

US murder spree in Latin American waters moves beyond 200 killed

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The death toll from US military strikes on alleged drug vessels off the coast of Latin America has now surpassed 200 people. In the latest attack, the fourth in a single week, the US military released video on Saturday of a small boat erupting in flames in the Eastern Pacific. The three men reportedly killed bring the estimated total to 205 since the mass murder campaign began in the Caribbean on September 2, 2025. The campaign expanded to the Eastern Pacific in October and has destroyed approximately 60 vessels.

Mass murder has been turned into a daily, bureaucratic operation, with extrajudicial killing a part of imperialist policy. This unfolds alongside the criminal US-Israeli war against Iran and Lebanon—which the Lebanese health ministry counts at 3,371 dead in Lebanon since March 2 and which the human rights group HRANA puts at 3,636 in Iran—and is built on top of the genocide in Gaza that has killed over 70,000 people.

This campaign of mass murder also carries a direct warning for workers inside the United States: The methods being tested in the Caribbean are being imported home.

The Trump administration has not identified a single one of those killed by the US attacks on boats. No names have been released, no families notified, no evidence made public showing that the dead committed the crimes alleged against them. The US military merely repeats each time that vessels were “engaged in narco-trafficking” and provides nothing further. Only three people are confirmed to have survived and have been rescued across all strikes.

Families in Colombia and Trinidad and Tobago have come forward to identify relatives as fishermen or migrant laborers traveling between the islands and the South American coast. Entire fishing communities in Colombia and Ecuador report abandoning their livelihood, according to interviews by the *New York Times*.

The Trump administration’s allegations are entirely unproven. Moreover, even if they were proven, the killings would still be crimes. The state has declared that it can execute people on suspicion alone, without charges, without a trial, without any judicial process anywhere in the world. That is the definition of an extrajudicial killing—and it would remain one even if every person killed had been guilty of exactly what Washington claims.

The criminal character of the campaign was established on the very first strike. When two men survived the initial missile strike and were left clinging to the wreckage, a second strike was ordered to finish them off. Killing wounded survivors is a textbook war crime under the Geneva Conventions. The *Washington Post* reported November 28 that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth had ordered the entire crew killed.

The two strikes killed all 11 aboard—nine in the first, the two survivors in the second. US President Donald Trump posted video of the first strike on Truth Social that day. The murders are advertised as spectacle and a threatening demonstration that the state can kill anyone, anywhere, with total impunity.

Analysts at InSight Crime found the strikes have not meaningfully disrupted trafficking flows. This is because disrupting trafficking was never the purpose.

This maritime killing campaign is the arm of a broader offensive to reassert US dominance over Latin America and prepare or consolidate regime-change operations against governments that do not fully submit to Washington. It is the same offensive that produced the Special Forces abduction of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in January and the military buildup and fuel blockade against Cuba.

More broadly, this onslaught connects directly to Washington’s moves against Chinese influence in the region, including surveillance of Chinese fishing vessels in the Pacific, particularly around Peru’s Chancay port, opened in late 2024 and operated by the Chinese firm COSCO, which the US views as a strategic challenge to its domination of Latin America.

The administration’s pseudo-legal basis for the campaign of mass murder rests on a confidential Justice Department memo of nearly 50 pages asserting that drug cartels are in “armed conflict” with the United States—a fraud designed to erase the distinction between policing and war so the executive can exercise unchecked lethal violence.

Foreign terrorist organization designations, however, have never authorized military force, which requires an act of Congress. There is simply no statutory basis or credible claim of imminent threat. Legal specialists have almost unanimously described the strikes as an unconstitutional usurpation of war powers.

The boat strikes in the Caribbean and Pacific set a far broader

precedent. The same “terrorist” justification used for the maritime killings was invoked by Trump’s deputies to explain away the killing in Minneapolis of Renée Good, shot by an ICE agent on January 7 while observing an operation from her car, and of Alex Pretti, a nurse and protester shot by a Border Patrol agent on January 24.

General Gregory Guillot, head of US Northern Command, told the Senate Armed Services Committee on December 11 that he would be willing to carry out such strikes against “designated terrorist organizations” on US soil: “If I had no concerns and I was confident in the lawful order, I would definitely execute that order,” he said.

Under the new domestic counterterrorism framework codified in the National Security Presidential Memorandum (NSPM-7), the White House and Justice Department establish a broad crackdown on political opposition and refuse to say whether Americans labeled “domestic terrorists” would be subject to the same methods.

Despite the blatant illegality and dangerous precedent, there is no serious effort to stop these attacks from within the political establishment.

The reaction of regional governments has exposed the bankruptcy of every variety of bourgeois nationalism. Argentine President Javier Milei and Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa have openly aligned themselves with Trump. Supposedly aimed at cartels, US and Ecuadorian forces launched “Operation Total Extermination” in March, leaving a trail of reports of destroyed farming plots and tortured agricultural workers.

The nominally “left” governments have been no less complicit. Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum dropped her objections to the boat strikes after negotiating an arrangement for the Mexican Navy to intercept suspected vessels off Mexico’s coast, even as she faces a scandal over secret CIA operations within Mexican soil, including targeted assassinations of alleged drug lords. Her focus has remained deepening military and intelligence collaboration with Washington to appease Trump’s threats to deploy US troops across the border.

Colombian President Gustavo Petro has criticized the boat strikes, but this criticism has not gone beyond calling for emergency UN and OAS meetings after the abduction of Maduro, even as Colombian citizens are among the boat-strike dead. Both Petro and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, after their White House meetings—February 3 and May 7, respectively, each kissing Trump’s ring and praising the serial killer to his face—have not issued a single public protest against the boat strikes.

In April, Lula signed a partnership with Washington for joint drug and weapons interdiction; on May 29 he denounced the US “terrorist” designation of Brazilian gangs as a threat to Brazilian sovereignty.

In all three cases, the largest regional powers are ruled by

“left” nationalists that have accommodated Trump and remained complicit in the neocolonial coup against Venezuela, the deepening strangulation of Cuba and the US campaign of murder on the high seas. US imperialism’s drive to recolonize Latin America cannot be opposed by relying on any section of the capitalist ruling elites.

It is an unmistakable confirmation of Leon Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution, which established that only the working class, by taking power as part of the world socialist revolution, can fulfill democratic tasks in countries of belated capitalist development, including opposing imperialist oppression.

The response by the Democratic Party in the United States only confirms that the militarist onslaught to recolonize Latin America is a bipartisan policy. Democrats introduced war-powers resolutions that failed, knowing that they would not pass or stop a single strike. Some Democratic members of Congress said they emerged from classified briefings “disturbed” and “frustrated” but did not go beyond demanding Hegseth turn over unedited strike footage or risk losing 25 percent of his travel budget.

Meanwhile, the same Democratic caucus has voted for the military budgets and appropriations that sustain the strikes.

The boat strikes escalate the bipartisan “war on drugs,” long a cover for imperialist efforts to dominate Latin America, which disbursed billions for the murderous Plan Colombia and Plan Mérida in Mexico with support from the Democratic Party.

A government that has claimed the right to kill on the high seas without charges or even bothering to identify its victims will not hesitate to turn those same methods against workers, protesters and political opponents inside the United States.

This accelerating effort to impose fascist forms of rule is an international process and fighting it cannot be entrusted to the Democrats or any bourgeois nationalist tendency. It requires the independent political mobilization of the working class in the United States, across the Americas and internationally to abolish the source of war and dictatorship: the capitalist profit system.



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