

# Ecuador and U.S. Navies Conduct Bilateral Maritime Engagement in Pacific Ocean



Ecuadorian navy Esmeralda-class missile corvettes BAE Manabi (CM 12) and BAE Loja (CM 16) conduct formation maneuvering alongside Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Nimitz (CVN 68) and Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Gridley (DDG 101), part of Nimitz Carrier Strike Group (NIMCSG), in the Pacific Ocean, April 8, 2026. (U.S. Navy photo by MC3 Class Gina Gallia)

From the U.S. 4<sup>th</sup> Fleet, April 9, 2026

PACIFIC OCEAN – The Ecuadorian and U.S. Navies conducted a bilateral maritime engagement as part of U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet's Southern Seas 2026 deployment in the Pacific Ocean, April 7-8.

The engagement, focused on increasing interoperability between

the two navies, included participation by the Ecuadorian Esmeraldas-class missile corvettes BAE Manabi (CM 12) and BAE Loja (CM 16), Ecuadorian A-29 Super Tucano aircraft, Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Nimitz (CVN 68), Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Gridley (DDG 101), and F-18 Super Hornets and MH-60 Sea Hawks assigned to Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 17.

“Engaging with partners like Ecuador ensures that when the need arises, we can work together as a proficient warfighting team, built with trust and experience,” said Rear Adm. Cassidy Norman, commander of Carrier Strike Group 11. “Training on the high seas with Ecuadoran naval forces gave us the chance to hone our critical skills while also continuing to build a relationship that is already strong and enduring.”

Training conducted included subject matter expert exchanges, simulated maritime interdiction operations scenarios, a live-fire gunnery exercise, maneuvering in formation and an air defense exercise.

Nimitz also hosted a visit of senior Ecuadorian government and military leaders including Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabriela Sommerfeld, Minister of Defense Giancarlo Loffredo, and Chief of Defense Gen. Henry Delgado. The delegation was accompanied by U.S. Charge d’Affaires a.i. in Ecuador Lawrence Petroni.

The visit was one of many planned opportunities for distinguished visitors to observe aircraft carrier operations during Southern Seas 2026.

While aboard, the Ecuadorian delegation met with Norman and Capt. Joseph Furco, commanding officer of Nimitz. The leaders discussed the Southern Seas 2026 mission and the strong security partnership between Ecuador and the U.S.

Visitors also observed flight operations and an air power demonstration from Nimitz’ flight deck.

The visit and bilateral training demonstrated the Southern Seas 2026 mission to strengthen existing regional partnerships and encourage the establishment of new relationships through the exchange of maritime mission-focused knowledge and expertise.

Southern Seas 2026 marks the 11th iteration of the exercise to the region since 2007. Like the previous deployments, Southern Seas 2026 is designed to foster goodwill, strengthen maritime partnerships to counter threats, and build the U.S. Navy's team alongside partner nation maritime services.

During the deployment, Nimitz Carrier Strike Group (NIMCSG) is scheduled to conduct passing exercises and operations at sea with partner nation maritime forces as the ships circumnavigate the continent of South America.

NIMCSG consists of Nimitz, Carrier Air Wing (CVW) 17, Destroyer Squadron (DESRON) 9, and Gridley.

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