

[Draft editorial offered to Tampa Tribune, circa October 2025. Tampa is home to the US Central Command and the US Special Operations Command. The newspaper did not respond.]

“To the aircraft commanders, weapon systems operators, and drone pilots blowing up Venezuelan “drug” boats: prepare to go to prison.

You will be joining an ignominious line of military criminals who were punished for unlawful acts, hiding behind the “I was only following orders” excuse. The justice system assumes you can discern between lawful and unlawful orders, regardless of what your superiors have told you to do. The Nuremberg trial set the standard. Lieutenant Calley’s imprisonment for his participation in, and supervision of, the My Lai massacre that shamed the US Army in Vietnam, and the military members who served prison terms for their abuse of non-combatants at Abu Ghraib (Specialist Charles Graner and PFC Lynndie England), should frighten any trigger puller involved in the extrajudicial execution of Venezuelan “drug terrorists.”

That these orders are prima facie illegal must already be understood by USSOCOM shooters. They have read the arguments that people like Rand Paul, the Republican Senator from Kentucky, and others who have [laid out the case](#) for the illegality of these murderous operations. Feigned ignorance will not suffice as a defense.

While the trigger pullers face the most serious criminal liability under the Uniform Code of Military Justice, their superiors in the chain of command who ordered these missions, from the Squadron and Wing commanders up to the US Southern Command commander himself, are also exposed to criminal charges under the same illegal order rationale. Perhaps Admiral Alvin Holsey understood this and retired before he could be implicated.

What options do our military members have when given these illegal orders? Push back. Refuse the mission. Consult with the staff Judge Advocate General. Certainly, they put their careers at risk, but that’s the trade-off to avoid potential prison time. Beyond the legal ramifications, each military person participating in these killings must look in the mirror and face the immorality of their actions. For the Believers among them, the eternal consequences of their acquiescence to these illegal executions are much more dire.”