

What's behind the new U.S. military base in Galapagos

written by teleSUR
December 26, 2024



San Cristobal Island in Galapagos.

President Daniel Noboa has succeeded in establishing a foreign base in an archipelago of invaluable importance to humanity.

U.S. military vessels are set to arrive in the Galapagos Islands in December, amidst accusations that Ecuador is surrendering its sovereignty and violating its own constitution.

President Daniel Noboa has succeeded in establishing a U.S. military base in the Galapagos Islands, allowing Washington to expand its network of approximately 750 military bases across 80 countries. With this, the United States will have another location to deploy its nearly 200,000 troops stationed in 159 nations, as extensively documented by Professor David Vine of American University in Washington.

The decision, approved by the Galapagos Governing Council and based on military cooperation agreements with the United States, was formalized on December 10. Specifically, a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) will permit the U.S. to deploy ships, aircraft, and military personnel to the archipelago.

The Noboa administration justifies this move by claiming that the U.S. presence will help combat drug trafficking, illegal fishing, and other illicit activities in the island region. However, the Galapagos' geostrategic location and contemporary geopolitical events suggest that this decision amounts to a negotiated surrender of sovereignty.

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A precedent in Ecuador's history

This development follows the precedent of the U.S. military base in the coastal city of Manta, where American soldiers were stationed for a decade to conduct air and

sea operations as part of the Plan Colombia.

Despite the stated goal of combating drug trafficking, violence did not decline during that period. In 1999, the homicide rate in Ecuador was 13.55 per 100,000 inhabitants, but after a decade of U.S. military presence, it increased to 17.74.

During that same period, 21 cases of boat interceptions, destruction, and sinkings were documented, involving vessels transporting migrants along maritime routes through Central America to the United States.

Currently, in the Galapagos Archipelago, the U.S. is reportedly planning to establish a chain of naval stations equipped with radar systems in the Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor (CMAR).

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A constitutional violation

Ecuador's 2008 Constitution explicitly prohibits the installation of foreign military bases on national territory. This principle was introduced during the constitutional process under Rafael Correa's presidency, leading to the closure of the U.S. base in Manta in 2009.

Given this constitutional prohibition, President Noboa submitted a proposal to the National Assembly to repeal the article restricting foreign military presence. Although Parliament refused to debate the proposal, Noboa pushed forward after securing approval from the Constitutional Court.

The court's approval was based on the provisions of the SOFA agreements signed by former President Guillermo Lasso and President Noboa in 2024.

"This type of agreement signifies Ecuador's surrender of full sovereignty over

sensitive matters like security and national territory,” said Mexican sociologist Miguel Ruiz. “This surrender explains events like the brazen invasion of the Mexican Embassy in Quito, ordered by Noboa—an action that could hardly have been executed without the backing of U.S. power structures,” he added.

Former Deputy Foreign Minister Fernando Yepez condemned the decision to establish a U.S. military base in the Galapagos as “colonial servitude” that jeopardizes national sovereignty. “There’s no awareness of Ecuador’s interests or the negative experiences with foreign bases,” he said.

Social and political organizations have denounced the measure, citing the lack of community consultation and the violation of special regulations governing the Galapagos, which prioritize the conservation of natural heritage and the well-being of its residents.

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Environmental and geopolitical concerns

The Galapagos Islands, celebrated for their unique biodiversity and their role in Charles Darwin’s research, face new environmental challenges with the arrival of military equipment.

Although the cooperation agreements promise strict controls to prevent ecological harm, environmental activists remain skeptical. “Past experiences show that military operations often fail to respect even the minimum conservation standards,” said environmental activist Cristina Cely.

Additionally, the construction of new infrastructure in local ports and airports, necessary for operating the base, could further disrupt the fragile terrestrial and marine ecosystems of the Galapagos.

While the Noboa administration argues that the U.S. base will help combat drug trafficking and illegal fishing, critics contend that the move primarily serves U.S. strategic interests in the region. In February 2024, Noboa signed an agreement granting U.S. military personnel privileges and exemptions, including diplomatic-level immunity, setting a dangerous precedent for national sovereignty and exposing Ecuador to potential legal conflicts.

For former presidential candidate Andres Arauz, the U.S. military base is not aimed at combating drug trafficking but at advancing Washington's geopolitical agenda.

"The United States seeks a base for a potential Third World War against China as part of its strategy for Pacific dominance. The U.S. already had a military base on Baltra Island in the Galapagos during World War II for similar reasons," he said.

Meanwhile, Ecuadorians will elect their next president in February 2025, a decisive moment to determine who will write the next chapter of U.S. military deployment on Ecuadorian soil, Arauz pointed out.

[Nicolas Hernandez Sources: La Jornada - PIA - Lexis - Indepaz - Resumen Latinoamericano](#)

