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U.S. Coast Guard Arrests Drug Suspects, Migrants and Seizes Drugs Worth An Estimated \$94.6 Million During Caribbean Sea Patrols

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Pictured are bales of cocaine interdicted by the Coast Guard Cutter Tampa (WMEC-902) crew in the Eastern Pacific Ocean Feb. 20, 2019. By. COAST GUARD PHOTO

The United States Coast Guard said Thursday it had detained drug suspects and migrants, and seized a significant amount of drugs during patrols in the Caribbean Sea.

The Coast Guard said the Cutter Tampa returned to its homeport in Portsmouth, Virginia after completing a 56-day counter narcotics patrol in the Central Caribbean.

As part of the counter narcotics operation, an exercise on April 9 led to the detention of three suspects and the discovery 87 bales of cocaine, totaling approximately 5,500 pounds of cocaine, worth an estimated \$94.6 million.

The Coast Guard said the crew of the Tampa Cutter's efforts to combat drug smuggling in the Caribbean are part of Operation Martillo, "a larger effort to increase regional stability and undermine the influence of Transnational Criminal Organizations, who routinely attempt to smuggle drugs throughout the region."

"This was our third patrol we have conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic," said Capt. Michael Cilenti, Tampa's commanding officer, adding "our success in interdicting the first Caribbean low-profile vessel is a testament to that teamwork and focus on mission excellence that makes Tampa so special."

The crew of the Cutter Diligence returned to its homeport in Florida Thursday after a 59-day Caribbean Sea patrol and during that period detained 14 migrants held by other U.S. law enforcement agencies, and "orchestrated their successful transfer to Cuban and Bahamian immigration officials for processing, the Coast Guard said.