

US and Ecuadorian militaries burn homes and torture workers in “Operation Total Extermination”

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10 March 2026

The US-Ecuadorian joint military operation launched March 3, ostensibly against drug cartels, has turned Ecuador into a proving ground for unleashing military violence upon every country in the hemisphere in furtherance of US hegemony.

Neither the Pentagon nor the Ecuadorian Ministry of Defense, which has dubbed the onslaught “Operation Total Extermination,” have reported casualty figures.

Subsequent reports, however, have made clear that the Pentagon and Ecuadorian forces are following a scorched-earth policy aimed not at cartels but civilians, akin to that employed by the military dictatorships in Central and South America over the last century.

Last Friday, the Ecuadorian Armed Forces boasted on social media that “Ecuador and the US destroyed” the training grounds and a vacation home of the Border Commands—a drug trafficking group formed by former Colombian FARC-EP guerrilla fighters along the Colombian-Ecuadorian border.

The announcement included aerial videos showing military helicopters bombing rural properties and rustic homes in the northeast town of Santa Rosa, Sucumbíos Province. “During the subsequent search, weapons and other evidence linked to illegal activities were found,” the publication claims.

The US Southern Command, the branch of the US armed forces that oversees forces in Latin America, issued an accompanying statement indicating the US and Ecuador had launched “lethal kinetic operations against Designated Terrorist Organizations.”

Sean Parnell, chief Pentagon spokesman, added: “At the request of Ecuador, the Department of War executed targeted action to advance our shared objective of dismantling narco-terrorist networks.”

The following day, Saturday, President Daniel Noboa

shook hands with Donald Trump at the “Shield of the Americas Summit” in Miami, where the fascist American president announced a “brand new military coalition” against drug cartels. “The only way to defeat these enemies is by unleashing the power of our militaries,” he declared.

To capture drug traffickers, Trump might have simply called for the arrest of Noboa himself, whose billionaire family’s Noboa Trading Co. has been caught shipping cocaine to the Balkans in crates with bananas sold under the Bonita label.

Instead, in real time, the true character of this coalition was shown in Sucumbíos, where local news reporters were informing Saturday that the US and Ecuadorian militaries had bombed the homes of peasants and small farmers and tortured agricultural workers who deny any illegal activities.

Novedades Sucumbíos interviewed people in the town of San Martín, located in the same border region in Sucumbíos targeted by US and Ecuadorian troops. The video reports shows massive craters and burned constructions. One resident, Wilmar Garzón, explained: “The Ecuadorian army is coming to burn down the houses, and they bombed them after burning them down.”

Another, Vicente Garrido, says, “We were working with other co-workers when the planes came here.” Several residential homes were burned to the ground, he added, and “The military men tied up the boys who were working there.”

Showing significant scars on his arms, one of the workers detained, said: “The day they arrived, the soldiers tortured me and my coworkers while we were working. They gagged us, mistreated us, kicked us, and told us they were going to kill us. Right now, I am afraid to go back to the place where I worked.”

A video shows community members with their hands up trying to approach the soldiers to demand the liberation of the workers. The soldiers shoot their rifles as a warning. The workers who had been detained were then taken away by helicopter and freed the following day. A community leader in the attacked town said: “We are all fearful.”

Under the pretext of fighting “narco-terrorists,” US imperialism and its stooges are deliberately sowing terror.

Radio Sucumbíos published a video of the total destruction of an impoverished home in San Martín, reporting that the town was left “war-torn.”

None of the international news media have mentioned what happened in San Martín in their reporting of the joint operation, and it is still unclear from media reports how many people have been killed.

The US aggression in Ecuador has been framed as an extension of the Pentagon’s bombing of dozens of boats and killing of 157 fishermen accused of carrying drugs off the Caribbean and Pacific coasts of South America, a mass murder spree dubbed Operation Southern Spear.

The US Southern Command announced the latest boat strike Sunday, killing the six men aboard.

Like the agricultural workers and peasants in Sucumbíos, relatives of the fishermen killed have gone to the media to refute the accusations of drug trafficking.

Even as Trump laughed in his State of the Union address, boasting that “Nobody wants to go fishing anymore,” relatives of Ricky Joseph, a 35-year-old fishing boat captain from St. Lucia reported to the Associated Press that Joseph had gone missing after a February 13 strike near the Caribbean island.

Killing scores of innocent workers, the Trump administration is claiming the right to apply the death penalty against any suspect, group or community anywhere without even formal charges, where US commanders act as prosecutor, judge, jury and mass executioner.

“Operation Total Extermination” in Ecuador has been combined with the extension of states of exception suspending democratic rights across nine provinces covering much of the country and a March 15-30 curfew in four provinces.

In other words, the resulting regime of terror imposed by US imperialism and its Latin American puppets is setting the stage for military dictatorship.

As noted by the WSWS, the “Shield of the Americas” summit in Miami has as its closest historical precedent the November 1975 summit in Pinochet’s Chile, where

intelligence officials of South America’s dictatorships launched “Operation Condor,” named after Chile’s national bird. This network coordinated the detention, torture and killings of suspected leftists with the assistance of the CIA.

The Ecuadorian military, which would later join Operation Condor, and their US handlers are now relaunching their network of terror.

The Trump administration undoubtedly expects that the turmoil generated by the unravelling economic and military wars launched by US imperialism, now leading to skyrocketing oil prices, will lead to explosive social protests across Latin America akin to those that erupted during the 1970s oil shocks. In response, they seek to terrorize the population and set up dictatorships before a popular upheaval.

The methods of landing helicopters in rural communities, burning and bombing homes, capturing and torturing their inhabitants recall the types of attacks and massacres carried out by these dictatorships to kill hundreds of thousands across South and Central America, but this time replacing the charge of “Communists” with that of “Narco-terrorists.” In many cases, these dictatorships and the CIA worked closely with the drug cartels.

As recently as March 2022, the Colombian military massacred 11 people, including the indigenous governor and another local leader, at a peasant bazaar in Putumayo, claiming that they belonged to the same Border Command targeted in Ecuador. While this took place under the far-right Iván Duque administration, the current pseudo-leftist President Gustavo Petro has joined the fray, announcing a joint operation with Ecuador and the US, with 20,000 Colombian troops deploying to the border in collaboration with “Operation Total Extermination.”

Ecuador serves only as the test case. This terror is no aberration but the logical outgrowth of US imperialism’s global war drive, from Iran’s annihilation to the starvation of Cuba, the bombing of Caracas and kidnapping of the Venezuelan president.



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