

October 16, 2025

The Honorable Roger Wicker
Chairman
Senate Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
425 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
728 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chairman
House Committee on Armed Services
United States House of Representatives
2469 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Committee on Armed Services
United States House of Representatives
2264 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Subject: Executive Overreach Regarding Extrajudicial Killings in International Waters And Militarized Responses in U.S. Communities

Dear Chair Wicker, Chair Rogers, Ranking Member Reed, and Ranking Member Smith:

We write on behalf of the 108 undersigned U.S. and international civil society organizations to sound the alarm about President Trump's escalated U.S. military engagement in law enforcement and drug control operations. We respectfully urge the Senate Committee on Armed Services and the House Committee on Armed Services of the United States Congress to formally investigate the lethal military strikes that took place in September and October 2025 in the Caribbean Sea against vessels alleged to be carrying illegal drugs, as well as the Administration's deployment of the National Guard and active duty military personnel for law enforcement purposes in U.S. communities. Based on the available information, the recent lethal strikes on alleged drug vessels in the Caribbean have no basis in either U.S. or international law and appear to constitute extrajudicial executions. President Trump's assertion of sweeping authority to wield lethal military force against alleged drug smugglers and his vows to order more such strikes require urgent action by Congress to prevent further harms.

Military Strikes in September and October 2025

Without congressional authorization, the Trump Administration deployed navy warships and other military assets to the Southern Caribbean.¹ The stated mission of this military operation was to counter drug trafficking. On September 2, on Trump's orders, the U.S. military struck a boat alleged

¹ NPR, "U.S. sending warships to Venezuelan waters", Aug. 25, 2025, found at: <https://www.npr.org/2025/08/25/nx-s1-5514478/u-s-sending-warships-to-venezuelan-waters>

to be transporting drugs, killing all eleven people reportedly on board. The military strikes were supposedly targeting members of Tren de Aragua, which was designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) pursuant to Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act.² On September 15, the U.S. military struck another vessel alleged to be transporting drugs in the Caribbean, killing three people on board.³ On September 16, the president told reporters that a third had also been destroyed, claiming “We knocked off actually three boats, not two, but you saw two.”⁴ On October 3, the military conducted a fourth strike, killing all on board, according to U.S. officials.⁵ On October 14, the president stated that a fifth boat strike took place killing six people.⁶

Lack of Justification for Lethal Action

The White House justification for these killings does not pass legal scrutiny under national or international law. President Trump claims that these actions were taken to further U.S. national security and foreign policy interests. However, his Administration has not provided any evidence that could justify the premeditated killing of people on board the vessels, nor has it referenced any plausible legal or constitutional⁷ authority for conducting these lethal military strikes. No evidence has been presented that would suggest the boats were armed or were preparing to attack the nearby U.S. military vessels. To the contrary, recent reporting indicates that the first boat appeared to be turning around when it was pursued and struck repeatedly until it was destroyed.⁸ Nor has the administration explained why the usual interdiction process (arresting those on board) was not used and options short of lethal force were considered inadequate.

Threat of Continued Military Strikes without Legal Authority

Trump Administration officials have boasted about the lethal strikes and vowed to conduct more such strikes against those they deem to be “narcoterrorists” without providing a clear strategic and legal justification to Congress or the public. On his recent visit to Mexico and Ecuador, Secretary Rubio has encouraged those and other governments to cooperate with the U.S. campaign, claiming that: “They're going to help us find these people and blow them up, if that's what it takes.”⁹ The

² State Department Notice of Foreign Terrorist Organization Designations, found at: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/20/2025-02873/foreign-terrorist-organization-designations-of-tren-de-aragua-mara-salvatrucha-cartel-de-sinaloa>

³ NPR, “Trump says U.S. military struck a boat allegedly carrying drugs from Venezuela”, September 16, 25, found at: <https://www.npr.org/2025/09/16/nx-s1-5542447/trump-says-u-s-military-struck-a-boat-allegedly-carrying-drugs-from-venezuela>

⁴ Washington Post [Trump discloses U.S. targeted a third alleged drug boat from Venezuela](#)

⁵ CNN, “US strikes another boat off Venezuela coast, killing four, Defense Secretary announces”, October 3, 2025, found at: <https://www.cnn.com/2025/10/03/politics/strikes-boat-caribbean-fourth>

⁶ Reuters, “US strike on alleged drug boat off Venezuela kills six, Trump says”, October 14, 2025, found at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-strike-boat-off-venezuela-kills-six-trump-says-2025-10-14/>

⁷ See Article I of the U.S. Constitution. Congress has the sole power to declare war and authorize the use of military force. Under Article II of the U.S. Constitution, the president can order defensive force in response to sudden attacks to the U.S. See Records of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, found at: https://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/a1_8_11s4.html

⁸ New York Times, “Boat Suspected of Smuggling Drugs Is Said to Have Turned Before U.S. Attacked It”, Sept. 10, 2025 found at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/09/10/us/trump-drug-boat-venezuela-strike.html>

⁹ NPR, “Rubio warns cartels as U.S. Strike on Venezuelan boat raises regional unease”, September 5, 2025, found at: <https://www.redriverradio.org/2025-09-05/rubio-warns-cartels-as-u-s-strike-on-venezuelan-boat-raises-regional-unease>

administration has deployed fighter jets to a Puerto Rico airfield,¹⁰ and are reportedly considering options to strike alleged cartels inside Venezuela.¹¹ Secretary of Defense Hegseth has also claimed the boat strikes are part of a broader U.S. military campaign in the region.¹²

Militarization in U.S. Communities

Throughout this summer, President Trump has deployed, and threatened to deploy, the National Guard and Marines to cities within the United States. In Los Angeles, as communities protested against the dangerous actions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the Administration responded with the deployment of war-trained military officers and predator drones.¹³ Weeks later, the president federalized Washington, D.C. law enforcement and sent hundreds of National Guard, immigration, and other federal agents to address “crime.”¹⁴ The Administration has also moved to send federal troops to Memphis, Chicago, and Portland to crack down on crime.¹⁵ These actions, whether they come in the form of increased deployments in the Caribbean, Latin America, or in U.S. cities themselves, are interconnected facets of presidential overreach.

Escalation of a Failed Drug War

This executive overreach marks the intensification of failed, antiquated drug war logic that has been used for decades to militarize public safety as both a foreign policy and domestic policy within the United States. The decades-long war on drugs in Latin America has failed to curb drug trafficking in the Western Hemisphere, while fueling violence and resulting in grave human rights violations.¹⁶ There’s no evidence that leaning into this failed approach will help communities struggling with addiction, especially in the face of dramatic funding cuts to public health. Despite trillions of dollars spent to stop the illicit drug supply, illegal drugs remain plentiful and readily available. Crackdowns are short-lived, markets adjust, and drug suppliers respond to enforcement pressures by devising and producing more potent and dangerous drugs that are easier to conceal and transport. For example, when the U.S. federal government criminalized all fentanyl-related substances in 2018, overdose deaths rose by 60% in four years—from 67,367 deaths in 2018, to 107,941 in 2022. The policy further opened the door for newer drugs to enter the market and our streets. The Trump administration’s choice to engage in lethal military operations against those suspected to be transporting drugs is a deeply alarming escalation of this failed approach.

¹⁰ CBS News, “U.S. sending 10 fighter jets to Puerto Rico for operations targeting drug cartels”, September 5, 2025, found at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/u-s-sends-10-fighter-jets-to-puerto-rico-for-strikes-against-drug-cartels/>

¹¹ CNN, “Trump weighs strikes targeting cartels inside Venezuela, part of wider pressure campaign on Maduro, sources say”, September 5, 2025, found at:

<https://www.cnn.com/2025/09/05/politics/trump-weighs-strikes-targeting-cartels-inside-venezuel>,

¹² Fox News, Hegseth says Trump admin had the authority to conduct lethal cartel boat strike”, September 5, 2025, found at: <https://www.foxnews.com/video/6378437890112>

¹³ Time, August 8, 2025, found at: <https://time.com/7307963/trumps-deployment-dhs-officers/>

¹⁴ The Brennan Center, “One Week of Trump’s DC Takeover Attempt”, August 19, 2025, found at: <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/one-week-trumps-dc-takeover-attempt>

¹⁵ NPR, “Trump’s power to deploy National Guard, explained”, October 7, 2023, found at:

<https://www.npr.org/2025/10/07/nx-s1-5564010/national-guard-deployments-powers-trump>;

CNN, “President Trump plans to send troops to Portland, Chicago and Memphis. Here’s what we know”, September 29, 2025, found at: <https://www.cnn.com/2025/09/29/us/trump-national-guard-memphis-chicago-portland>

¹⁶ E-International Relations. “The Global War on Drugs as Authoritarian Statecraft and Its Human Rights Costs”, Salvador Santino Regilme, October 11, 2025, found at:

<https://www.e-ir.info/2025/10/11/the-global-war-on-drugs-as-authoritarian-statecraft-and-its-human-rights-costs/>

Conclusion

The lethal military strikes against alleged drug boats in the Caribbean that have been conducted by the Trump administration in September and October appear to have been entirely lawless acts, and may be merely the opening salvos in a wider military campaign. This situation demands a prompt and thorough response from Congress. We therefore urge you to aggressively conduct congressional oversight, act to prevent any more such killings from taking place, ensure proper accountability under the law for those responsible, and create clear legal and funding limits on the Executive's sweeping claims for the authority to engage in such lethal strikes.

Sincerely,

U.S. Organizations [listed alphabetically]

Afghans For A Better Tomorrow

African Immigration Initiative

All People's Health Collective

Al Otro Lado

American Friends Service Committee

Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)

Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta

Baltimore Nonviolence Center

Baltimore, MD Phil Berrigan Memorial Chapter Veterans For Peace

Campaign for Peace, Disarmament and Common Security

Center for Constitutional Rights

Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR)

Center for Gender & Refugee Studies

Center for International Policy Advocacy

Clearinghouse on Women's Issues

CODEPINK Bay Area

Color Of Change

Common Defense

Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, U.S. Provinces

Defending Rights & Dissent

Dominican Sisters of Sinsinawa Peace and Justice Office

Drug Policy Alliance

DRUM - Desis Rising Up & Moving

Feminist Majority
Fox Valley Citizens for Peace & Justice (Illinois)
Freedom for Immigrants
Freedom Network USA
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Good Trouble Church
Government Information Watch
Hope Shot Harm Reduction
Immigrant Defenders Law Center (ImmDef)
Immigrant Legal Resource Center (ILRC)
Impact MN
Institute for Policy Studies, Drug Policy Project
International Drug Law Advocacy & Resource Center (IDLARC)
J&A Independent Baltimore Outreach, LLC
Law Office of Peggy J. Bristol, PC
Lawyers for Good Government
LEPOCO Peace Center (Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern)
Muslim Advocates
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Association of Social Workers
National Harm Reduction Coalition
National Homelessness Law Center
National Immigration Law Center
New York State Harm Reduction Association (NYSHRA)
Ohio Immigrant Alliance
Pax Christi New York State
Peace Action Maine
The Porchlight Collective SAP
Project On Government Oversight
Quixote Center
Reframe Health and Justice
Rio Grande Valley Harm Reduction
September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows
Sisters of St. Dominic of Blauvelt, NYU

Sisters of St. Francis, Clinton, Iowa
Social Work Advocates for Social Change
Southern Tier AIDS Program
StoptheDrugWar.org
Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP)
The Taifa Group
Truth Pharm
United for Peace and Justice
Veterans For Peace
VOCAL-NY
War Prevention Initiative
Wallingford Indivisible
Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)
WESPAC Foundation, Inc.
Wilco Justice Alliance
Win Without War
Witness at the Border
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom US. DISARM/End Wars Committee
The Workers Circle

International Organizations [listed alphabetically]

Acción Técnica Social - Colombia
AIVL
Association of World Citizens
Barbies testeadoras del bajío
Canadian Drug Policy Coalition
Center for the study of law, justice and society - Dejusticia
Centre on Drug Policy Evaluation
Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)
Drug Policy Network South East Europe
Elementa DDHH (Colombia & México)
El Recreo Labhouse
Forum Droghe
Frontera Federation

Instituto RIA, AC
International Drug Policy Consortium (IDPC)
Harm Reduction Australia (HRA)
Harm Reduction International
Harm Reduction Nurses Association (HRNA) / Association des infirmiers et infirmières en réduction des méfaits (AIIRM)
HIV Legal Network
Latin America Working Group Education Fund (LAWGEF)
Mainline
My Brain My Choice Initiative
Peace-seeking Iranian Veterans
Peace Y Paz
Release (UK)
Schildower Kreis
la Società della Ragione
Students for Sensible Drug Policy International
Transform Drug Policy Foundation
Tryggere Ungdom (Safer Youth)
WHRIN
Youth RISE

cc: Chairman Chuck Grassley, United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Chairman Jim Jordan, United States House Committee on the Judiciary
Chairman James Risch, United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman Brian Mast, United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Chairman Tom Cotton, United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence
Chairman Rick Crawford, United States House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence
Ranking Member Dick Durbin, United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Ranking Member Jamie Raskin, United States House Committee on the Judiciary
Ranking Member Jeanne Shaheen, United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Ranking Member Gregory Meeks, United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs
Vice Chairman, Mark Warner, United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence
Ranking Member, Jim Hines, United States House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence