



US Special Forces Operating in Ecuador: Green Berets in Action Against Drug Cartels

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United States Army Special Forces are conducting joint operations in **Ecuador** together with local armed forces as part of a growing campaign against drug trafficking and criminal organizations.

The American presence has been confirmed by Ecuadorian authorities and concerns in particular the province of **Esmeraldas**, in the northwestern part of the country, along one of the most sensitive sectors of the border with Colombia.

According to statements by the province's governor, **Juan Jaramillo**, the operations involve the **7th Special Forces Group (Airborne)** of the U.S. Army, one of the Green Berets units traditionally oriented toward Latin America.

The Green Berets in Ecuador

The most significant aspect does not simply concern the presence of American military advisors.

The information released speaks of **joint field operations** between U.S. personnel and Ecuadorian units engaged against drug trafficking organizations.

"We are working together in the fight against narcoterrorism," Jaramillo said when speaking about the collaboration with the 7th Special Forces Group.

The **7th Special Forces Group (Airborne)** is one of the units of the U.S. Army Special Forces, the renowned Green Berets, and is historically specialized in operations in the Latin American and Caribbean area.

The typical duties of U.S. Special Forces include training partner forces, military assistance, special reconnaissance, and operations conducted jointly with local units.

The presence in Ecuador therefore represents a step up from mere training cooperation.

Joint activities are not just announced: **field operations have already been conducted**. On August 7, as part of the "**Piraña del Norte**" operation, Ecuadorian Armed Forces with the support of U.S. agencies identified and destroyed a **caleta**, a clandestine infrastructure hidden in the mangroves of Esmeraldas and believed to be used by criminal organizations for storing illegal substances. The structure was neutralized with a controlled demolition after intelligence and surveillance activities in the northern border area.

However, it should be noted that available sources **do not explicitly attribute this operation to the 7th Special Forces Group**. The participation of the Green Berets in anti-cartel operations in Esmeraldas was confirmed separately by local authorities, but at this time there are no publicly documented specific drug seizures carried out directly by the American unit.

The Esmeraldas Front

Esmeraldas represents a particularly sensitive area.

The province is located on Ecuador's Pacific coast and borders Colombia to the north, along an area crossed by major routes used for cocaine trafficking.

Ecuadorian criminal organizations are also increasingly integrated with transnational networks involving Colombian groups and major Mexican cartels.

A few days ago the United States imposed new sanctions against a network based in Ecuador accused of moving **thousands of kilograms of cocaine each month**, linking it to the Ecuadorian organizations **Los Choneros and Los Lobos** and the Mexican cartels of **Sinaloa and Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG)**.

Drug trafficking through Ecuador now exploits a logistics system that includes ports, fishing vessels, speedboats, and sea transfers along the eastern Pacific routes.

The results obtained in the province in recent weeks nonetheless show the dimensions of the phenomenon. On **August 12, 2026**, in the Muisne canton, Ecuador's Policía Nacional seized approximately **1.6 tons of cocaine**, divided into 1,611 packages and destined, according to authorities, for international markets. At the site were also found a **Go-Fast** type lancha, two outboard motors, and fuel. However, this is an operation by Ecuadorian police and there is no public evidence to directly link the seizure to the Green Berets.

Military Cooperation Between Washington and Quito

The deployment of the Green Berets is part of a progressive strengthening of military cooperation between the **United States and Ecuador**.

On August 18, the commander of the **U.S. Southern Command, Marine Corps General Francis L. Donovan**, traveled to Quito to meet with Ecuadorian Defense Minister Gian Carlo Loffredo and the head of the Armed Forces, General Henry Delgado Salvador.

SOUTHCOM explicitly indicated among the topics of the meeting joint efforts against what Washington defines as "**narco-terrorists**" and the strengthening of the security partnership between the two countries.

Ground operations are also supplemented by a growing naval and air presence.

According to information released in recent weeks, **two U.S. naval units and three Black Hawk helicopters** are expected to contribute to surveillance and interdiction operations, significantly increasing Ecuadorian capabilities in countering maritime drug trafficking.

The United States Raises the Level of the Struggle Against Cartels

Ecuador is not, however, an isolated case.

Washington is expanding U.S. military involvement in the fight against drug trafficking in Latin America.

Since 2025, the U.S. Southern Command has also conducted direct operations against vessels indicated as belonging to drug trafficking networks in the eastern Pacific and the Caribbean.

On August 24, U.S. forces carried out a new attack against a vessel in the eastern Pacific, while the next day another operation in the Caribbean Sea resulted in the deaths of four people identified by the United States as traffickers.

The methods and legal basis for these operations have also raised criticism and questions in the United States and by human rights organizations, particularly regarding the use of military force against individuals designated by the American administration as narcoterrorists.

From Advisors to Field Operations

This is precisely the aspect that makes the presence of the **7th Special Forces Group in Ecuador** particularly significant.

For decades the Green Berets have operated in Latin America primarily through training programs, military cooperation, and capacity development for local forces.

Now information from Esmeraldas indicates participation in **joint operational missions** against criminal organizations.

This does not necessarily mean a return to large-scale military campaigns, but it signals an important change: in the American strategy against cartels, Special Forces can once again play a role directly in the field alongside partner country units.

And Ecuador could represent one of the first laboratories of this new phase of America's war on drug trafficking.