

Trump's military strikes against boats in Caribbean target Latin American working class

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President Trump's naval and air campaign in the southern Caribbean and Pacific against supposed "narco-terrorism" has not been a targeted strike at transnational cartels but a direct assault on the Latin American working class. The boats struck are overwhelmingly civilian workboats and fishing skiffs, *pangas* used by fishermen, transport workers and small traders. Their destruction and the massacre of their crews are acts of international piracy and war crimes that have terrorized coastal communities.

The strikes escalated sharply this past Saturday with the US military's operation that abducted Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores. This criminal violation of Venezuelan sovereignty came on top of an effective blockade of the country and the missile attacks against common civilian boats in the Caribbean and Pacific killing at least 107 people in 30 strikes since September. The Trump administration has justified these actions, claiming the boats and Maduro himself are part of a massive drug smuggling operation bringing large quantities of fentanyl to the United States.

Such claims are blatant lies. Venezuela is not the source of any fentanyl and accounts for only a minuscule share of the cocaine flowing north from South America.

As Trump's own subsequent statements have shown, the goal is regime change in Venezuela to secure US oil interests. In the aftermath of Maduro's kidnapping, Trump threatened Venezuela's interim President Delcy Rodríguez, stating that if she "doesn't do what's right, she is going to pay a very big price, probably bigger than Maduro." Given that Maduro faces the possibility of life in a US prison, this is a thinly veiled death

threat.

And according to ABC News, other Trump officials have asserted that the goal is for Venezuela to "kick out China, Russia, Iran and Cuba and sever economic ties" and "agree to partner exclusively with the US on oil production and favor America when selling heavy crude."

It is a further lie that the boats are running drugs in the first place. Photo evidence released by the Trump administration itself reveals that these were small, fast, but rudimentary fiberglass cargo boats used commonly in Latin America for every purpose, including delivering groceries, fresh water and fuel to remote locations. These boats also often take passengers for travel or tourism.

With few roads in the jungles, islands and coastal regions of Latin America, these *pangas* or *lanchas* are skiffs that are a primary mode of transportation in the region extending from Mexico to South America. Many of these boats were provided as part of government economic stimulus projects begun decades ago in order to cheaply connect these widespread, remote communities and allow them to engage in a higher level of fishing, support the burgeoning tourist industry and feed a growing and modernizing population.

The original *panga* design was created by Yamaha as part of a World Bank project circa 1970. The upswept bow resembles the machete or knife called a *panga* and allows the boats to be operated directly from the beaches without having to install any infrastructure, such as boatyards and docks.

The boats are about 22 feet (6.7 meters) long with a beam of about 6 feet (1.8 meters). They were mass produced out of heavy fiberglass materials, making

them nearly immune to collisions and rough use, and they have lasted for decades with further decades of use ahead of them as well.

The missile strikes on the *pangas* are the equivalent of bombing pickup trucks used ubiquitously across the US.

While no doubt some of these boats are used in the drug trade, the drug runners are often not associated with the cartels at all. Instead, they are usually poor natives who have been coerced by various means to make the runs for the cartel. One local told the *World Socialist Web Site* that “the last drug bust near my home included a young native man whose sister was kidnapped by the cartel.”

Moreover, these civilian *panga* boats could not possibly reach the United States from Venezuela using the Yamaha Enduro outboard motors that commonly power such boats in Latin America. To do so would require massive amounts of fuel, along with navigation and weather equipment that these impoverished people simply do not possess.

Pangas such as these would either have to carry so much fuel they would not have room for drugs or people, or would have to stop for fuel at a dozen or more places on the route north to the US. It simply is not practical and might not even be possible. In addition to fuel issues, the boat operators would be exposed to the sun and elements for days at a time in boats that are not suited for navigating open waters for long periods. The cartels would risk losing all of their products with each such trip.

In other words, the boats that have been sunk and the crews that have been murdered could not have been heading to the US. The vast majority were workers trying to make a living amid the poverty imposed by more than a century of US interventions in the region.

American leisure boats passing through the region have been encouraged to share their vessel information and travel plans online voluntarily with the US government with the implied threat that they might be “accidentally” targeted by one of these arbitrary strikes if they do not. Reports indicate US vessel captains have been nervously debating if it is better to share the information and possibly be harassed or to attempt to fly under the radar but risk being “accidentally” targeted.

The invasion on Saturday resulted in the deaths of

even more workers. At least 100 people were killed, including Joana Rodriguez Sierra, a 24-year-old Colombian woman, who was killed by a missile or projectile in her bed during the midnight raid by US forces. Another civilian casualty of the criminal raid was 78-year-old Rosa Gonzalez, who was murdered by US forces when a projectile hit the apartment in the port city of La Guaira where she and her nephew Wilman lived.

Any pretense of justification for such acts of war was quickly thrown out with Secretary of War Pete Hegseth smugly declaring “Welcome to 2026” and Trump outright admitting that international law will not be a barrier to the aims of the predatory US financial oligarchy he represents. In other words, this is a campaign of terror against the working class of Latin America and the Caribbean, a logical extension of the wars of the past 35 years and the attacks on workers by ICE and other police-state agencies within the US itself.

And the naked neo-colonialism of the attacks on the *pangas* and of the kidnapping of Maduro was made clear when Trump declared, “We’re going to have our very large United States oil companies, the biggest anywhere in the world, go in, spend billions of dollars.”

No confidence can be placed in any section of the Democratic Party to stop these attacks. Congressional leaders bemoaned the lack of notification but largely agreed with the military action itself. New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, only stated his “opposition” and did nothing to mobilize the mass opposition that exists to these attacks, even as Trump holds Maduro in a New York prison.

These attacks abroad will be matched with attacks on the working class domestically with the last vestiges of democratic rights and vital social programs squashed and more austerity imposed upon workers. The working class is the only social class with the interest and ability to end the threat of world war and barbarism by abolishing the capitalist system that is their source.



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