

# Ecuadorian government gives Pentagon a base in the Galapagos

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The Ecuadorian government of President Lenin Moreno has reached an agreement with the Pentagon to allow the US military to use the Galapagos island of San Cristobal as a military base.

Made public last week, the agreement has provoked popular outrage in Ecuador, where it is rightly reviled as a grotesque violation of the country's national sovereignty and constitution, as well as a threat to one of the most treasured and sensitive environmental sites on the planet.

San Cristobal, where the US military is to be based, is the island where Charles Darwin first went ashore from the HMS Beagle in 1835. Located at the confluence of three ocean currents, the site of continuing seismic and volcanic activity and extremely isolated—620 miles off Ecuador's coast—the island gave rise to unique forms of animal life. These include the land iguana, the giant tortoise and the many types of finch, which provided the inspiration for Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection.

Designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site and a biosphere reserve, the island will now become a launching pad for the predatory and lethal operations of US militarism throughout Latin America. The base will pose a direct threat to the lives and freedom of the people of the region, as well the environmental integrity of one of the most priceless areas of biodiversity on the planet.

Nothing could express more nakedly the slavish subservience to imperialism and the outright criminality of Latin America's capitalist ruling classes.

Touting the deal with the Pentagon, Ecuador's defense minister, the retired general Oswaldo Jarrín, declared: "Galapagos is for Ecuador our aircraft carrier, it is our natural carrier, because it assures us permanence, replenishment, interception facilities and it is 1,000 kilometers from our coasts."

Since 2008, Ecuador's constitution has proclaimed the country "a territory of peace" and that the "establishment of foreign military bases or foreign facilities for military purposes shall not be allowed." A year later, the country expelled US military personnel from their air base in Manta on the Pacific coast, from which it had conducted surveillance flights on the pretext of fighting drug trafficking.

Ecuador's defense minister extolled the Pentagon's prowess, declaring, "what the base [Manta] did in its time, can be done now by just one airplane, because of the advanced technology that you have only with the capacity of a power like the United States."

The plane he is referring to is a Boeing 707, Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS), with a range of over 4,500 nautical miles. Flying at 30,000 feet, it is capable of monitoring an area covering 120,000 square miles. From its base in the Galapagos, this powerful aircraft will be capable of helping to prepare an invasion of Venezuela, spying on the people of Ecuador itself or even tracking the northward flow of Central American migrants. It will be accompanied by a Lockheed Orion P3, an aircraft developed during the Cold War to track Soviet nuclear submarines.

The US base has immense geo-strategic significance. Washington had sought to establish bases there since 1911, three years before the completion of the Panama Canal. During World War II, the US military established a base on Baltra, a small island in the Galapagos archipelago, where it stationed 2,500 troops as well as warplanes and naval assets for the purpose of guarding the Pacific access to the canal against Japan and Germany.

Today, the Pentagon is basing US military spy planes in the eastern Pacific in the context of an escalating trade war and military buildup aimed at preventing China's rise as an economic and geo-strategic competitor.

Ecuador is a significant battlefield in this intensifying "great power" conflict, with Washington pointing to Chinese investment and Ecuador's \$6 billion in debt to China as symptomatic of Beijing's intolerable interference in Yankee imperialism's "backyard".

The government of President Moreno has done its utmost to submit to Washington's demands. The terms of the agreements reached along these lines—signed, sealed and delivered during a visit to Quito a year ago by US Vice President Mike Pence—have become clear.

First and foremost, the Moreno government threw open the doors of its London embassy last April, inviting in a British police snatch squad to drag Julian Assange out of the diplomatic facility where he had been granted political asylum

in 2012.

Moreno and his henchmen claimed that the British had offered guarantees that the WikiLeaks co-founder would not be extradited to a country where he would face torture, the death penalty or life in prison. As a result of their betrayal, he is now held in the UK's Belmarsh maximum security prison under conditions tantamount to torture and the UK home minister has signed an extradition request from the US, where the journalist is facing 18 criminal counts, including under the Espionage Act—which carries the death penalty—for exposing the war crimes and criminal conspiracies of US imperialism.

Meanwhile, Ola Bini, a Swedish programmer and friend of Assange residing in Ecuador, has been jailed without charges for two months. Ecuadorian authorities have indicated that they are going to turn him over to US interrogators.

The trampling on the right to asylum, democratic principles and international law in the Assange case has been accompanied by a radical realignment of Quito's foreign policy with that of US imperialism, with Moreno becoming one of the most enthusiastic supporters of Washington's regime change operation in Venezuela.

At home, the Moreno government has carried out a relentless assault on the jobs and living standards of Ecuadorian workers, faithfully implementing the austerity measures demanded under the agreement it reached with the IMF.

Both these attacks and the betrayal of Assange have provoked protests that have been met with police repression.

The stampede to the right by the Moreno government in Ecuador is part of the broader fate of the so-called "Pink Tide," i.e., the rule by various populist, nationalist bourgeois parties in Latin America. This has seen the ousting of the Workers Party and the coming to power of the fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, the replacement of the Peronist Kirchner dynasty by the right-wing multimillionaire Mauricio Macri in Argentina in 2015, the intense crisis of the government of President Nicolas Maduro in Venezuela as well as that of Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua.

This turn to the right in Latin America was prepared by the governments that had been identified with the so-called "turn to the left" over the previous two decades. While employing nationalist and "socialist" rhetoric—and endlessly promoted by the pseudo-left in Latin America, as well as the US and Europe—they remained governments controlled by the bourgeoisie, committed to the defense of private property and the interests of both native and foreign capital.

With the collapse of the commodities and emerging markets boom that had allowed them to adopt a more independent posture in relation to Washington while introducing modest social assistance programs at home, they responded with an intensification of attacks on the working class. The end result was growing popular hostility to these governments, which, in the absence of an independent mass socialist movement in the working class, paved the way for the return of the right.

In Ecuador, this political process is personified by the current president. Lenin Moreno came into politics as part of a generation of radicalized students who protested against US imperialism's domination of Latin America and the fascist-military dictatorships that it spawned. He began his career as a member of the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left), which emulated the petty-bourgeois nationalist and guerrillaist politics of Castroism and Guevarism.

Like many who participated in these radical petty-bourgeois nationalist movements in their youth—including former Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff—Moreno has long since shed his youthful radicalism, becoming a ruthless political enforcer for imperialism and the Ecuadorian ruling oligarchy.

As the former vice-president, Moreno was the hand-picked successor of President Rafael Correa, a self-proclaimed supporter of the Bolivarian Revolution. While Moreno turned viciously against his former political partner and implemented the policies that have shifted Ecuador violently to the right, this process had already begun under Correa.

It should be recalled that it was Correa who first ordered the severing of Julian Assange's internet connection at the Ecuadorian embassy in 2016 under pressure from Washington after WikiLeaks' publication of leaked emails from the Democratic National Committee. Two years earlier he had transferred more than half of Ecuador's gold reserves to Goldman Sachs to secure the confidence of capitalist financial markets.

The granting of a base to the US in the Galapagos is one more stark confirmation that the defense of democratic rights, the overcoming of the region's pervasive poverty and inequality and the overthrow of imperialist domination can be achieved only through the political mobilization of the working class, independent of all bourgeois parties—including the PT in Brazil, *chavismo* in Venezuela, Peronism in Argentina and similar movements—based on a socialist program and the unification of the struggles of the workers of Latin America with those of workers in the US, Europe and across the globe.



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