

The Virgin Islands Consortium

U.S. Forces Kill Three in Strike on Suspected Drug-Trafficking Boat in Caribbean

SOUTHCOM says three people were killed in the latest U.S. strike on a suspected drug-trafficking boat in the Caribbean, raising the total death toll from the military's campaign against alleged drug vessels to at least 230 people across 69 lethal strikes.

Caribbean / **Published On September 10, 2026 05:35 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **September 10, 2026**



Thermal targeting footage released by U.S. Southern Command shows the suspected drug-trafficking vessel during the Sept. 9 Caribbean strike that killed three people aboard.

U.S. military forces killed three people Wednesday in a strike on a go-fast vessel traveling through the Caribbean that U.S. Southern Command says was actively involved in drug trafficking.

Joint Task Force Western Hemisphere carried out what SOUTHCOM described as a "lethal kinetic strike" on September 9 under the command's direction. According to SOUTHCOM, the vessel was operating along established narcotics-trafficking routes in the Caribbean and intelligence had confirmed its involvement in trafficking activity.

The military described the three people killed as "narco-terrorists." However, SOUTHCOM did not identify any of them, provide their nationalities or name a cartel, gang or other organization with which they were allegedly affiliated.

The command also did not disclose where in the Caribbean the strike occurred, whether the vessel was in international waters, where it had departed from or where it was headed. There was no indication in the announcement that the operation occurred near the U.S. Virgin Islands.

SOUTHCOM did not disclose the type or quantity of narcotics allegedly aboard the vessel or make public the intelligence it said established that the boat was actively engaged in drug trafficking. Reuters reported Thursday that it was unable to independently verify the military's account.

SOUTHCOM released a roughly 10-second video in connection with the September 9 operation but provided little additional information beyond its written announcement.

The lethal Caribbean strike comes amid an intensified U.S. military campaign against maritime drug-trafficking networks across the Western Hemisphere. SOUTHCOM says Joint Task Force Western Hemisphere is using military forces, intelligence sharing and cooperation with regional governments to disrupt cartels and other organizations involved in moving narcotics.

The September 9 operation also contrasts with several actions carried out by the same task force in the Eastern Pacific in recent days.

On September 7 and again on September 8, U.S. forces intercepted vessels that SOUTHCOM said were serving as floating refueling stations for drug traffickers and were linked to Los Choneros, an Ecuadorian criminal organization. In those operations, the people aboard were removed and transferred to Ecuadorian authorities before U.S. forces sank the vessels.

Similar operations were carried out on September 2, September 3 and September 5. SOUTHCOM said crews were removed before the vessels were destroyed, with the actions conducted in cooperation with Ecuador as part of efforts to disrupt maritime logistics supporting narcotics trafficking.

The United States has increasingly used military force against vessels that federal authorities say are connected to narcotics trafficking. The Associated Press reported this week that at least 227 people have been killed across 68 U.S.-led operations during the broader maritime campaign over the past year. The strategy has also faced criticism from human-rights organizations and others questioning the legal basis and evidentiary

standards for lethal action against suspected traffickers at sea.

SOUTHCOM maintains that the operations are intended to disrupt organizations responsible for moving illegal narcotics through the Caribbean, Eastern Pacific and other trafficking corridors toward the United States.

© Viconsortium 2026