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## Trump Confirms Fifth Caribbean Strike, Killing Six Off Venezuela in Expanding Anti-Narcoterror Campaign

The strike, part of an expanding anti-narcoterror operation, comes as 4,500 U.S. troops are deployed across the Caribbean — including on St. Croix. Regional leaders fear escalation, but Governor Albert Bryan supports the mission's security benefits.

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A U.S. military strike captures the moment a missile hits a small boat off Venezuela's coast, erupting in flames during one of several recent operations targeting suspected narcoterrorist vessels in the Caribbean.

President Donald Trump disclosed on Tuesday that U.S. forces had conducted another lethal strike on a small boat off Venezuela's coast, killing six men aboard whom he described as

"narcoterrorists" involved in drug trafficking.

The announcement, made via a post on Truth Social accompanied by an unclassified video of the operation, marks the fifth such action in the Caribbean since early September and underscores the administration's escalating campaign against regional cartels. Trump stated that War Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered the strike at his direction, emphasizing its execution in international waters. The vessel, which departed from Venezuelan shores, was targeted based on intelligence linking it to illicit networks, though no details on the cargo or specific affiliations were immediately released by the White House.

The video shared by Trump shows a crosshair locking onto the boat at sea before a missile impact triggers a fiery explosion, sinking the craft within seconds. According to the president's post, "Intelligence confirmed the vessel was trafficking narcotics, was associated with illicit narcoterrorist networks, and was transiting along a known DTO route."

DTO refers to drug trafficking organizations, a term used by U.S. agencies to denote groups like Venezuela's Tren de Aragua, designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the State Department in February. Officials have not publicly identified the six deceased or provided forensic evidence from the wreckage, citing operational security. The Pentagon confirmed the strike in a brief statement, noting it was part of ongoing maritime interdictions authorized under the administration's determination of a "non-international armed conflict" with such groups, as notified to Congress on October 1.

This latest operation brings the reported death toll from U.S. strikes on suspected cartel vessels to at least 27 since September, with previous actions eliminating crews of 11, four, six, and five individuals, respectively. The administration justifies the tactics as a necessary evolution from traditional Coast Guard interceptions, which often allow smugglers to evade capture in high-seas chases.

International backlash has intensified, with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights condemning the strikes as potential "extrajudicial executions" in a statement released hours after Trump's announcement. Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro decried the action as "piracy and aggression," warning of a possible "full-scale invasion" and ordering heightened naval patrols along the coast. Maduro's government, already under U.S. sanctions for alleged narco-terrorism, denied any complicity with the boat's operators and demanded an independent investigation. Regional allies like Colombia have expressed unease, with President Gustavo Petro calling for multilateral diplomacy to address trafficking without lethal force, fearing escalation in the volatile Caribbean.

The announcement follows last month's deployment of roughly 4,500 U.S. troops across the Caribbean, including forces assigned to Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. On St. Croix, soldiers have been housed at the south shore refinery and terminal facility's "Man Camp", as part of the region-wide buildup.

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. has voiced his support for the deployment, citing both security and economic benefits. "If we could stop this flow of drugs to our shores, why wouldn't we be for that?" he asked in remarks earlier this month, noting that traffickers are increasingly using Caribbean routes as enforcement tightens along the U.S. southern border. Bryan added that hosting several hundred troops on St. Croix also brings a spillover effect: "They gotta eat, drink and make merriment in our community. We are happy to have them."

