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U.S. Strike in Caribbean Kills 3 as Anti-Drug Campaign Death Toll Reaches at Least 181

The U.S. military said it struck a boat along a known Caribbean smuggling route, killing three men, in the latest operation in a campaign that has killed at least 181 people since early September.

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An unclassified thermal image released by U.S. Southern Command shows a boat in the Caribbean Sea during a U.S. anti-drug operation that officials said killed three people. By. U.S. SOUTHERN COMMAND.

The U.S. military said Sunday that it struck a boat in the Caribbean Sea, killing three men in the latest deadly operation in Washington's ongoing campaign against suspected drug-trafficking vessels in the region. The U.S. Southern Command said the men were described by the military as illicit drug smugglers.

Southern Command said the vessel was traveling along “known narco-trafficking routes in the Caribbean.” The command also posted what it said was video of the strike on social media showing a small boat moving across open water before exploding.

The latest strike adds to a widening U.S. military effort that the administration says is aimed at cutting off the supply of illegal drugs entering the United States. The broader campaign against alleged drug-trafficking boats in Latin American waters has been underway since early September and has now killed at least 181 people. Other strikes have also taken place in the eastern Pacific Ocean.

The military has framed the operations as part of an aggressive push against what it calls “narcoterrorism” in the Western Hemisphere. President Donald Trump has said the United States is in “armed conflict” with cartels in Latin America and has defended the attacks as necessary to stem the flow of drugs into the country and reduce overdose deaths.

The government has provided limited public evidence about the targeted vessels. Reuters reported last month that a senior U.S. defense official said 157 alleged members or affiliates of drug organizations had been killed in 45 strikes against drug-trafficking vessels in the Western Hemisphere as of mid-March. That Reuters report also said 47 vessels had been destroyed and that officials claimed the operations had reduced drug vessel movement in both the Caribbean and eastern Pacific.

AP reported that the military did not provide evidence that the vessel struck Sunday was carrying drugs. The news agency also said critics have questioned the legality of the strikes, even as the administration insists the operations are justified under its broader campaign against transnational drug networks.

The campaign has drawn growing scrutiny in recent months. Reuters previously reported that legal experts and Democratic lawmakers have questioned the legality of using military force in these operations, while the Pentagon has continued to present them as a key part of its anti-drug strategy in the hemisphere.

For now, the latest Caribbean strike underscores that the U.S. operation remains active and lethal, with the overall toll continuing to climb as Washington presses ahead with a strategy it says is designed to stop traffickers from moving drugs toward the United States.