

US Southern Command announces sustained operations in Ecuador and Colombia while sinking more fishing boats in the Pacific

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Between August 26 and 28, the commander of US Southern Command, Marine Gen. Francis L. Donovan, traveled to Colombia and Ecuador to place the two countries' armed forces under a permanent joint command structure with the Pentagon. Within days, US forces boarded and sank three artisanal fishing boats from the Ecuadorian port of Manta, carrying 53 fishermen.

These are not separate events. On August 27, Donovan met at San Lorenzo, on Ecuador's northern coast, with Colombian Defense Minister Jorge Eduardo Mora, Ecuadorian Defense Minister Gian Carlo Loffredo, the military chiefs of both countries, and Maj. Gen. Kevin J. Jarrard, commander of the newly activated Joint Task Force–Western Hemisphere.

Southcom described the border zone as a corridor exploited by transnational criminal organizations and said the leaders met with elite forces from both nations “to refine a joint operational strategy.”

This represents a shift from episodic US-partnered missions to sustained combined operations. A binational Colombian-Ecuadorian military base was discussed, and *El Tiempo* reported plans to place radar at Tumaco on Colombia's Pacific coast to track vessels and feed targeting data to Colombian units. Donovan closed the trip at Fuerte Militar Tolemaida, Colombia's principal army base, discussing the rehabilitation of an air fleet in which 11 of 19 MI-17 helicopters are non-operational.

Southcom's own statement names the objectives: to “defeat narcoterrorist groups, curb illicit migration, and counter malign influence.” Drug trafficking is one item on a list that includes stopping migrants and pushing back Chinese investment. That is the actual mission.

On August 28, US forces intercepted and sank *Los Tres Hermanos* roughly 40 nautical miles off Manta. Its 14-member crew—13 from Santa Marianita, one from Jaramijó—said they were returning with a good catch when

they were subdued, handcuffed and blindfolded. They made it back to shore in the four launches the boat carried.

On September 2, the *Conquista II* was boarded 244 nautical miles out with 17 aboard. Ginger Reyes was on a video call with her husband, captain Eduardo Holguín, when an aircraft and then an armed vessel closed in. The call cut off.

On September 3, the *OM2* was boarded roughly 83 miles from Manta with 22 crew members, all from the parish of San Mateo, and seven launches.

Southcom claimed all three were “floating refueling stations” serving the gang Los Choneros, operating in international waters. Two of the three were seized well inside Ecuador's exclusive economic zone. And the configuration Southcom describes as narco-logistics—a mother ship carrying multiple small launches that fan out to set longlines—is simply how Manta's artisanal fleet fishes. Under this definition, every mother ship working out of Manta is a target.

Families gathered at the Manta port captaincy for days with no information. “They are fishermen, they struggle to bring food to our homes, to our children,” Olivia Holguín, sister of one captain, told AFP. “We want answers, we want to know about them, if they are OK.”

Twenty-eight crewmen from the *Conquista II* and *OM2* were landed at Manta on Friday morning by an Ecuadorian coast guard vessel; the rest were still making their way home in their own launches. On arrival the Navy and National Police processed them for identity verification and “custody procedures.” Their boats are at the bottom of the Pacific. No charges have been announced and no evidence produced.

The boat strike campaign began on September 2, 2025. In one year, US forces have carried out at least 68 strikes and killed 227 people. Not once has the Pentagon

presented evidence that any of its victims were trafficking drugs, and no survivor has been charged.

In parallel, the US intelligence apparatus is refining its capabilities for transnational extrajudicial mass killings and disappearances. In August the *Washington Post* revealed the attacks against three Ecuadorian fishing vessels were run not by the Pentagon but under a covert CIA program based in El Salvador. The survivors were hooded and taken to El Salvador before being sent back to Ecuador.

The Manta prosecutor whose files included those attacks, Gloria Alexandra Bravo Cedeño, was shot dead with her sister on June 14. Moreover, those investigating the drug ties of the government itself have faced a similar fate. Monika Silva Koniuszek, who was documenting the Noboa family's banana empire and its shipment of cocaine in banana containers, was found dead on June 8. On August 23, René Manuel Cobos Merchán, 49, a fixer who had worked for the BBC on organized crime in Ecuador and its control over the police, was killed at Yaguachi by roughly six hooded men in vests resembling security-force gear.

In Colombia the same apparatus is being installed by fascist President Abelardo De la Espriella. In his first weeks in office, he has ordered that all illegal armed groups be classified and treated as terrorists and launched a massive bombing campaign. On August 30, the military bombed a camp at Miraflores, Guaviare, killing 23.

Days later, De la Espriella walked among the 23 body bags laid out on the floor of a military battalion before the cameras—a spectacle copied from El Salvador's Nayib Bukele. Reportedly, the bodies included minors killed in the operation.

Facing widespread condemnation, he doubled down Friday. "My support for our security forces is absolute," he declared alongside the military and police command in a press briefing behind four corpses. He has also threatened opponents directly: "When you least expect it, a bomb is going to fall on you."

Three children were killed in a separate bombing at El Retorno. A Colombian judge has now ordered the suspension of bombings where recruited minors are present. Social leaders continue to be murdered.

The former President Gustavo Petro denounced the morbid publicity stunts. Yet, he presided over the same air war and built up the machinery for his successor, who within days restored full military cooperation with Washington and realigned Bogotá with Israel.

All of this unfolds while western Colombia lies in ruins.

The magnitude 7.4 earthquake of August 10 killed 331 people, injured more than 4,600 and left 240 missing. The United Nations estimates 1.2 million people need humanitarian assistance. Colombia's Ombudsman reported that Chocó and Buenaventura lacked potable water, electricity, health services and adequate shelter, and the interior minister admitted Buenaventura's hospitals were overwhelmed.

Under these conditions, not a step has been missed in building the apparatus of war and dictatorship.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio travels to Colombia, Ecuador and Peru from September 8 to 10, meeting De la Espriella, Noboa and Peru's new president Keiko Fujimori. The State Department lists the agenda as earthquake support, "enhanced cooperation in the shared fight against narcoterrorism," and closer commercial ties.

Venezuela has shown what disaster relief looks like for US imperialism, which has used the devastating June earthquakes as leverage for the Pentagon to expand its presence and even seize that country's oilfields directly.

US imperialism is building a hemispheric repressive apparatus that is distinctly fascist: fishermen killed or their livelihoods destroyed without trial, prosecutors and journalists murdered and bodies displayed as propaganda. The same methods are surfacing inside the United States, where federal agents shoot protesters and no investigations follow.

No section of the political establishment offers an alternative to the building of police state dictatorships and accommodation to the Trump administration. The defense of democratic rights and opposition to war relies entirely in the independent political mobilization of the international working class.



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