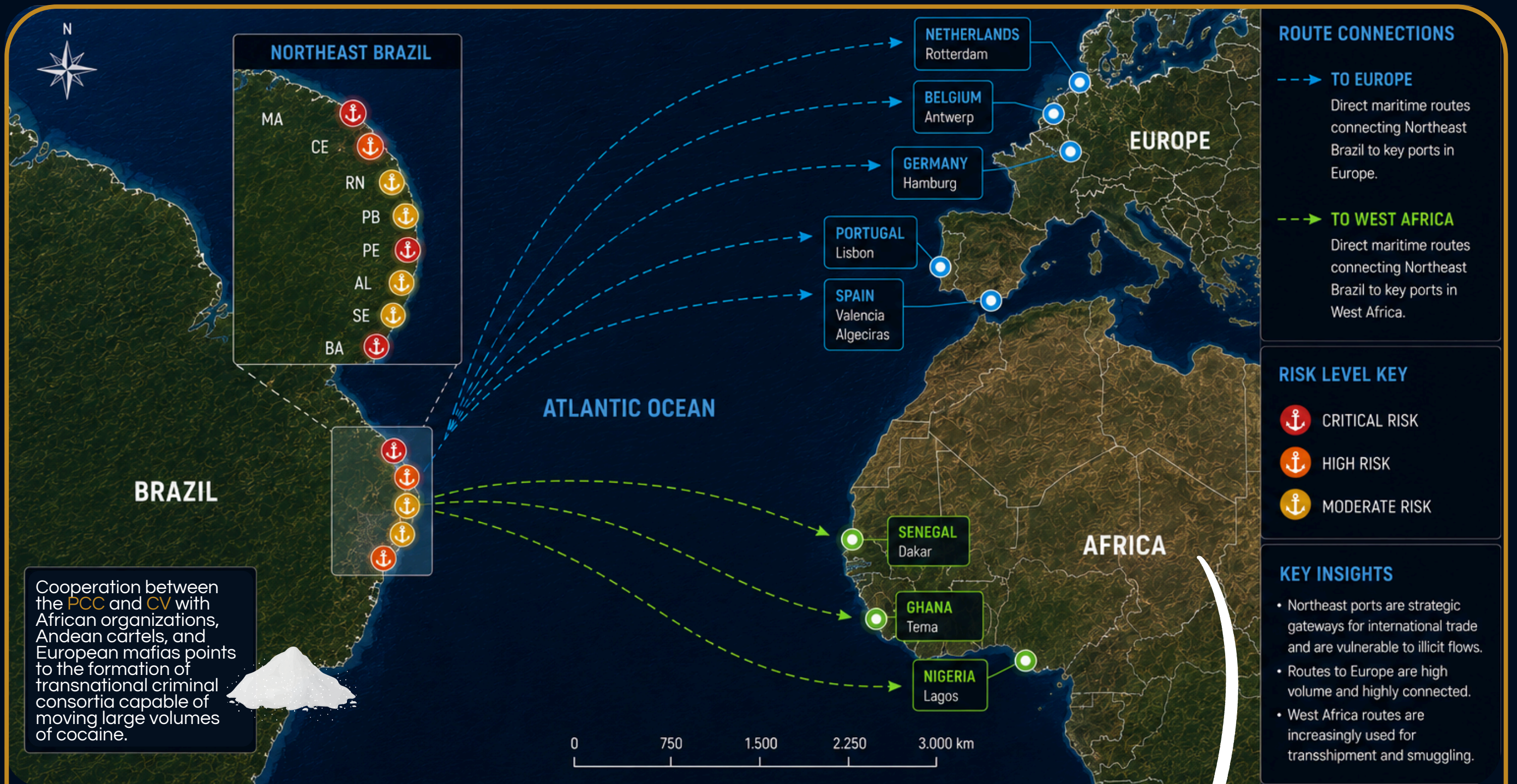
CRITICAL RISK PORTS

HIGH RISK PORTS

MODERATE  
RISK PORTS



# ATLANTIC CORRIDOR TO AFRICAN PORTS



## West Africa as an emerging strategic corridor

Although many ports in the region are close to European hubs frequently exploited for international trafficking, criminal groups also focus on Africa when utilizing ports in the Northeast.

West Africa has become increasingly relevant within the global cocaine supply chain.

Countries including **Senegal, Ghana and Nigeria** occupy strategic positions between South America and Europe, functioning as important transshipment hubs exploited by transnational criminal organizations.

For Brazilian exports departing from Northeastern ports, the shorter Atlantic crossing to African ports provides legitimate commercial advantages while simultaneously creating opportunities for criminal networks seeking to diversify maritime trafficking routes.

Intelligence assessments indicate that narcotics may either continue directly toward European ports or be temporarily stored, redistributed, or consolidated, through West African logistics networks before reaching final destinations.

This geographic reality reinforces the need for enhanced vessel security immediately prior to departure from Brazilian ports, particularly for ships operating on routes connecting Northeastern Brazil to Europe and the **Gulf of Guinea**.





# NORTHEASTERN PORTS THREAT ASSESSMENT

The current threat landscape across Northeastern Brazil is characterized by **operational diversification rather than concentration**. Unlike previous years, when cocaine exports were heavily concentrated through Santos, intelligence indicates that organized criminal groups now distribute their operations across multiple ports to reduce operational predictability and law enforcement pressure. This shift is towards the region.

Current criminal methodologies in the Northeastern ports include:

- ⚓ Container contamination during terminal operations
- ⚓ Insider recruitment among logistics workers;
- ⚓ Unauthorized access during cargo handling;
- ⚓ Small boat approaches alongside berthed vessels;
- ⚓ Underwater attachment to hull structures and sea chests;
- ⚓ Exploitation of vessels during extended port stays.



## Smaller vessels: a new trafficking strategy

As enforcement efforts intensify around large commercial vessels in the Northeastern ports and other major Brazilian ports, criminal organizations are increasingly **shifting their trafficking strategies**. The use of **fishing boats and semi-submersible vessels** has grown due to their ability to operate with greater discretion and evade detection in coastal and offshore waters. These platforms enable flexible smuggling operations, including at-sea transshipments to deep-sea vessels or direct routes to international destinations. This evolving threat highlights the need for enhanced maritime surveillance, international cooperation, and integrated intelligence-driven security measures to keep pace with the changing tactics of organized crime.

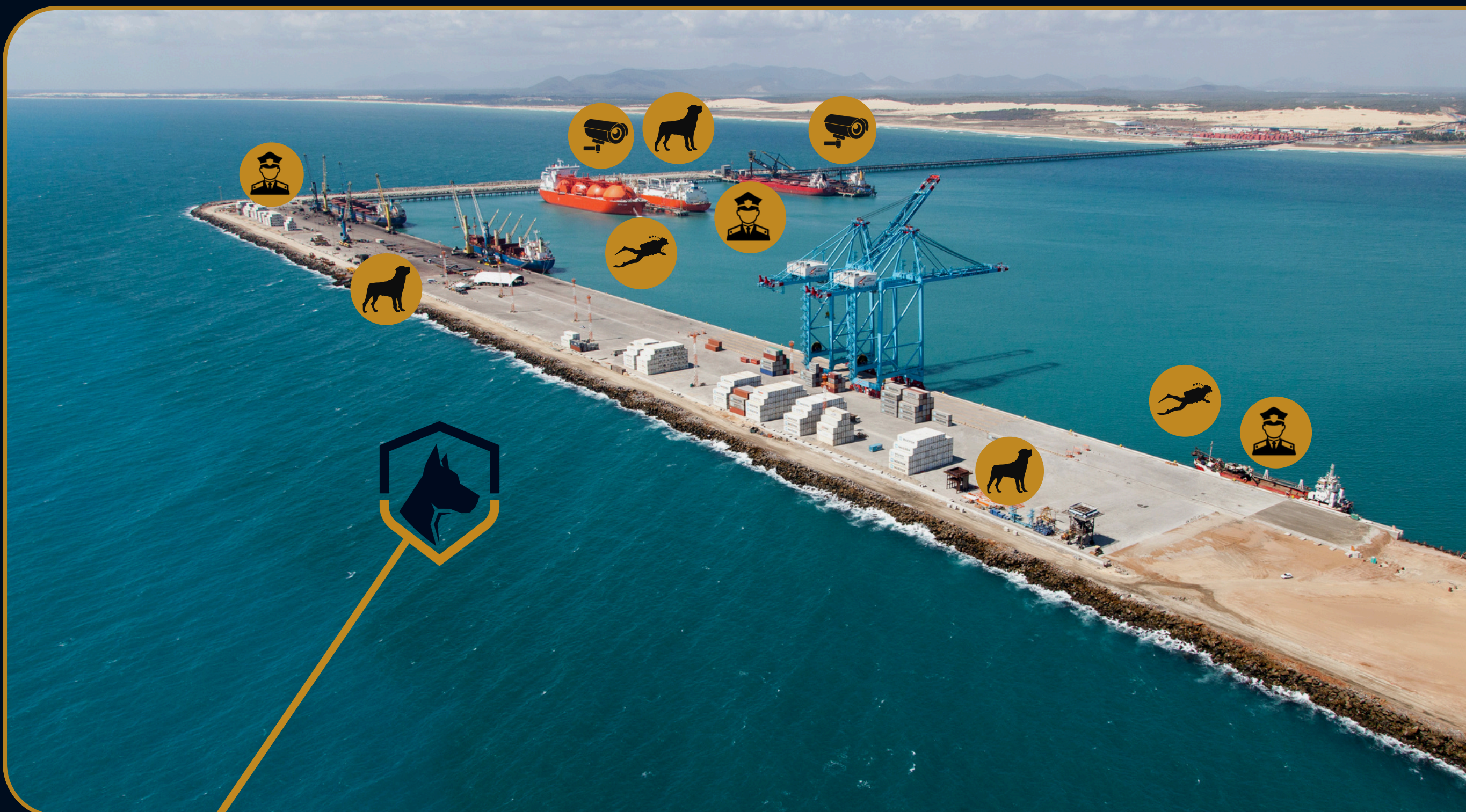






## DBK9'S OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

DBK9's integrated maritime and port security strategies offer effective solutions for shipowners operating in Northeastern Brazil. We stay one step ahead of every identified vulnerability by implementing specific solutions that protect and guide every stage of your port call.



Integrated K9 inspections of export cargo, vessels and containers



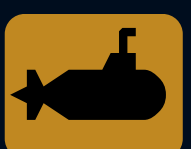
Continuous CCTV monitoring throughout port operations;



Deck security teams during cargo handling and vessel stay;



Underwater hull and sea chest inspections prior to departure



ROV deployment whenever diving operations are operationally restricted;





## RISK ANALYSIS: Northeastern Brazilian ports 2026

### Data Sources Summary:



#### CNN BRASIL

Brazilian Federal Police identified a logistics network in Bahia and São Paulo supporting the Balkan Mafia's cocaine trafficking operations to Europe. The investigation revealed long-term cooperation between international criminal organizations and local facilitators using maritime routes.



#### G1 Nordeste

Federal Police launched an operation against companies and port employees suspected of facilitating international cocaine trafficking through the Port of Mucuri. The investigation focuses on criminal infiltration into port logistics and export operations.



#### Diário do Nordeste

The ports of Mucuri and Pecém accounted for most cocaine seizures in Ceará's customs areas during 2025. Authorities warn that both terminals have become strategic gateways for international cocaine shipments to Europe.



#### Gazeta do Povo

Brazil's PCC and CV criminal organizations are expanding partnerships with African groups, Latin American cartels, and European mafias. These transnational alliances are strengthening maritime cocaine trafficking routes connecting South America to Europe, Africa, and Asia.



#### Africa Defense Forum - ADF

A new report highlights West Africa as a major transshipment point for cocaine trafficked by Balkan criminal groups. Weak governance, port corruption, and expanding maritime logistics have strengthened the region's role in shipments destined for Europe.

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