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U.S. Deploys 4,000 Troops Near Latin America

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The U.S. military is deploying more than 4,000 Marines and sailors to waters around Latin America and the Caribbean as part of an intensified effort to counter drug cartels, U.S. defense officials confirmed. The movement, which has not been previously reported, includes the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), and is part of a broader repositioning of military assets under U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) that has been underway for several weeks.

Officials described the deployment as a demonstration of U.S. military readiness and strategic capability. A range of additional assets is also being positioned in the region, including a nuclear-powered attack submarine, multiple destroyers, a guided-missile cruiser, and P-8 Poseidon reconnaissance aircraft. According to sources, these resources are aimed at addressing threats posed by designated narco-terrorist organizations operating in the region, while maintaining flexibility for U.S. leadership to respond to emerging security situations.

On Friday, the U.S. Navy announced the deployment of the USS Iwo Jima, the 22nd MEU, and two other ships in the ARG – the USS Fort Lauderdale and USS San Antonio without specifying the exact operational areas. Officials noted that, for now, the deployment serves primarily as a show of force rather than a signal of immediate tactical operations against drug cartels. The presence of the ARG and MEU provides military commanders and the president with a wide range of options, including support through aviation combat elements attached to the MEU.

While Marine Expeditionary Units are highly versatile, some defense officials expressed concern over the suitability of the Marines for counter-narcotics missions. If the mission requires direct involvement in drug interdiction, they will rely heavily on coordination with the U.S. Coast Guard. Historically, MEUs have been deployed in diverse operational scenarios, including large-scale evacuations and humanitarian support. For example, a MEU was stationed in the eastern Mediterranean amid regional tensions involving Israel, Hamas, and Iran. A Marine official stated that the 22nd MEU “stands ready to execute lawful orders and support combatant commanders in the needs requested of them.”

The deployment reflects a continuation of U.S. efforts to maintain a strategic presence in the Western Hemisphere. In March, the U.S. Navy positioned destroyers near the U.S.-Mexico border to support U.S. Northern Command’s border security initiatives. The current deployments fall under SOUTHCOM’s area of responsibility and are expected to remain in the region for several months to support ongoing security operations.

Earlier this year, a memo signed by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth highlighted that the Pentagon’s “foremost priority” is defending the homeland. The memo directed military efforts to address unlawful mass migration, narcotics trafficking, human smuggling, and other criminal activities in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security. It also emphasised the importance of deporting illegal entrants and maintaining secure borders.

U.S. officials emphasised that the deployment is a proactive step to safeguard national security, deter criminal networks, and ensure that military assets are positioned for rapid response if required. The show of force underscores the U.S. commitment to the security and stability of the Western Hemisphere, providing options for both deterrence and potential operational engagement.

By reinforcing SOUTHCOM with both naval and aerial assets, the United States demonstrates its strategic focus on threats that extend beyond its borders. Officials stated that the current deployment enables the military to respond effectively to emergent threats from narco-terrorist organisations while maintaining flexibility for additional missions as necessary.

The deployment highlights the increasing integration of naval, air, and marine forces in regional security operations, reinforcing the U.S. military's readiness and commitment to countering organized criminal networks and protecting national interests throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.