

# US war crime exposed, as Trump escalates assault on Venezuela

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Revelations of yet another horrific war crime committed by the US military in the southern Caribbean have surfaced, as the Trump administration is drastically escalating its unprovoked war threats against Venezuela.

According to multiple sources who spoke to the *Washington Post*, US Special Operations troops, acting on the direct orders of Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, carried out a “double-tap” strike on a boat carrying 11 people near the shores of Venezuela on September 2.

“A missile screamed off the Trinidad coast, striking the vessel and igniting a blaze from bow to stern,” the *Post* reported. “For minutes, commanders watched the boat burning on a live drone feed. As the smoke cleared, they got a jolt. Two survivors were clinging to the smoldering wreck.”

One individual involved in the strike told the *Post*, “The order [from Hegseth] was to kill everybody.” This was the first in a series of deadly missile strikes that have sunk at least 22 small boats and killed at least 83 people from Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Trinidad.

The Trump administration has justified its killing spree as a defense of the United States against “narco-terrorists.” The pretext of the “war on drugs” has been utilized to deploy roughly a third of all US naval forces to the region, including the largest warship in the world, the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford, and 15,000 sailors and Marines, backed by advanced fighter jets brought to Puerto Rico and B-52 strategic bombers sent to the edge of Venezuela’s airspace.

This show of force, which is wildly disproportionate to the stated aim of deterring a relative handful of fishermen allegedly smuggling cocaine in boats that could never reach the US mainland, has been further escalated over the past few days. Trump off-handedly announced that the strikes at sea would soon be joined by attacks on land and issued via social media a personal decree declaring a no-fly zone over all of Venezuela.

The clear aim of this campaign is not drug interdiction but rather regime change in Caracas and the imposition of a US puppet government that would clear the way for the major US-based oil corporations to plunder Venezuela’s petroleum reserves, the largest on the planet.

The revelations regarding the September 2 double-tap strike only demonstrate that Washington’s predatory aims are being pursued with entirely criminal methods. Rather than rescue the survivors left clinging for life to the remains of their vessel, Special Operations commanders ordered a second missile strike, blowing them to bits.

The action was taken on the direct instruction of Hegseth, who has been christened the “secretary of war” by the Trump administration.

Overseeing the operation was Adm. Frank “Mitch” Bradley, based in Fort Bragg, North Carolina, who absurdly claimed in a secure

conference call with other officials that the survivors constituted a legitimate target because they could call other alleged drug traffickers to rescue them and their cargo. Bradley, who has been described as a favorite of the Trump White House, was promoted to chief of the US Special Operations Command in the immediate aftermath of this act of cold-blooded murder.

For his part, Hegseth denounced the *Post* article as “fabricated, inflammatory, and derogatory,” before going on to confirm its essential claims. Responding to the article on X, he stated:

As we’ve said from the beginning, and in every statement, these highly effective strikes are specifically intended to be “lethal kinetic strikes.” The declared intent is to stop lethal drugs, destroy narco-boats, and kill the narco-terrorists who are poisoning the American people.

In a separate post on his personal account, Hegseth wrote, “We have only just begun to kill the narco-terrorists.”

The Pentagon has yet to identify a single one of its 80-odd victims, nor has it provided a shred of evidence that they were guilty of drug-trafficking or any other crime. The 11 passengers aboard the boat subjected to the double-tap undoubtedly included migrants or passengers traveling between Venezuela and Trinidad; it would hardly take that many people to load and unload bags of cocaine.

Even if some of the victims of the Trump administration’s Caribbean murder spree were transporting drugs, this is not a crime punishable by death, and it must be proven in a court of law, not punished by means of extra-judicial executions on the high seas. Nor is it by any stretch of the imagination an act of war.

The Former Judge Advocates General (JAGs) Working Group, which includes officials who served as legal advisers for the military under previous administrations, issued a statement in response to the *Washington Post* article, declaring:

If the US military operation to interdict and destroy suspected narcotrafficking vessels is a “non-international armed conflict,” as the Trump administration suggests, orders to “kill everybody,” which can reasonably be regarded as an order to give “no quarter,” and to “double-tap” a target in order to kill survivors, are clearly illegal under international law. In short, they are war crimes.

If the US military operation is not an armed conflict of any

kind, these orders to kill helpless civilians clinging to the wreckage of a vessel our military destroyed would subject everyone from [the defense secretary] down to the individual who pulled the trigger to prosecution under US law for murder.

In other words, the criminality of these acts is not in the slightest doubt. The only question is whether they should be judged in US criminal courts or by a modern day reincarnation of the Nuremberg Tribunals that judged the mass murderers of Germany's Third Reich. Under international law, the penalty for war crimes that involve deliberate killings is either life in prison or death.

Hegseth's entire career is steeped in war crimes. As an infantry officer, he served in a unit that murdered unarmed Iraqi detainees in 2006 and was deployed as part of the Minnesota National Guard to the Guantanamo Bay detention and torture camp. He became a right-wing commentator on Fox News, gaining fame and an entry into Trump's inner circle as a vocal advocate for the pardoning of convicted US military war criminals. These included the Navy SEAL Eddie Gallagher, who was tried on charges of stabbing a wounded and defenseless 17-year-old Iraqi with a hunting knife and then posing for photographs with his corpse.

The fascistic and asinine "secretary of war crimes" is representative of a government in which the ethos and methods of the mafia prevail. Murders are ordered just for the sake of proving the murderous character of the camarilla in the White House.

Of course, this is not the first time that the Oval Office has been used to plot unlawful killings. Obama orchestrated drone assassinations, including of at least four American citizens, in meetings dubbed "terror Tuesdays," while Trump ordered the 2020 assassination of senior Iranian official Qasem Soleimani, who was on a diplomatic visit to Iraq.

But there is more than a quantitative change in the current policy. What is unfolding is nothing less than the complete evisceration of the country's political, constitutional and legal foundations and their replacement with the methods of a police-state dictatorship and the law of the jungle.

Trump represents and personifies a criminal ruling oligarchy that wallows in filth, blood and obscene sums of personal wealth. He himself has weaponized the presidency for the purpose of stuffing hundreds of millions of dollars into his own pockets. According to calculations made by the Reuters news agency, the Trump family's income has grown 17-fold to \$864 million during the first half of this year, compared to the same period in 2024.

This criminality at the top finds no more telling expression than in the "full and complete pardon" Trump announced for Honduran ex-President Juan Orlando Hernandez, who was sentenced to 45 years in prison after being convicted in a US court for facilitating the importation of a staggering 400 tons of cocaine into the US. Hernandez was famously cited for telling one of his co-conspirators that he wanted to shove cocaine "right up the noses of the gringos."

"He may be a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch," was a quote attributed to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in relation to the viciously repressive Nicaraguan dictator, Anastasio Somoza, who was feted by Washington in 1939. Today, it is clearly a case of "He may be a narco-trafficker, but he's our narco-trafficker."

The pardon of Hernandez makes a mockery of the Trump administration's claims that its Latin American policy is driven by the

need to rescue Americans from drug traffickers bent upon their destruction. No one in Trump's circle or the ruling oligarchy as a whole could give a damn about overdose deaths. Rather, they see drugs as a useful means of social control over the most oppressed layers of the population, as well as a lucrative source of profits for the financial sector.

Beyond a morbid fascination for all things criminal, Trump's sympathy for Hernandez is no doubt influenced by the latter's ties to his tech billionaire supporters, including Peter Thiel (the principal patron of Vice President JD Vance's political career), Sam Altman, and Marc Andreessen, who partnered with ex-president Hernandez in creating Próspera, a semi-autonomous private, for-profit city, free from taxes and regulations.

The pardon was announced on the eve of Sunday's Honduran election, together with Trump's endorsement of Nasry "Tito" Asfura, the candidate of Hernandez's right-wing National Party. Trump has vilified the candidate of the ruling Libre party, Rixi Moncada, as a "communist," in large measure because the current government has broken off ties with Taiwan and established diplomatic relations with Beijing, an action taken by Washington itself nearly half a century ago. Asfura has vowed to cut off ties with both China and Venezuela if elected.

There is an undeniably maniacal character to the policy being pursued by the Trump administration throughout the region. Reflecting the increasing desperation of a ruling capitalist oligarchy trapped by the contradictions of its own failing profit system, it is trying to reverse the loss of US hegemony and the rise of China to the position of South America's principal trading partner by means of missile strikes and intimidation.

This foreign policy constitutes an extension of a domestic policy of war against the working class. Attempting to reverse every social gain won by workers in the course of the 20th century, the US ruling class is turning to dictatorial methods, from the fascistic demonization and savage persecution of immigrants to the deployment of US troops to major American cities to fight the "enemy within." Just as the Trump administration is murdering fishermen and migrants in the Caribbean, it will not shrink from deploying death squads to carry out extra-judicial executions in the US itself.

All of these measures are provoking mass popular opposition and an intensification of the class struggle. The decisive task is that of uniting workers' struggles against war and in defense of social and democratic rights across national borders.

The war crimes being organized from the White House will be punished only by means of a conscious political intervention by the working class throughout the Americas to put an end to the capitalist system and reorganize society to meet human need, not the profits of the oligarchs.



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