

US-Ecuador joint military operation signals accelerated turn to fascist militarism across Latin America

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The US Southern Command announced Tuesday the beginning of joint land operations with the Ecuadorian armed forces against drug cartels designated as “terrorist organizations.” The Pentagon released a declassified video of helicopter raids and US special forces operating with local commandos.

The operations mark an escalation of the Trump administration’s aggression across Latin America and globally, coming just days after the onset of its criminal war against Iran.

This first-ever US ground intervention ostensibly against cartels in South America expands Operation Southern Spear, the Navy-led campaign that has already murdered 151 fishermen in 45 strikes on alleged drug boats across the Eastern Pacific and Caribbean since last September.

US Southern Command chief Gen. Francis L. Donovan, fresh from Venezuela where Delcy Rodríguez’s puppet regime pledged a “joint security agenda” against trafficking, praised Ecuador’s military for its “unwavering commitment” against narco-terrorists.

While details on the scope and timeline were not offered, fascistic Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa signaled an indefinite operation targeting Los Lobos and Los Choneros—groups branded by Washington as terrorists. Quito confirmed an “offensive collaboration,” with raids hitting coastal zones, while Noboa’s government vows sustained action to “recover control” in cartel hotspots.

In other words, Trump and Noboa have agreed to an indefinite deployment of US troops to wage war on broadly defined “terrorists,” after 67 percent of Ecuadorians voted to reject the building of US bases in the country in a referendum last November.

The Ecuadorian ground operations take place on the heels of the bombing of Caracas to abduct Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, and amid the ongoing Cuban fuel siege, US bombings in Nigeria, and the sinking of an Iranian warship near Sri Lanka in the spillover from the expanding US-Israeli war in the Middle East. This is no isolated “anti-drug” campaign but a component in the initial stages of a third world war.

Framed as fighting “narco-terrorism,” the raids coincide with Trump’s Miami summit of Latin American leaders next week, where he will demand absolute subordination. Terrified of a globally interconnected working class more powerful and

numerous than ever, the local ruling elites rely ever more openly on US imperialism to defend class rule as they roll back every 20th-century gain won by the working class and the oppressed masses and move toward fascist dictatorship.

Ecuador’s Daniel Noboa, scion of a banana-export billionaire clan implicated in cocaine shipments to Europe, has begged for Pentagon help. He has pointed to the record number of homicides in 2026—six Ecuadorian cities are listed among the world’s 10 deadliest—and claimed that 70 percent of global cocaine transits his nation’s ports.

Since declaring a “state of war” in January 2024—backed by all bourgeois parties, the CONAIE indigenous confederation and the Stalinist union leaderships under the banner of “national unity”—Noboa has repeatedly suspended constitutional rights across most of the country and ruled by decree. Coinciding with the US announcement, Quito decreed a March 15-30 curfew in four provinces from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m.

The administration has relied on social austerity, slashing public wages and spending to fund this police state. The US-Ecuadorian raids coincide with two “Economic Urgent Bills” introduced by Quito to force local governments to divert 70 percent of their budgets to infrastructure and dodge court rulings blocking the privatization of mining/energy in order to hand them over to the transnationals.

Noboa’s January 2026 security plan devours \$180 million for seven twin-engine helicopters, a multipurpose logistics ship, 3D radar, scanners and drones—dual-use tools for internal repression and war. Interior Minister John Reimberg boasts of an autonomous Unase anti-extortion unit, and a new 15,000-capacity “Encuentro” prison.

Police raids last Saturday on offices of Revolución Ciudadana (RC-Citizens Revolution), the party led by former President Rafael Correa, for “corruption,” signal the criminalization of opposition, however nominal. Noboa’s April 2024 Mexican embassy assault to nab former VP Jorge Glas already shredded Vienna Convention norms.

Noboa has also rebuilt naval facilities in Manta (a 150m pier, barracks) for US personnel. He has also partnered with Erik Prince, Blackwater’s billionaire founder, for urban warfare training, hosted US Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem for intel-sharing, and only reversed the initial approval of a US

base in the biodiversity-rich Galápagos after a major popular backlash.

Historical precedent: coups, dictatorships and subordination to imperialism

The US-Ecuadorian operations hark back to the Pentagon-CIA orchestration of 20th-century coups and dictatorships crushing Latin American workers. This includes the Ecuadorian military dictatorship that ended in 1979 after the 1971/1975 general strikes that demonstrated the power of the urban proletariat. More recently, the Pentagon has used Plan Colombia and Plan Mérida in México to train and arm local armed forces, which perpetrated bloodbaths without denting drug trafficking.

Washington is seeking to employ far-right forces like Noboa and President Javier Milei in Argentina as pliant tools against China, now South America's top trader and investor—displacing the US from its “backyard.”

However, any economic move away from China poses immense challenges for every country in the region. An Ecuador-China free trade agreement just went into effect in 2024, and oil exports to China have grown exponentially in recent years. In 2025, oil output fell 7.16 percent to 441,000 bpd amid internal woes, per Central Bank data.

The US deployment in Ecuador is a harbinger for similar operations to pressure regional elites against China, directly install puppets, secure key infrastructure and participate in the repression of the working class. In Mexico, government officials have acknowledged that they ordered the killing of top cartel leader Nemesio Oseguera, alias “Mencho,” after concluding that the Trump administration was about to carry out a unilateral military operation in the country. Panama moved to expel a Chinese port company from the Canal after Trump threatened to invade.

The nominal “left” opposition in Ecuador has been shown to be entirely bankrupt. Rafael Correa's own handpicked successor, Lenin Moreno, handed Wikileaks founder Julian Assange to British authorities and adopted an IMF austerity plan. The *Correista* RC has consistently been a partner in Noboa's militarization, with all establishment parties running in the last elections promising a major buildup of the repressive state apparatus.

In response to the joint raids Tuesday, RC chairwoman Gabriela Rivadeneira futilely begged Ecuador's army not to join “incursions” abroad, and praised the governments in Brazil, Mexico and Colombia as bulwarks of regional “sovereignty.”

However, the efforts of these “Pink Tide” governments to accommodate Trump are themselves proof of the role the *Correistas* would play if returned to power. Colombian President Gustavo Petro toned down his criticisms of US policy after meeting with Trump. On March 1, the Petro administration announced joint operations with Ecuador and the United States, deploying 20,000 troops to Nariño/Putumayo. In the context of a major trade war with Colombia, Ecuador denied any coordination.

Ecuador's post-1979 “democratic” regime co-opted indigenous elites via electoral quotas, birthing the CONAIE and its electoral wing Pachakutik. Every massive upsurge of the working class and peasantry against inequality, ecological ruin and land grabs has been successfully channeled by these forces and the Stalinist-led union bureaucracy behind support for one or another section of the bourgeois establishment and illusions in the 1997-98/2007-08 capitalist constituent assemblies.

The 1998-2000 pre-revolutionary crisis—chaos from bank collapses and dollarization, 70 percent poverty, debt implosion—saw CONAIE and the Stalinists propel ex-colonel Lucio Gutiérrez (2003-2005), who then imposed IMF austerity plans sparking his ouster. These same “leftist” forces then elevated US-trained economist Rafael Correa to power, riding the commodity boom (2000-2014) fueled by Chinese growth for limited increases in social spending. Correa, however, crushed indigenous resistance to ecological damage and began the turn to austerity, followed by Moreno. More recently, some sections of the CONAIE even endorsed Noboa.

Now, amid deceleration of the economy, the ruling elite is demanding a greater subordination to imperialism and social attacks on the working class to attract investments.

US troops on Latin American soil revive School of the Americas-style terror, but today's working class—vast, and linked by transnational production—controls the strategic levers of the economy. Ecuador's troops killed workers, youth and peasants dubbed “terrorists” for protesting against inequality.

The working class must reject any appeal for “national unity” behind the capitalist state, and instead form rank-and-file committees linking with their counterparts across the Americas and globally via the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.

The only alternative to fascist dictatorship and the imperialist slaughter is world socialism. All workers who agree in Ecuador must commit to building a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the World Party of Socialist Revolution.



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