

**TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF LIEUTENANT  
GENERAL LAURA J. RICHARDSON, USA TO  
BE GENERAL AND COMMANDER, UNITED  
STATES SOUTHERN COMMAND**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

—————  
AUGUST 3, 2021  
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**TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF LIEU-  
TENANT GENERAL LAURA J. RICHARDSON,  
USA TO BE GENERAL AND COMMANDER,  
UNITED STATES SOUTHERN COMMAND**

**TUESDAY, AUGUST 3, 2021**

UNITED STATES SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,  
*Washington, DC.*

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m. in room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator Jack Reed (Chairman of the Committee) presiding.

Committee Members present: Senators Reed, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Kaine, King, Warren, Peters, Manchin, Rosen, Kelly, Fischer, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Scott, Blackburn, Hawley, and Tuberville.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JACK REED**

Chairman REED. Let me call the hearing to order.

Good morning. The committee meets to consider the nomination of Lieutenant General Laura Richardson, to be promoted to four-star general and to be the next commander of the United States Southern Command.

If confirmed, you will be the second female, four-star general officer currently serving in the United States military and the second female officer to command a geographic combatant command.

I am glad to preside for this well-deserved nomination and I thank you, General, for your continued service and willingness to lead in this important position.

I would like to welcome your husband, Lieutenant General James Richardson, United States Army, and your daughter, Lauren Richardson. We thank them for your continued support to our Nation.

You have most recently served as the commander of the U.S. Army North and senior commander of Fort Sam Houston and Camp Bullis in Texas. That experience, along with your distinguished career of service across multiple theaters, and commander at all levels, will serve you well in this new role.

Security issues in the U.S. Southern Command, or SOUTHCOM, are challenging and increasingly complex. SOUTHCOM has traditionally focused on counter-drug and counter-transnational criminal organization missions, while making the most of limited resources; recently, however, the SOUTHCOM region has experienced a rise in political instability, including the presidential assas-

sination in Haiti, political protest in Cuba, and continuing economic and political degradation in Venezuela, as the Maduro regime clings to power.

Further, the security situation in the northern triangle countries, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, continues to deteriorate, exacerbated by the corruption of these governments, human rights violations, and criminal violence. It is critical that the root causes of this instability be addressed comprehensively. I would be interested in your views and the role that SOUTHCOM might play in those efforts.

The political and economic instability in these SOUTHCOM nations presents a situation that China, Russia, and other near-peer rivals are now seeking to exploit to increase their own strategic influence. In March, Admiral Faller, the current SOUTHCOM commander, provided this committee a classified briefing on the growing malign influence of China in the region and the consequential threat this poses to the United States.

A critical task to the next SOUTHCOM commander will be to focus on countering these efforts by near-peer rivals to coerce our allies and partners. We need to find ways to complete and compete successfully, short of armed conflict, including by addressing sources of insecurity and other vulnerabilities that near-peer rivals exploit to gain leverage or sow division.

It will also be important to strengthen the resilience of the U.S. partner security forces, including by building defense institutional capabilities for adherence to the rule of law and respect for human rights.

General Richardson, I am interested in your assessment of the spread for near-peer competition in the SOUTHCOM area and how we might work strategically with partners in our neighboring region to build resilience to China and Russia's malign activities.

Finally, the DOD's response to COVID-19 must remain a priority. As the current Army North commander, you led NORTHCOM's Joint Force land component, which has provided COVID-19 response support to civilian hospitals nationwide, assisted FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] and HHS [Department of Health and Human Services] with distribution, and provided personnel for community property vaccination centers in multiple states and U.S. territories.

General, on behalf of the committee, please thank the men and women under your command who have participated in this heroic response to the pandemic and thank you for your extraordinary leadership.

I would ask that you share how you plan on leading the U.S. COVID-19 response in the SOUTHCOM area based on the lessons learned over the past year and a half.

General Richardson, if confirmed, you will lead SOUTHCOM in an incredibly consequential time. We thank you, again, for your continued willingness to serve.

Senator Inhofe has requested that I submit his statement for the record and I will do so at this time.

[The statement of Senator James M. Inhofe follows:]

## PREPARED STATEMENT BY SENATOR JAMES M. INHOFE

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Lieutenant General Richardson, we thank you for your decades of service, and for you and your family's continued willingness to serve the country.

If confirmed, you'll be responsible for overseeing military activities in a region of growing importance to the National Defense Strategy.

China and Russia are expanding their access and influence in the SOUTHCOM theater through arms deals, military deployments, and economic and diplomatic coercion.

As Admiral Faller, the current SOUTHCOM Commander, told this Committee earlier this year: "Our strategic competition with China is global, not just in the Taiwan Strait or the South China Sea. China is quickly growing its influence here, in our hemisphere." I agree with him.

At the same time, much of the drugs poisoning American cities and the migrants at our southern border are coming from the SOUTHCOM AOR [area of responsibility].

We also see growing turbulence in the region in places like Haiti and Cuba.

Despite these threats, SOUTHCOM has never had enough resources to do its job. That's why I'm pleased that this committee adopted my amendment to the NDAA that increases the defense budget topline and addresses many of the unfunded requirements of our combatant commanders, including SOUTHCOM.

General Richardson, your experience makes you well qualified to lead SOUTHCOM as it confronts these challenges, and I look forward to supporting your nomination.

Thank you again for your willingness to serve.

Chairman REED. At this time, General Richardson, your introductory statement, please.

**LIEUTENANT GENERAL LAURA RICHARDSON, NOMINEE TO BE  
GENERAL AND COMMANDER, UNITED STATES SOUTHERN  
COMMAND**

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and distinguished members of the committee, I am honored and humbled to appear before you today as the nominee to lead United States SOUTHCOM.

I would like to thank President Biden, Secretary Austin, and General Millie for their trust and confidence in nominating me for this position. I would also like to recognize Admiral Faller, the current U.S. SOUTHCOM commander and his wife, Martha, for their loyal and dedicated service to our Nation.

If confirmed, I will build on their efforts and work diligently together with our partners to ensure we fully account for the defense challenges and opportunities in Central and South America and the Caribbean.

I would like to thank my family for their love and support throughout my military career. With me today is my husband Jim, our daughter Lauren. Jim has been my strongest advocate for 33 years and we have proudly served side-by-side, tackling the challenges of a dual-military family and I would not be the officer that I am today without him.

Lauren, who I am so proud of, she deserves so much credit for her support and sacrifices along the way. It is often the service members who receive praise, but I believe our military kids deserve more credit for their support and sacrifices, as well.

I would like to thank my parents watching from Colorado. They have truly been instrumental in establishing a family virtue of service to our country. Thanks, Mom and Dad.

In this era of long-term strategic competition, the United States must remain the partner of choice throughout the Western Hemisphere. As this committee knows, the Southern Command region is of strategic importance to U.S. vital interests, and if confirmed, I will synchronize our approach to Security Cooperation, working across all combatant commands to narrow the gaps and seams our competitors are exploiting.

Today, many of our closest partners in the region are still fighting bravely against COVID. We are all too familiar with the devastation caused by this deadly pandemic, and I empathize with those who have felt its horrific impacts. More than a humanitarian crisis, this devastation is changing the geopolitical landscape.

Authoritarian regimes and transnational criminal organizations, enabled by China, and encouraged by Russia, are attempting to consolidate power in the region and free societies are being directly challenged. While our competitors are extending hands of exploitation, attempting to profit from our partners' vulnerable circumstances, if confirmed, I stand ready to support the coordinated and prioritized whole-of-government effort in support of partner nations on vaccine distribution.

I will focus on rebuilding regional resilience by expanding our Security Cooperation efforts and multilateral exercises, increased International Military Education and Training exchanges, and work with the Department of Defense (DOD) and Congress on innovative methods to increase levels of interoperability and global integration.

Through a comprehensive and multilateral approach, we can strengthen regional resilience by denying freedom of movement to transnational criminal organizations by reducing exposure to the corrosive efforts of external state actors in our shared hemisphere and, thereby, improving security of our southern border.

We draw upon the strength in the Western Hemisphere from partner nations who share our values of freedom, democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law. We cannot, however, take these relationships for granted or let our guard down, as our competitors vie for influence. We must hasten to pick up the pieces left by the pandemic and transform our relationships to meet 21st century security challenges; put simply, winning together with our allies and partners matters.

If confirmed, I look forward to continuing to serve the American people by leading the great team at U.S. Southern Command. Just as I have worked with numerous agencies within our U.S. borders, I will work with our interagency partners abroad.

Whether against COVID, transnational criminal organizations, the predatory actions of China, the malign influence of Russia, or natural disasters, there is nothing we cannot overcome or achieve through an integrated response with our interagency allies and partners.

Thank you, again, Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and Members of the Committee for this opportunity. I look forward to your questions.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, General Richardson. I will begin the questioning.

Security and human rights in the Northern Triangle of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador have been deteriorating for many, many years and I have worked closely with the Sisters of Mercy, particularly with their mission in Honduras. They have raised serious concerns about our security assistance to the Northern Triangle countries, whose governments continue to commit human rights abuses and undermine the international efforts.

If confirmed, will you agree to review the security systems approach in the SOUTHCOM area, particularly, the Northern Triangle, to ensure that our assistance is bolstering their commitment to human rights and to civil order and not disorder?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Yes, Senator, absolutely.

Human rights is a core principle of the U.S. military and I will absolutely do that if confirmed as the SOUTHCOM commander.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much.

I have jumped ahead in my questions without asking significant questions we ask all nominees, so you will let me step back and ask the questions I will do so. You can respond in the affirmative or appropriately.

Have you adhered to applicable laws and regulations governing conflict of interest?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Yes, Senator.

Chairman REED. Have you assumed any duties or taken any actions that would appear to presume the outcome of the confirmation process?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. No, Senator.

Chairman REED. Exercising our legislative and oversight responsibilities makes it important that this committee and subcommittees and other appropriate committees of Congress receive testimony, briefings, reports, records, and other information from the Executive Branch on a timely basis.

Do you agree, if confirmed, to appear and testify before this committee when requested?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Yes.

Chairman REED. Do you agree, when asked before this committee, to give your personal views, even if your views differ from the Administration?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Yes.

Chairman REED. Do you agree to provide records, documents, electronic communications in a timely manner when requested by this Committee—

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Yes.

Chairman REED.—and subcommittees or other appropriate committees of Congress and to consult with the requestor regarding the basis for any good faith delay or denial in providing such records?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Yes.

Chairman REED. Will you ensure that your staff complies with the deadlines established by this committee for the production of reports, records, and other information, including timely responding to hearing questions for the record?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Yes.

Chairman REED. Will you cooperate and provide any witnesses and briefers in response to congressional requests?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Yes.

Chairman REED. Will those witnesses be protected from reprisal for their testimony or briefings?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Yes.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, General, and I apologize for the going out of sequence, but let me continue my questioning.

You have played a critical role in the border security efforts by supporting DHS [Department of Homeland Security] and getting back to the Northern Triangle, that seems to be the root of many of the individuals seeking entrance into the United States.

What lessons have you learned from your responsibilities along the border that you will apply to the Northern Triangle and other areas?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, Senator, having performed this mission, I have been in command just over 2 years now and I am very proud of our soldiers who have served in this mission in a title 10 status in support of Department of Homeland Security and CBP [Customs and Border Protection]. Their primary mission has been detection and monitoring on the Southwest Border in support of them and, certainly, again, I visited the border, I visited the soldiers on the border performing this mission and I am very proud of the role that they have played in support of DHS and CBP.

Chairman REED. This observation, has it given you any insights to what you might try to accomplish in the Northern Triangle in terms of stopping the flow at the source?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, certainly. The migration problem is a confluence of many different issues, Senator, and that is violence, corruption, trafficking of arms, personnel, as well as poverty. Certainly, with COVID and the COVID impacts, as I said in my opening statement, changing the geopolitical landscape, all factor in to having high migration efforts.

Certainly, working with, I have a professional working relationship under the Theater Security Cooperation. We do, under United States NORTHCOM, running the Border Commanders program with the Mexican Army, SEDENA, and certainly, when I came into command, they were not along our, on the other side of the border, and since then, they now patrol on the other side of the border, acting as a deterrent, as well.

So, certainly working with our partner nations, working with our partner militaries, and strengthening them, bolstering them to be able to handle their own security problems is really what can help curb the situation. We have to have a persistent presence, though; it can't be, it has to be routine, it has to be persistent, and it has to be sincere.

Chairman REED. Thank you.

Just quickly, your general impressions of the malign influence of Russia, China, and other countries in your AO?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. So, certainly, China and Russia, China is a reemerged, long-term, strategic competitor, rapidly asserting itself. It is the only competitor that is capable of using its instruments of power, economic, political, technological, to challenge our rules-based international order.

Certainly, the Secretary of Defense has identified China as a pacing threat. They have been aggressively modernizing their military

at a serious and sustained rate. As I look at this from the military lens, all to, for the PLA, or the People's Liberation Army, to project and sustain military power.

Certainly, obviously with Russia, the malign influence of Russia, they continue to undermine the United States globally. They try to separate democracies and sow discord and certainly in Latin America, tried to create a friction point and use that as pressure upon the United States.

If confirmed as the SOUTHCOM commander, I will utilize security, cooperation, and engagement to counter these and work with our partner nations to counter this malign influence.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, General.

I think we are all very enthused about your nomination and I wish you well. Thank you.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Thank you, Chairman.

Chairman REED. I will now recognize Senator Rounds.

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Lieutenant General Richardson. First, let me begin by saying thank you for your service to our country, as well as your family's continued service to our country.

I would like to follow-up a little bit with your comments just now with regard to the Chinese challenges that we have. With regard to Chinese influence and Latin America, since the end of World War II, the SOUTHCOM AOR has been a secondary concern to military planners, but I wonder if it deserves more focus.

According to a July report by CRS [Congressional Research Service], total Chinese-Latin American trade increased from less than \$18 billion in 2002 to almost \$316 billion in 2019. The Chinese have a clear strategy of investing in minerals and agricultural commodities throughout South America.

As we saw in Africa, economic engagement will precede closer military engagement and, indeed, Admiral Faller told this Committee earlier this year that China has increased its port calls in the region by 70 percent over the last 5 years.

Reports from CSIS last year suggested that if war broke out with China, the PRC may have enough sway already in some Latin American capitals, Caracas, Quito, Havana, and La Paz, to use ports, airfields, and other facilities in support of operations against the United States.

Do you have a reason to believe this is an accurate depiction of Chinese influence in Latin America and how can our Armed Forces work to minimize this potential threat?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, thank you, Senator.

I share your concern and certainly with the expansion of China across the Latin American region is concerning, and so just with the Belt and Road Initiative, the BRI, 19 countries have signed up for infrastructure loans, billions of dollars in loans for infrastructure projects across the region, and so, quite honestly, very concerning. I look at that all as, even though those are Chinese State enterprise companies, still, they can use those as dual-use facilities and utilize that as global logistics and basing infrastructure as they expand to project and sustain military power globally, and certainly within the region. So, again, I share your concern.

The way that we counter that is through the Security Cooperation engagement. We do have a lot of levers to utilize. Admiral Fallor and the great team at SOUTHCOM have been doing a very good job of aggressively getting after those levers with Security Cooperation, whether it is with the institutional Capacity Building, multinational exercises, they picked back up with three big exercises in the last 6 months. They have four more on the horizon in the next 6 months. This trains thousands of soldiers. It increases readiness, interoperability, domain awareness, sharing of information, and so if confirmed, Senator, I will certainly take on this role to do what the SOUTHCOM team has done before and continue to have persistent presence in the region.

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you for that answer.

Let me change topics a little bit. Reports out of Cuba suggest the protests have been quelled for now, however, there is no end in sight to Cuba's economic failure. Most citizens lack access to basic necessities. Nor is there an end in sight to Cuba's current COVID surge, which is getting worse by the day and which will likely further erode public confidence in Cuba's Communist government.

Assuming the unrest has merely hit a pause, is SOUTHCOM well-positioned to act in support of our relevant government agencies if waves of refugees head for U.S. shores, or if the country devolves into a civil war? I guess I would pose the same question in regards to Haiti, given the ongoing unrest there following the assassination of President Jovenel Moise.

What are your thoughts?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. So, Senator, certainly, this is a very fluid and dynamic situation and it requires a whole-of-government approach, absolutely, with diplomacy in the lead. Certainly, if confirmed as the SOUTHCOM commander, I would be ready to respond with whatever was asked of Southern Command to be able to do in terms of either one of those situations.

Senator ROUNDS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My time is expiring.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, Senator Rounds.

Let me now recognize Senator Kaine, please.

Senator KAINE. Mr. Chair, thank you so much.

General Richardson, congratulations on your nomination. I hope to work with you.

I guess all of our favorite AORs is NORTHCOM, but next to NORTHCOM, SOUTHCOM is my favorite AOR. I was a missionary in Honduras. I am the chairman of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee of Senate Foreign Relations. We have a huge Latino population in Virginia who have family all over the Americas.

But I feel like our military operations, as well as diplomatic and other operations, in the Americas are often underresourced and our attention, often, is episodic; we pay attention if there is a crisis and then we drift back to focusing on an east-west axis of the world, rather than our neighbors in the Americas.

Over the years, as I have been on this Committee and Foreign Relations, I have often heard from Latin American heads of state: We would much rather deal with the United States than with China. We are worried about Chinese motivations. They put us into

debt traps that we don't like, but they are present and they are putting resources on the table and you are not present.

Recently, I returned from CODEL [Congressional Delegation] to the Americas, four nations, Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, and Colombia, with six senators, three Democrats, three Republicans. I was very struck that we had a moment in time where a window is really open for the United States. They are thrilled about the U.S. delivery of vaccines, vaccine diplomacy. You mentioned this in your opening statement. They look at the U.S. gifts of vaccines, and President Biden is making an announcement today, I think, about delivery of 100 million vaccines around the world. But they look at the United States gift of vaccines and they say these are the highest-quality vaccines in the world, and they compare it with the China or Russia willing to sell them vaccines that they don't think are so high quality and they are incredibly grateful.

You and I talked briefly, and, again, you referred to it in your opening statement. I visited U.S. military operations in Honduras, for example, that are doing remote medical clinics in rural regions of Honduras that not only train us to quickly set up mobile medical units, but also perform humanitarian work to build goodwill.

Throughout the Americas, there is a need for help in deploying vaccines into rural areas far away from central cities. In Guatemala, we arrived in the CODEL the same day that one and a half million American vaccines were delivered. Senator Coons asked a really challenging question to President Giammattei: How many of these vaccines will get more than 20 minutes from the International Airport? How many will get to indigenous communities or places in Guatemala that don't have good road network?

I see a massive opportunity for the U.S., as part of this vaccine diplomacy, to regain lost ground in the Americas and build goodwill, and I actually think the U.S. military has expertise in this way. I see my Virginia Guard at everything during COVID, from the testing clinics to the food distribution to the vaccine clinics, and so I know it is an expertise.

Share a little bit about how, should you be confirmed, you might want SOUTHCOM to be involved, as you say, in a whole-of-government exercise to accelerate American vaccine diplomacy in the Americas.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Thank you, Senator, for the opportunity to talk about that.

As NORTHCOM and Army North have been dealing with the effects of COVID across our Nation with our military medical providers and hospitals and then everything that we learned with that, as well as across the United States with vaccine centers, and so we have learned an awful lot. But this is absolutely an area with COVID distribution and I know the Administration has talked about giving out 500 million vaccine doses across the globe over the next year.

Quite honestly, as we were looking to desperately create the vaccine last December, for example, and getting that out and getting shots in arms as quickly as possible, I know that in SOUTHCOM and the capabilities that the military has with distribution, logistics, lessons learned, being able to provide PPE, and those sorts of

things, and so I think this is a huge opportunity for the United States, allies, and partners, with vaccine distribution.

I think the other very important point is that with the United States, there aren't strings attached. There is no fine print, small print. We don't use this as leverage; whereas, the Chinese and the Russians are using this as leverage to change, you know, a country's mind: we will give you a vaccine if you take on our 5G from Huawei, for example. We don't do that. We don't have strings attached when we are talking about vaccine diplomacy.

Senator KAINE. I think, General, that last fact is not lost on these leaders and they are really seeing an America that wants to help them out of this "once in a century" healthcare crisis in a way that China and Russia are not. Let's take advantage of the moment. SOUTHCOM has a big role to play in it. I look forward to supporting your nomination.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Kaine.

Senator Ernst, please.

Senator ERNST. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, General Richardson. I am so pleased to see your nomination in front of this Committee.

I also want to thank your family, as well. General Richardson, Lauren, thank you so much for the support of your wife and your mother. We know how important our military families are. So, thank you for being here today.

General Richardson, again, congratulations, and we know that we do have a lot going on in this hemisphere, and focusing on SOUTHCOM is extremely important, as Admiral Faller has told us over and over again. We have many malign actors that are engaging in our own neighborhood and we certainly need to make sure that our interests and our country are protected.

We do see those new threats coming from Chinese and Russian influence; in particular. We have many of these transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) that are engaging and what we have seen coming from those TCOs, about \$90 billion of annual revenue generated from those TCOs. Just last week, we saw the Coast Guard cutter Harriet Lane interdicting \$16 million worth of illicit drugs, which were likely moving towards America in the Caribbean Sea. So, we do have a lot of risk from these TCOs.

Can you maybe talk a little bit about how they are working with those malign actors like China and Russia and the implications that has to the United States.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Certainly. Thank you, Senator.

With the TCOs, transnational criminal organizations threaten partner nations' stability, as well as regional security. Certainly, the violence that they create, quite honestly, they feed off of each other, the TCOs or the external state actors of China, Russia, and Lebanese Hezbollah. Certainly, again, they are expanding, they are diversifying, they are destabilizing in the region, they are a major security threat in the AOR.

Drug trafficking is their number one funding source, and so, certainly, what SOUTHCOM has as its, are the levers that it utilizes for security cooperation and, again, that has to be a persistent

presence. Certainly, we would like our allies and partners to join us in the region, too, so it is not just the United States.

But, quite honestly, the multilateral exercises that I spoke about before, really a “low-cost, high return on investment” to train with our partner nations, increases the readiness, the interoperability, the domain awareness, because we have to be able to have the security advantage in all domains, as well as the sharing of information and intelligence.

Senator ERNST. Thank you.

Even to build further on that, one of my favorite topics when we have commanders in front of us is our State partnership programs through the National Guard.

I am very proud of our own partnership. Iowa is partnered with Kosovo, and we have seen a great return on investment with a tremendous country in Europe.

We see that, as well, in South America with many of our state National Guards partnering with host nations. The best bang for the buck, coming from those types of agreements.

You also mentioned allies and partners, other countries that are engaging with us. I think it is important to remember that we do have to continue to collaborate with others that have our shared interests and values in the region.

Can you talk about some of the great partnerships we do have with allies, as we are engaging against some of the malign actors and TCOs that we see. Maybe some of the key partners we would have.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Certainly, in the current position that I am in, in Army North and under U.S. NORTHCOM, we have the theater security relationship with our ally Canada and our partner, Mexico. Specifically, being able to work with them, have them train at our training centers, for example, our Joint Readiness Training Center at Fort Polk, which the Canadians routinely train there, battalion level.

We are going to have a company, our partner nation, Mexico, a company participate in the first-year ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] rotation next spring, and then by 2024, we hope to have a battalion-level participation.

I think it just helps us. I look at it as an integrated deterrence when we work with our allies and partners together. Because we are much stronger and more powerful together to counter the external influence.

Senator ERNST. Thank you very much, General Richardson.

My time has expired. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I look forward to supporting your nomination. Thank you.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Thank you, Senator.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Ernst.

Now, let me recognize, via Webex, Senator King.

Senator KING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, I want to congratulate General Richardson and her husband. I think in your family there are more stars than the Milky Way. I mean, this is extraordinary. I don't think we have ever had this many, this high level in both sides of a family. So, congratulations on your nomination.

I have been asking this same question for about 5 years. It maybe is getting marginally better, but what really frustrates me is that we know about 100 drug shipments from the Latin American AOR and we have the capacity to interdict 25, maybe 30 percent of them. I hope that you will advocate for more resources, whether it is naval training vessels, additional Coast Guard, whatever it is. Given the tragedy that is going on, we are losing tens of thousands of people every year. I think 90,000 this year, including four or 500, I think over 500 in my state of Maine to overdoses. Please ramp-up the capacity to interdict these shipments and also the ISR to know where they are.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, thank you, Senator.

Certainly as Admiral Faller has said, is we can't interdict our way out of this, and so not only will I, if confirmed, work very aggressively on this way forward, through JIATF-South, which is the Joint Interagency Task Force-South, under SOUTHCOM that has the air and maritime mission for detective monitoring for this, but also the whole-of-government approach. You have the interagency that is integrated within JIATF-South, as well. You have partner nations that are part of this team.

Partner nations participated in 60 percent of the interdictions that occurred last year. I think that just continuing to work on that, but, absolutely, I will advocate for that, Senator.

Senator KING. Well, we may not be able to interdict our way out of it, but we can do a heck of a lot more interdiction than we are doing, and that is just a lack of facilities, of ships. So, I hope that you will be very aggressive with your colleagues in the Navy and the Coast Guard, that we just need more resources.

It is inexcusable that we know of 100 shipments and we only interdict 30. I mean, that is, it is one thing if we don't know about them, but if we know about them and can't stop them and people are dying up here, that is not acceptable.

Let me change the subject for a moment. How do we bolster the Northern Triangle countries economically, in terms of internal security, in order to slow the flow of the migrants to our border? How do we do that while dealing with what are often, essentially, corrupt governments? How do we get around the government?

It doesn't do any good to send millions or billions of dollars to these countries if it gets siphoned off by regimes that aren't serving the people, only themselves.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, Senator, certainly through Institutional Capacity Building is extremely important and working, not giving up with our partner nations and continuing to try to work with them. As I said before, a core principle in the U.S. military is human rights and the rule of law, and we have to continue to have this within all of our training, which it is, and continue to leverage that.

Not just Institutional Capacity Building, but the militaries are very well respected in this region and, quite honestly, a lot of the people look at the militaries as a way to have a better life and a way to get out of the poverty and the violence and things like that. Again, persistent engagement with Security Cooperation, the exercises, the train and equip, foreign military sales, foreign military financing. Senator Ernst mentioned the National Guard State Part-

nership Program. Nine members on this committee have state partnerships with the countries in Latin America. So, there are a lot of levers that we have to continually be persistent about utilizing in this region.

Senator KING. Well, I hope you will—we are asking you questions as if you have been there 3 years, and I hope these are things that will be on your mind.

We have to figure out how to support and encourage and rebuild though countries without, sometimes, outside of the corrupt local governments.

The other thing that I am interested in following as you are on this job is the course of Chinese influence and whether they can maintain their influence when the bills come due. Because what they are really engaged in now is debt diplomacy and I think some of those deals aren't going to look as good to those countries as the Chinese are looking for repayment.

But in any case, I appreciate your testimony, General. Congratulations. I, too, look forward to supporting your nomination.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Thank you, Senator.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator King.

Let me recognize Senator Tuberville, please.

[Pause.]

Chairman REED. No, sir, not yet.

Senator TUBERVILLE. There. Maybe that will work.

General, thank you for being here today and your husband and your daughter.

My two kids grew up with a coach as a dad, disciplinarian. I can't imagine your daughter growing up with two generals. That would be very interesting. I would love to be around the breakfast table sometimes. I know she has got some stories.

I appreciate your training in Fort Rucker in Alabama, too, your aviation training; that is awesome.

You know, your area of responsibility of Southern Command sometimes gets overlooked, but it is getting more important every day and we can just see the drugs in this country. Being a coach, I have seen over the years, and of all the kids that we are losing to drugs just in my career. I can imagine now with what is coming across the border; that has got to be a huge undertaking in the future because there is so much money involved in it.

You know, I told Admiral Faller when he testified in March that dealing with criminal organizations, Haiti, Cuba, China, and Russia, coming our way, their presence every day, you have got your hands full. I believe sooner or later the American people are going to wake up to what is going on in our Caribbean and our southern part of the country and I hope it doesn't take for China to float an aircraft carrier between Miami and the Bahamas for us to wake up, because it is coming.

I think in the next 3 years, you are going to see a lot of changes and you are going to be right on top of it. So, I am anxious to watch and see what you do and how you do it, because we are all going to be counting on you.

If you ever need anything, you know, please let this Committee know, because sometimes the Southern Command, along with, you know, with all the drugs and so many different factions that is

challenging our country, you are going to need more and more every day and that can't be overlooked.

What do you think is going to be your biggest obstacle, you know, when you take this job, when you are confirmed, what do you think your number one concern will be when you look at it?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, Senator, thank you for the question.

I share your concern about the area of operations. It is a huge area and quite a lot of ground to cover. Just to use a sports analogy, you have got to have your jersey on, you have got to have your number, and you have got to be on the field. You can't just be on the field once every couple of months engaging with countries; it has got to be consistent, it has to be persistent, and constantly engaging with our partner nations.

I think it also sends that the U.S. is committed to this region and so a lot of levers are available, and so utilizing those "low-cost, high return on investment" initiatives and certainly working cross contraband command, as well, because I think a lot of things that are happening in different AORs in the Indo-Pacific and to the European Command, AFRICOM [United States African Command], certainly. Everything is very globally interconnected these days, and so working with my fellow combatant commanders, and, obviously, with the commander of U.S. NORTHCOM to help strengthen those relationships and our commitment in the region.

Senator TUBERVILLE. I don't think it is fair to ask you this question today, but when you come back for another hearing in the future, I want to know your thoughts about Guantanamo Bay. I want to know what you think about it, what the future for it is. I think that is a huge region for us down there.

I spent a lot of years in Miami. I have a lot of Cuban friends and they are very passionate about their country in Cuba. I think you are going to be right in the middle of that because you see things are starting to happen down there.

My time is almost up. I take a little controversy over this question, but I am going to ask you, our military needs to grow. We are losing more and more in our military to be able to get them into the military because of either education, drugs, felonies. We don't have a lot to choose from. We have a lot of bright young men and women in this country. What do you think about drafting women in the future or having them at least sign up for the Selective Service?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, certainly, for women, and having been in the military, there are just huge opportunities to serve in the military. I am very thankful that I have been able to do that. I have been a helicopter pilot for 34 years. I have been able to build and train teams to fight and win in combat and, quite honestly, it is just my honor to be able to serve with America's sons and daughters in the U.S. Military.

Senator TUBERVILLE. Thank you very much. Thank you for your service, and I look forward to working with you. Thank you.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Thank you, Senator.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Tuberville.

Let me recognize, via Webex, Senator Warren, please.

Senator WARREN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for being here, General Richardson, and congratulations on your nomination.

As you know, many Central and South Americans, particularly from the Northern Triangle countries, have migrated north in the last few years. Rampant corruption, criminal gangs, some of the world's highest rates of gender-based violence in their countries are among the reasons why so many of them are embarked on such a long and dangerous journey.

As I have been saying for years now, dealing with these factors is crucial for responding appropriately to migration. Last week, the Biden administration published its strategy for addressing the root causes of migration in Central America and one of the pillars it identified was combatting organized criminal organizations that have driven hundreds of thousands of innocent people from their homes through the persistent use of violence.

Admiral Faller also identified these criminal organizations as a national security threat to the United States. As the combatant command responsible for Central and South America, can you describe the role SOUTHCOM should play in President Biden's strategy to address the root causes of migration.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Yes, Senator. Thank you for the question.

I share your concern in terms of, and I agree with Admiral Faller in his assessment of transnational criminal organizations in this region. They sow violence. There is corruption; again, trafficking. When you are dealing with nations with poverty, and then, of course, COVID has just exacerbated all of that.

Quite honestly, with the whole-of-government approach, I look at it from the military perspective, Senator. Obviously, all the tools that I would have available, if confirmed as the SOUTHCOM commander, to be able to be persistent and engaged with our partner nations in order to stem the flow of migration and all of the root causes that affect that.

I look forward, if confirmed, to be part of the whole-of-government solution to that. But, again, I think that we have good, strong partnerships and we have got to just, again, keep our jersey on, be on the field, do that persistent engagement, and work towards an integrated deterrence against these external influences, while also bolstering our partner nations to be able to take care of their security problems, as well.

Senator WARREN. Well, you say, all the tools. You know, one of the additional tools the Administration identified was engagement with regional partners across and beyond Central and South America. Last year Admiral Faller highlighted the importance of these alliances and partnerships saying, and I think I have a quote here, "Strengthening partnerships is the best way to counter threats, enhance our collective readiness, and capability to meet global challenges."

One tool that SOUTHCOM has available is the Humanitarian Assistance Program. The program funds supplies and infrastructure to help nations prepare and respond to a wide range of emergencies like natural disasters or the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

General, if confirmed, can you tell me, what role do you envision for this program in helping address the root causes of migration,

and how can Congress ensure that this program is as impactful as possible?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, thank you for the question, Senator.

Certainly, I have seen where Admiral Faller and the SOUTHCOM team have utilized the Humanitarian Assistance aid in order to counter some of the effects of COVID-19 and certainly with donating field hospitals for those ventilators, PPE, and lessons learned. I believe the numbers were somewhere over 400 projects, 54 million to the Latin American region that they have done.

Certainly, if confirmed, Senator, I pledge that I will absolutely continue with that aggressive use of Humanitarian Assistance funding as a lever for Security Cooperation with our partner nations.

Senator WARREN. Thank you.

I think that having strong and stable partners throughout Central and South America is in the United States' best interests and the best way to strengthen these partnerships is to de-emphasize military tools and refocus our efforts on human rights, on any corruption, on humanitarian and development assistance programs led by state and USAID [United States Agency for International Development]. But I am very glad to hear that SOUTHCOM is also committed to playing its part in ending this violence.

Thank you very much. Thank you for being here.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back my time.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Warren.

Let me now recognize Senator Blackburn, please.

Senator BLACKBURN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, General, congratulations. I look forward to working with you and I appreciate your time for a phone call.

I know you have been asked about China and the malign influences that are there. We are all concerned about that issue, are fully aware. Let me just follow on with that.

In planning for a conflict with the PRC [People's Republic of China], the United States should realistically work through scenarios that go beyond those for INDOPACOM and should take into account other areas in which the PLA forces are operating.

So, how will you approach that as you look at SOUTHCOM, knowing that China is trying to plant their flag in so many different countries?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, thank you, Senator.

I share your concern with that, and as we watch the Belt and Road Initiative, the BRI, and 19 countries in Latin America that have signed on to that with infrastructure projects. They come with very sophisticated plans in order to capture the interests of the countries, willing to loan billions of dollars, as well.

Again, I look at that from the military lens of projecting and sustaining military power for the PLA with this expansion. So, not just in the Indo-Pacific region or Africa, but also in the region. So, we have to aggressively continue to work with our partner nations, show that the U.S., allies, and partners are committed. Work with our interagency, whole-of-government approach with the Department of State and USAID, and just continue to be persistent.

Senator BLACKBURN. I appreciate that.

I am pleased to know that you are attentive and thoughtful about how that would be approached.

We discussed ISR when we talked and my concern about the lack of attention on ISR and the SOUTHCOM AOR and the President's new "over the horizon" strategy that relies on basing ISR support far away from the battlefield is something that is of concern to me because it will put constraints on DOD's ISR availability, and this compounds the challenges that SOUTHCOM already has with its ISR allocation.

Are you prepared to operate with even ISR support than SOUTHCOM has right now?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, certainly, that is a concern, and as Admiral Faller has said, being able to interdict is very important. Obviously, you can't interdict what you can't see.

So, going forward, as I have seen with Southern Command has done, being innovative with the tools that are available, 21st century tradecraft of being able to use AI [artificial intelligence], machine learning, to be able to datamine open-source information, utilizing the interagency, as well as partner nations, and their sharing of information and things like that in the AOR.

But if confirmed, Senator, I will absolutely, aggressively work towards that, and I will do an assessment immediately upon taking command, if confirmed, and come back to the Secretary of Defense with whatever is needed, in addition to that.

Senator BLACKBURN. I appreciate that.

I would like to get your assessment. This could be a question for the record or, Mr. Chairman, we may want to have this as something right after you are confirmed. I think it is important to have an assessment of the ISR availability and it needs to be a "compete and win" strategy in the utilization of ISR.

I am concerned that we are not setting you and our troops up for success in the SOUTHCOM AOR. We know that China is very aggressive in this area, so I am going to continue to work to focus on these.

I am about out of time. I will send to you, for the record, Senator Warren touched on the trafficking and border security, and I do have some concerns about the drug trafficking, the human trafficking. The efforts that we have going on dealing with this illicit trafficking and the effectiveness. So, I will come to you with that as a question for the record. Thank you.

I yield back.

Chairman REED. Thank you, very much, Senator Blackburn.

Now let me recognize, via Webex, Senator Gillibrand, please.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

General, your predecessor, Admiral Faller testified to this Committee that Russia has eagerly flooded online communities in Latin America with disinformation, intended to undermine faith in Democratic institutions and the United States.

Separately, China is investing heavily in their information technology that can be easily manipulated by the Chinese Government at their direction for espionage or cyber intrusions.

Do you feel that SOUTHCOM is adequately equipped to do its part to handle the separate, but overlapping risks posed by these efforts?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, I share your concern with that, and if confirmed, I will, that will be one of the first things that I assess when I get to U.S. Southern Command. The disinformation and the information operations that are occurring. I will definitely do an assessment and come back to the Secretary of Defense with whatever resources might be required to counter that.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you.

General, as you pointed out, while China's economic coercion practices are only one element of its strategy to exert influence in the region, it certainly is an important one.

Is there a way for SOUTHCOM and other U.S. entities to facilitate opportunities for economic engagement where we can highlight the benefits of working with the United States, as opposed to China?

The Bahamas come to mind, where China has filled a gap left by previous administrations after Hurricane Dorian in 2019.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. So, certainly, Senator, with the Security Cooperation levers that are afforded to U.S. Southern Command to be able to counter that, the exercises, the International Military Education and Training program, IMET, we also have the National Guard State Partnership Program, and the section 333, train and equip. Also, foreign military sales, foreign military financing are also tools that are available to utilize, as well.

Also in the region, Senator, Security Force Assistance teams from the Army, which are also very effective on the ground, I think, you know, that goes to that persistent engagement with our partner nations to counter the external influence.

Senator GILLIBRAND. As we have seen by recent events in Haiti and Cuba, there are plenty of humanitarian and governance concerns within the SOUTHCOM domain that are in close proximity to the U.S. First, what role do you foresee SOUTHCOM playing in providing humanitarian support to our neighbors, and, two, in what ways can SOUTHCOM partner with other agencies to be helpful to people suffering from instability, corruption, or climate change?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, I do agree that this requires a whole-of-government approach with diplomacy in the lead, absolutely, and then, certainly, from the military perspective, being able to provide that Humanitarian Assistance, if required. I know that U.S. SOUTHCOM is always ready to be able to do that and, if confirmed, I certainly will be ready to do that, as well.

Senator GILLIBRAND. President Biden has made it clear that the current situation in Haiti doesn't necessitate United States Military assistance at this point.

Do you agree with that assessment, and if so, what signals will you be looking for that might change your advice on this matter?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, I certainly support the President and the Administration in terms of the diplomacy, leading with diplomacy and the whole-of-government approach, and being ready to, if required, provide Humanitarian Assistance, or whatever assistance would be required. If confirmed, Senator, I pledge that I will be ready to provide that, provide, as a combatant commander, options for the President and the Secretary of Defense.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Last, I saw in your written statement, comments about your support for the IRC recommendations and Secretary Austin's decision to remove sexual assault and domestic violence prosecution from the chain of command.

As a convening authority yourself, your voice on this issue is very important. I did have one question for you about our policies. If you agree that sexual assault prosecution will be improved by leaving it to trained military prosecutors, is there a reason why you wouldn't also improve the prosecution of other serious crimes?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, Senator, as a commander, I am responsible for standards and discipline within my command and within my organization. Certainly, as the Secretary of Defense had said that he supports the change for sexual assault and sexual harassment, I agree with that, as well.

In terms of other crimes, I think that, in support of the Secretary of Defense, I do think we need to review that and study that. Because to me, it is very important that I be able to have the ability for, and the responsibility to provide standards and discipline within the organization. I think that is very important. That is a commander's role, and so I do believe that that requires further study.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REED. Thank you very much, Senator, Gillibrand.

Let me recognize Senator Hawley, please.

Senator HAWLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, thank you for being here. Thank you for your service to our country. Thank you for being willing to continue that service.

Let me start, if I could, with the problem of drugs coming across our southern border. I represent the state of Missouri. We have been deeply harmed, my state has, by the amount, the volume of drugs pouring across the southern border, and pouring into, unfortunately, every part of my state's schools, neighborhoods, small towns, big towns, everywhere.

If you are confirmed, how do you intend to work with countries in the SOUTHCOM AOR to counter narcotics and to make sure that that effort is strong?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Thank you, Senator, and I share your concern, as well.

We work very closely with partner nations and the interagency to counter this. I think that it just stems and creates violence, corruption, trafficking, poverty. It just, it is a recipe of a lot of things coming together which are all very negative and create insecurity and instability in the region.

Senator HAWLEY. Do you have any thoughts about how you might work with the countries in the AOR to bolster the counter-narcotics effort to make it stronger than it currently is?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, certainly, Senator, through our Security Cooperation programs and being able to do the subject-matter expert exchanges. In the section 333, the train and equip, there is counter-narcotics training, military intelligence-operations training, continuing to reinforce the rule of law, human rights as we go forward with the training.

But it is persistent. We try to do that with allies and partners, as well; not just the U.S. alone. So, to bolster that, and to have an integrated deterrence in this region.

Senator HAWLEY. Very good.

Let me shift gears to talk about China. Earlier this year, Admiral Faller shared with this Committee his going concern about China's military presence in Latin America. I want to ask you if you are worried that China might one day seek to establish a regular or permanent military presence in our hemisphere in the SOUTHCOM AOR?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, certainly, I look at their Belt and Road Initiative. Nineteen countries in Latin America have signed onto that, as well as the 29 deepwater port deals, newer or improved ports that they have invested billions of dollars in, as well. I look at this as the PLA looking to project and sustain military power eventually in the region, and so I think that we have to be very concerned about that.

Senator HAWLEY. Would it be a violation of the Monroe Doctrine if the PLA did, indeed, attempt to project and sustain, as you say, a military presence in this hemisphere?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. I think as Chinese State-owned enterprises come in and look as if they are commercial enterprises creating the infrastructure goes to that global logistics and basing infrastructure, but also to dual-use facilities. So, they might look like their civilian facilities, where actually, they could be used by the PLA.

Senator HAWLEY. If you are confirmed, how would you seek to counter China's efforts to expand its military and intelligence efforts in what would be your AOR?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, the levers that SOUTHCOM has to compete with China in this region is Security Cooperation and engagement, and it is having your jersey on, having your number, and on the field with our partners each and every day. As I talked about before, having allies and partners is also part of that, so it is not just the United States.

But these exercises that SOUTHCOM has done three in the past 6 months has four more on the horizon in the next 6 months, trains thousands of soldiers in our partner militaries, but also ally and partner nation militaries, as well.

Senator HAWLEY. If you are confirmed, General, would you commit to informing us, informing Congress of any attempt by China to deploy missiles to the SOUTHCOM AOR that could range the U.S. Homeland or other American Forces in the Western Hemisphere?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, I would, absolutely, if confirmed, as the SOUTHCOM commander, would make sure that I inform the Secretary of Defense and the Administration and Congress of that.

Senator HAWLEY. Very good.

Finally here in my last remaining seconds, still on the subject of China, can you just give us a sense, if I could, of the challenges that are posed. We talked about China trying to project its military influence, but also its economic influence. You mentioned the Belt and Road Initiative.

So, describe for us, the challenges that are posed by their efforts, especially when it comes to port access, telecommunications infrastructure, the Panama Canal, give us a sense of the challenges there.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Certainly. If I just take the Panama Canal, the two ports on either end of the canal are owned by Chinese state-owned enterprises, and so that is very concerning. Again, I go back and I look at it through the military lens of the PLA trying to project and sustain power within the region and having the capability to do so under the cover of global logistics and basing infrastructure that looks benign because it looks commercial, but, again, could be used for dual use.

Senator HAWLEY. Very good. Thank you very much, General.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Hawley.

Let me recognize Senator Blumenthal, please.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

I was alarmed, as I know many at the Pentagon were, by reports about Iranian—

Chairman REED. Senator, is your mike on?

Senator BLUMENTHAL. It is on. I will begin again.

I know many were alarmed by the reports of Iranian missiles, Iranian vessels carrying arms, potentially including missiles to Venezuela. It was speculated that those shipments were designed to fulfill a deal that Iran and Venezuela made a year ago and the types of weapons might include long-range missiles.

Commercial satellite imagery of one of the ships showed fast-attack boats loaded on the deck of those vessels. Ultimately, as you know, the vessels were re-routed and didn't transmit anything to Venezuela, but given the volatility of oil prices and the current situation in Venezuela, how concerned are you that the Iranians will, again, attempt, possibly, to complete a shipment of arms to Venezuela?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, I only heard part of that last part of your question, and so I think that has to do with the concern of Iran with Venezuela in the region and those two ships that were headed for Venezuela but ended up not arriving there?

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Let me shift to a different microphone.

[Pause.]

Senator BLUMENTHAL. How concerned are you that Iran may, again, attempt, possibly, to ship missiles or other arms to Venezuela?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. So, very concerned. Obviously, they are the largest state sponsor of terror. They will continue their malign influence in the region.

Certainly, they exchange with Venezuela, petroleum for arms to avoid sanctions, and so I expect this would probably continue and, certainly, it is very concerning in the region.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. What action would you suggest the United States ought to take in response to another ship?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. So, I look at this, Senator, as a whole-of-government approach that has to lead from the front. Obviously, in terms of, if confirmed as a SOUTHCOM commander,

I would work with the international agency, as well as our partners, in the sharing of information and intelligence. As long as we have the 5G clean path of entry and exit of data, sharing of intel within this region to continue to be able to see what is occurring.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. In your posture statement, you stated that China and Russia are using the COVID-19 pandemic to gain greater influence in South America.

Can you give more specifics about how that is occurring.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Yes, Senator, thank you.

I think, quite honestly, they are using, there are strings attached. There are, as I said in my opening statement, it is the hand of exploitation; we will give you this vaccine, but you need to pay for it and we will provide it.

So, it comes with strings attached. It comes with fine print and/or to be used later as leverage to coerce the country or partner nation into something else.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Is that happening with any specific nations that you can cite?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, I believe it is, with vaccine, Brazil and I believe it is the Dominican Republic that if China would provide some vaccine if they agreed to the 5G with Huawei.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Finally, and I apologize if this question has been asked, are you familiar with the so-called Havana Syndrome and do you think that the United States should be taking additional efforts to counter it, to understand it, to study it, and will you commit to undertaking it?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, I share your concern on the Havana Syndrome.

I have seen the news reports on the Havana Syndrome and the effects that it has, and I am absolutely committed, if confirmed, to being part of that whole-of-government approach, as that is addressed.

Senator BLUMENTHAL. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Blumenthal.

Senator Tillis, please?

Senator TILLIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Richardson, thank you for being here and for your years of service.

You know, I have been here for 6 and a half years and every time I meet with a SOUTHCOM commander, resources always comes up as one of the top issues or lack of resources, particularly around manpower and ISR.

Do you, going into this role, do you share that concern that we need to really focus on resourcing and your future area of responsibility?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, I have seen Admiral Faller talk about the resourcing constraints and the issues and, certainly, if confirmed, I am committed to certainly having a full review of the resources that are allocated to U.S. SOUTHCOM and coming back to the Secretary of Defense if I need additional resources.

Senator TILLIS. Well, I have heard a number of them express their frustration that they may have situational awareness, but they don't have operational capacity to interdict a number of illicit, what they believe are ostensibly illicit actions in the area of responsibility.

What is your view of the Coast Guard and how important they are in partnering with you in your, in SOUTHCOM?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Hugely important, Senator, and thank you for asking about the Coast Guard.

Certainly, through our Joint Interagency Task Force-South that is underneath U.S. SOUTHCOM, commanded by a Coast Guard officer, and I understand, also, on the SOUTHCOM staff, the operations officer is from the Coast Guard. But, certainly with the ships, the cutters that are provided by the Coast Guard, their ability to conduct their law enforcement mission, as well as what the U.S. Navy provides in terms of ships to U.S. SOUTHCOM, as well, hugely important and helpful.

Senator TILLIS. I know some of my colleagues have asked questions about Russia, China, and Iran's activities in your area of responsibility. Can you just briefly explain in kitchen-table terms why the American people should be as concerned as most of the Members of this Committee.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, certainly, the SOUTHCOM AOR, the proximity to the United States, this is, as Admiral Faller referred to it, our shared neighborhood, our shared hemisphere, and so the proximity to the United States. The economic ties that we have the region, as well, in terms of just economy, trade, those sorts of things. Familial ties, just off the charts in terms of the families that are interconnected in this region. Certainly have China in our neighborhood is a concern.

Senator TILLIS. Between Russia, China, and Iran, what can you tell us about disinformation, their open and sometimes covert campaigns to misinform the folks that live in your future area of responsibility. Is it rampant? It seems to be.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Absolutely. The pace at which it is expanding is, and far-reaching is very much concerning and so, that China, Russia uses to exploit, deny, manipulate United States allies and partners in the region in order to control the attitudes, perceptions, and the behaviors. So, very concerning.

Russia Today, 2009 is when it entered in the region. It has more than doubled now. It had seven million listeners. Now, it is over 18 million. This is expanding at quite a large rate.

Senator TILLIS. Last question is, you know, I have heard other prior commanders in SOUTHCOM say that we really need to focus on working with partner nations to, the best way to secure our southern border is to work with Mexico and nations on the southern border of Mexico.

Do you agree with that assessment, if we are going to make headway on stemming the tide of what we are seeing for the unprecedented border crossings right now?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Yes, Senator, I agree with that. I think it is very important, our relationship with Mexico and under U.S. NORTHCOM, I have the Theater Security Cooperation responsibilities to partner with Mexico and the Mexican Army,

which we do, and operate the Border Commanders program, as well, as Security Cooperation with SEDENA.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you very much.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Tillis.

Let me recognize Senator Rosen, via Webex.

Senator ROSEN. Well, thank you, Chairman Reed, and Ranking Member Inhofe. I appreciate the hearing.

I want to thank General Richardson for speaking with me, I guess it was last week, and, of course, for your service to our country.

General Richardson, back in March, current SOUTHCOM commander, Admiral Faller, well, he testified before this Committee and when I asked him about Hezbollah's presence in Latin America, he mentioned their growing presence in Venezuela and their continued involvement in the tri-border region of Paraguay, Argentina, and Brazil.

Since then, I have joined Senator Blackburn in introducing the legislation that would shed light on Hezbollah's operations in the region and provide authorities in Latin America, and here in the United States, with the tools necessary to crack down on the group's agenda.

So, General Richardson, if confirmed, what strategy would you deploy to disrupt Hezbollah's agenda in Latin America, including coordinating with our regional partners?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, certainly, Senator, the Security Cooperation and engagement that we do, how we engage to counter those external influences, especially with the Lebanese Hezbollah and, quite honestly, the connection to the Lebanese diaspora in this region is nine million people, which equates to about 200 million in remittance per year, back to Iran. So, I share your concern on this issue.

Certainly, the Security Cooperation, working aggressively with our partner nation militaries and working with our allies and partners to also participate with us in the region, I think, is extremely important to create this integrated deterrence across the region.

Senator ROSEN. I appreciate that.

I wonder if you could just update for everyone what you think are some of the most concerning threats that Hezbollah poses to the United States interests in the Western Hemisphere.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, certainly, as they exchange with Venezuela, exchange arms for petroleum, continue to sow violence, corruption, and just create instability and insecurity within the region, and we have just got to counter this external malign influence that they continue to create within the region.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you, I appreciate that.

I would like to move on to talk a little bit about Chinese and technology in South America, because it is no secret that the Chinese have sponsored, they have State-sponsored companies and those companies have ambitions of assisting countries in South America and, of course, building their infrastructure, building their communications networks. ZTE and others are already helping Venezuela to build a system that monitors people's behavior through a new identification card called a fatherland card. Smart

countries are considering these vendors to close the technology gap. I am deeply concerned about what this means to us.

So, General Richardson, if confirmed, how will you work with our partners in Latin America to prevent the widespread deployment of Chinese technology that, we think is going to pose a threat right here to us in America?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Thank you, Senator. Again, I share your concern on this.

Certainly, with “smart city, safe city” technology, the personnel surveillance technology that China employs, safe city, smart city sound like a very nice term in order to have this capability, but, in turn, turns out to be a personnel surveillance technology.

Having voting records, as you mentioned, the fatherland card that ZTE has produced, in Venezuela, it ties the voting record to access to food and access to health aid and things like that is extremely concerning. So, certainly, countering, working with our partners, having that discussion and letting them know, we already have some countries that have been told—that don’t like the fact that they signed up for this originally and now see what it has brought to their country and are interested in getting rid of it. So, quite honestly, I think having that frank conversation about what this actually means for them.

Senator ROSEN. Thank you. I appreciate both your answers because I do believe that Iranian-backed terrorists, other terrorists coming to the Southern Hemisphere, our national security with Chinese technology get proliferated throughout the Southern Hemisphere, as well, has deep implications for our national security.

I look forward to your confirmation and working with you on preventing that.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Rosen.

Let me recognize Senator Sullivan, please.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, congratulations. Congrats to your family. I think you have a very strong background. You have been a great example in many ways. I look forward to being a strong supporter of yours and your confirmation.

I want to kind of take the questioning in a different direction. I had Secretary Austin in Alaska. I hosted him there about 10 days ago. You know, the best part of those kinds of trips when our military leaders, civilian, or uniformed come to my state and get to meet the community is so supported. But really, really, the best part was just meeting the troops and the Army, airmen, others, so impressive, you know, black, white, native, non-native.

You know, in the military, we don’t talk about skin color; we talk about, are you good or not good?

Damn it, these men and women are the best and their families, too. I think they are the best and brightest, most patriotic group of people we have in the country. It was great to show them off to the Secretary of Defense.

Would you agree with me on that, given your experience and their families, by the way.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Absolutely.

Senator SULLIVAN. Good. I do, too.

You know, there has been this narrative, to be honest, it is post-January 6 issues in the media. Some political commentators, unfortunately, maybe even some elected leaders, that somehow the military is filled with extremists and supremacists and, you know, pick up the Washington Post, they love to kind of fan the flames of this. No data ever presented, but it is always out there. It is the new narrative that our men and women, in fact, we had an Under Secretary testify here that one of his top priorities was to stamp out systemic racism within the ranks.

When I asked him, have you ever served in the ranks?

No.

Do you have data to back up that claim? It is a pretty broad and aggressive claim.

No, I have no data.

So, there is even one bologna estimate out there, 10 percent of the force, supposedly, by some, I don't know who estimated it, but it was repeated in a hearing here that 10 percent of the force is extremists in the military, supremacists. That is hundreds of thousands of troops.

Do you believe that it is 10 percent?

I don't. I don't think it is, but I want to know what you think.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, Senator, I can talk about Army North, which is what I am in command of and Fort Sam Houston—

Senator SULLIVAN. But, I mean, you are a three-star general, getting ready to be a four-star general.

In your experience, do you think it is even remotely—let me give you an example? We had two combatant commanders here, I put that number out. They said not only no but given the vetting that goes on in their commands, they doubt there are any extremists.

What is your view?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, Senator, just in terms of my perspective, I never say never, but in terms of my command at Fort Sam Houston in Texas and the command of Army North, and, certainly, we have gone through the extremism training, how to identify it, how to report it, and those sorts of things, and we have not had any reports within my command, which is what I can speak about.

Senator SULLIVAN. But in your Army experience, 10 percent, do you think that is even remotely in the ballpark?

I don't.

It is really important to me and I think you can just say it, say no, if you don't think so. Do you think tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of military members fall into that category, in your experience?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. In my experience, no, Senator.

Senator SULLIVAN. Yes, me, either.

Now, when those generals made that statement, evidently, some political guy in the Pentagon came out the next couple of days saying, oh, the generals are wrong. I think these generals had over 80 years of experience, but somehow they are wrong.

Here is my question, and I think it should be an easy one. Will you commit to me and this Committee to stand up for our troops, you know them, you are part of them, when such unsubstantiated

claims come from political appointees, members of Congress, the media?

I think it is really important to have our uniformed military, even though, you know, let's face it, in today's environment, it takes a little courage to say, no, that is not what I know. That is not what I understand.

Can you commit to me as you become a four-star general and combatant commander to stand up for our troops on what you think is really the truth on this, because it is really important, and the narrative out there really undermines morale of the troops and the families.

These are the best men and women in the country and yet, they are being besmirched with no data on somehow they are a bunch of extremists. Will you commit to me and this committee, when that comes up, and it will, that you will look whoever is telling you that in the eyes and say, no, that is not true. That is not my experience. Get some data and we can discuss it, but it is a really important issue.

Can I get your commitment on that, General?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Absolutely, Senator, I give you my commitment.

I will speak about what I know about and what I am in command of, Senator.

Senator SULLIVAN. Good. I look forward to supporting your confirmation and will be asking additional questions for the record.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Sullivan.

Now, let me recognize Senator Manchin, via Webex.

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Lieutenant General Richardson, for your service to our country.

Can you hear me?

Chairman REED. We can hear you now, Senator.

Senator MANCHIN. Okay. I am going to say it again.

Thank you, Lieutenant General Richardson, for your service to our country.

My question is Russia has continued to destabilize Venezuela in politics with its continued assistance to Maduro. His leadership has effectively confirmed Venezuela's status as an authoritarian nation.

My question is, how do you plan to increase our engagement with partners in South America and Latin America to stop the flow of narcotics out of Venezuela?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. So, I share your concern, Senator.

Certainly, Russia is Venezuela's number one military partner, and Russia routinely conducts port calls with its warships into Venezuela, as well as refueling of strategic bombers, and Russia also sends military training support to Venezuela, as well.

The Security Cooperation and engagement, Senator, is what SOUTHCOM has to aggressively engage in this region. Certainly, with partner nations around Venezuela that are affected by what is going on. Certainly, the humanitarian crisis with what is occurring there, five million displaced personnel, as well as one and a half million that have gone into Colombia, alone. Working with our

partner nations, knowing that, making sure that they know that the U.S. is committed with a whole-of-government approach regarding all of the activity that is occurring in this area of operations.

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you very much.

In an effort to bring greater stability to the Northern Triangle nations of Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, I was pleased to see that the State Department restarts the Central American Minors program to allow for the processing of refugees within their own nations instead of participating in the dangerous trek across Central America to the United States' southern border to claim asylum.

Additionally, this program works with the United Nations to settle eligible refugees in global nations, instead of creating dangerous backlogs solely within the U.S. immigration system. One issue I am worried about with this program is the matter of security for these refugees in their home nations before being sailed abroad.

So, can you commit to learning about the program and how SOUTHCOM can work to support it?

I have always believed that we should have, for lack of a better, like safe havens for these people as they are going through the vetting process. We have been able to do it in America with violence shelters, domestic violence shelters all over our country, and I can't see why we can't find a better solution of how we can protect people who are looking for asylum to see if they qualify. So, any thoughts on that would be appreciated.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, I do commit to learning more about that program, as you described it, sir.

Senator MANCHIN. How has aggressively pursuing the practice of predatory lending and infrastructure projects in the SOUTHCOM area of operations creating what we call debt traps, with port projects in Panama, Ecuador, and Honduras, and infrastructure projects in over two-thirds, 23 of the 31 of the South American countries? If China gains control of major ports and areas of commerce in SOUTHCOM, we risk economic loss, intellectual property losses, and the ability to effectively counter narcotics, including the Chinese-supplied Fentanyl.

Are you familiar with the latest attitudes from our allies in South America towards these predatory lending behaviors?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, I am aware of the predatory lending behaviors of China and all of the countries—the number of countries that have signed up for the Belt and Road Initiative, all the infrastructure projects with billions of dollars of loans, as well as a 5G and Huawei and subsidiaries of Huawei, as well, for the IT infrastructure, and I share your concern with that.

Certainly, if confirmed as the SOUTHCOM commander, I will work aggressively with our partner nations to counter that external influence.

Senator MANCHIN. I think what has to be done there, if they had a better alternative, do you believe that they would turn to the United States, I mean, rather work with the United States, as opposed to China. If that is the case and you know it to be so and true, are you going to prioritize in your budgetary request for this type of assistance?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, if it—absolutely. As I committed to you, I will look further into this program, and if it, as you said, furthers along the cause and working with our partner nations more closely to help them bolster against the external influence.

Senator MANCHIN. You are going to have to be very aggressive on that one. I appreciate it and will give you all the support you need because I think it is very dangerous to have our southern border being kind of overcompensated by a foreign ally or a foreign adversary, such as China, and what they are intent is. So, I look forward to working with you on this.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Thank you, Senator.

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Manchin.

Now, let me recognize Senator Scott.

Senator SCOTT. Thank you, Chairman.

Thank you, General Richardson, for your service and congratulations on your nomination. You will love living in Florida. You will love the Miami community. It is a wonderful group of people who work at SOUTHCOM.

What would happen in Latin America if the Cuban regime failed and we actually had democracy and freedom in Cuba, what would happen in Venezuela or the attacks we are seeing in Colombia or Ortega's power in Nicaragua?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Certainly, Senator, we have a long history with Cuba and they undermine the United States and are an authoritarian advisor, so to speak, with Venezuela and Nicaragua, and certainly prop up the Maduro regime in Venezuela, and certainly, if we had democracy in Cuba, I think that would change things dramatically in the AOR.

Senator SCOTT. So, how important do you think it is to get the internet back on in Cuba to help the Cuban population to be able to talk to each other, to be able to confront what is going on with the Castro regime right now?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, certainly, Senator, I share your concern about them being able to communicate with each other. If confirmed, I commit to you to working aggressively, as part of the whole-of-government approach, as we deal with the Cuba.

Senator SCOTT. So, is there anything that SOUTHCOM can do on its own to try to get the internet back on in Cuba?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, if confirmed as the SOUTHCOM commander, I would definitely look into that and find out what we could do or be a part of that whole-of-government approach in addressing that with Cuba.

Senator SCOTT. As commander of SOUTHCOM, would you use your pulpit to talk about the atrocities that are going on, the tortures of dissidents, the attack on peaceful protesters, and all the other atrocities that go on with the Cuban Castro regime?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Certainly. The training that we provide and the United States and the Security Cooperation has, as its core principle, human rights, the rule of law, and that is baked into all of the training, and we aggressively work that with all of our partner nations and our militaries that we conduct Secu-

riety Cooperation with. So, we would absolutely continue with that very aggressively.

Senator SCOTT. But do you have the ability to speak to the American public about what is going on in Cuba as commander of SOUTHCOM and would you do that?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Well, certainly, Senator, probably in support of the Department of State, who has the lead for the diplomacy and engagement with Cuba, and supporting the Administration with what is occurring there, I would be in support of that, if confirmed as the SOUTHCOM commander.

Senator SCOTT. Is there anything that you could do, that SOUTHCOM has the ability to help get the internet back on? Is there anything that they could provide? Are there other resources?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. In terms of engaging with the Security Cooperation and engagement, Senator, I would have to, if confirmed, I will work with the Department of State on these options and provide you with that assessment.

Senator SCOTT. So, as commander of the SOUTHCOM, have you already formulated your ideas of what you could do, whether it is to eliminate the Castro regime, the Maduro regime, the Ortega regime, or stop the attacks that are going on in Colombia? Have you thought through what you would be doing different than what Admiral Faller is doing?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Certainly. As I have looked at how Admiral Faller and the SOUTHCOM team have engaged in this region, I think that they have aggressively worked all of the levers and continue to improve upon what they are doing, working with our partner nations and our partner militaries.

I think, also, the allies and partners, the more allies and partners that are working alongside us to bolster that integrated deterrence and helping to increase our partner nations that are neighbors to Venezuela, as well as Nicaragua and Cuba is extremely important.

Senator SCOTT. Admiral Faller has been vocal about the malign Chinese influence in Latin America. Are you willing to be as vocal as he is?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, if confirmed as the SOUTHCOM commander, I think Admiral Faller has called it like it is, and if confirmed, I would do the same.

Senator SCOTT. What use do you think Guantanamo Bay has, besides holding terrorists?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. I'm sorry, Senator. Could you—

Senator SCOTT. What use does Guantanamo Bay have, besides holding terrorists?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, that would be used if we had to conduct a noncombatant evacuation, Humanitarian Assistance, for example, if there was a natural disaster or something like that, that would be used as a staging area, there, at the Naval Station Guantanamo Bay.

Senator SCOTT. Thank you.

Thank you, Chairman.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Scott.

Let me recognize Senator Peters, via Webex.

Senator PETERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, General. Congratulations on your nomination to this very important position. We certainly appreciate your willingness to serve, plus your years of service to date.

That is where I want to begin. First, I would like to recognize and thank Army North for all of its efforts across the country during the pandemic, but especially, your administration of the community vaccination center at Ford Field in Detroit. That was an incredible operation and that really jump-started our ability to get folks vaccinated throughout Michigan. So, thank you for your leadership and the men and women who you work with to make that happen.

General, last week, we discussed that what may be probably the most fundamental challenge that you will face, if confirmed, as commander of SOUTHCOM, and that is how to apply the military instrument of power to non-military problems that exist throughout the region, from corruption to money-laundering, climate change, and, certainly, the persistent requirement for Humanitarian Assistance.

As you well know, Honduras, the Hondurans, the Salvadorans, the Guatemalans all routinely identify government failures as one of the most significant challenges that face their country. So, my question for you is, how can you help build partner capacity to bolster the capacities of these governments, not just of their military or security services, but more broadly to help stabilize this region, particularly, in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala?

As chair of the Senate Homeland Security Committee, we are well aware that what happens in those countries has a direct impact on our southern border.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Yes, thank you for the question, Senator.

Certainly, with the integration, I think working with our partner militaries, but also with the integration of Women, Peace and Security is extremely important, as well as the NCO development that we can continue to foster within these partner nation militaries is a way to do that. Also, all domains, it is critical that we have domain awareness in all our domains and protect against cyber, cyberspace, and things like that, and I look forward to working with General Nakasone from CYBERCOM and General Dickinson from SPACECOM for furthering our efforts in this region, which is so very important.

Senator PETERS. Well, I appreciate that, General. I appreciate your bringing up the cybersecurity aspects of it. From your answer it is clear that you believe that cyber or security assistance should definitely include cybersecurity. We know that our neighbors are under constant attack by cyber criminals, as well as state-sponsored actors, whether they be Chinese, Russian, or from the Iranian Government. So, that has to be a part of it.

Related to that is one aspect that I find very concerning is the fact that we are seeing aggressive and sophisticated disinformation campaigns being used around the world by our adversaries and, particularly used during election times. If I look at your region, there are nine "head of state" elections in Latin America over the next 18 months, not to mention local, constitutional, and legislative

elections. Certainly, these, the voters in these countries deserve to participate in a democratic process, free from disinformation operations.

If Cyber Command possessed the capacity and the authority to empower regional allies with information and training to deal with this threat, how can Southern Command enable this effort?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Certainly, Senator, if confirmed, I will work this very aggressively, especially with all the elections in the Latin American region that are coming up in the very near future. And so, would work to understand exactly how we can utilize, to the best of our ability, what CYBERCOM has to offer, as well as SPACECOM.

But, also, you know, in terms of military information support to operations is extremely important regarding dynamic force employment and using the ability of us to be able to get forces into the region when we are doing multilateral training exercises, how quickly we can get a force in and on the ground. We need to be highlighting all the aspects of that in these multinational training exercises with all the capabilities that are brought to bear there. Working with our partner nation militaries, I think, can also help with that strategic narrative and drown out our competition.

Senator PETERS. Great. Thank you, General.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Peters.

Let me recognize Senator Kelly, please.

Senator KELLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Richardson, congratulations on your historic nomination to command the United States Southern Command and your promotion to general.

Earlier, Senator Rounds and Senator Hawley had questions about bases and weapons systems, specifically, Senator Hawley, about missiles in the SOUTHCOM region. You know, our partnership with South American nations are critical to ensuring safety and stability in the region and today we enjoy a relatively peaceful Western Hemisphere, so I want to follow-up a little bit on, and go a little more in detail on their line of questioning.

I am very concerned by China's efforts to pursue arms deals with countries right in our backyard. The potential of Chinese fighter jets in South America is of great concern and we had a good discussion on the subject last week, and I want to continue that here.

Argentina used to fly the Mirage III. It is a fighter jet built by the French. I have flown it a couple times, evaluated it. I could see why in 2015 they decided to retire the Mirage III. They have been trying to acquire a replacement, including western airplanes, but run into roadblocks, because parts are often made in the U.K. and a fallout of the Falklands War, which started an ended while I was in high school, is still an issue, that we are having, it is challenging to sell western fighter jets to Argentina. Because of that, they are looked at and pursued purchasing the JF-17 from the Chinese, which is of great concern to me and others.

So, General, what do you think we can do with our Argentinian partners here to assist them in meeting their procurement needs with either our platforms or some of our allies?

A good replacement option for the Mirage III could be the F-16, but we have got this persistent issue surrounding parts that are built in the U.K.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Senator, I share your concern with Chinese military equipment being in this area of operations, in the SOUTHCOM AOR. Certainly, our engagement with the country of Argentina and being able to have the discussions with them, open discussions and continue to work as part of the whole-of-government approach with our foreign military sales, our foreign military financial system, to be able to support this and counter that external influence being in our shared hemisphere and in our neighborhood.

Senator KELLY. General, do you think this is at the level now of maybe this needs to be elevated to the State Department to ensure that the JF-17 is not sold to Argentina?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Certainly. If confirmed, Senator, I will work very closely with the State Department on our foreign military sales and FMF programs and work with our partner nation of Argentina to try and counter against that.

Senator KELLY. By the way, I haven't confirmed this, but the JF-17 seems to have Martin-Baker ejection seats in it, which is manufactured in the U.K., so it seems to be a similar issue. But I hope we can overcome this. I mean, they are an ally of ours. To have JF-17s in our hemisphere, I think is, you know, just takes us down a road that we do not want to go down.

So, thank you, General.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back the remainder of my time.

Chairman REED. Thank you, Senator Kelly.

General Richardson, thank you and your family for your extraordinary service to the Nation and the Army over many years. We look forward to, I look forward to your nomination and to your service. Once again, thank you.

With that, I will adjourn the hearing.

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Thank you, Chairman.

[Whereupon, at 11:16 a.m., the Committee adjourned.]

[Prepared questions submitted to Lieutenant General Laura J. Richardson, USA by Chairman Reed prior to the hearing with answers supplied follow:]

#### DUTIES AND QUALIFICATIONS

*Question.* What is your understanding of the duties and functions of the Commander, U. S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM)?

*Answer.* Title 10 of the United States Code and the 2020 Unified Command Plan (UCP) outlines U. S. SOUTHCOM's (SOUTHCOM) missions, responsibilities, and geographic area of responsibility (AOR). SOUTHCOM is a unified Combatant Command responsible for contingency planning, operations, and security cooperation for Central and South America and the Caribbean. In this capacity, the SOUTHCOM Commander is responsible for detecting, deterring, and preventing threats and attacks against the United States. Specific tasks include defending the Panama Canal and Canal area, building and enhancing regional security partnerships, and being the principal contact on military matters pertaining to the AOR enabling inter-agency and DoD counterparts to advance U.S. influence and interests in the region.

*Question.* What background and experience do you possess that you believe qualify you to perform these duties?

*Answer.* I am humbled and honored to be nominated as Commander, SOUTHCOM. If confirmed, I will use the combined experience of my 34 years in

uniform. Commanding at multiple echelons provided me numerous opportunities to work with interagency teammates and multinational militaries, and to lead joint formations comprised of all services in the Department of Defense. Most recently, as the Commander of U.S. Army North, I served as NORTHCOM's Joint Force Land Component Command for the Homeland. This included the command, control, and employment of the Joint Force in support of the lead federal agencies in charge of COVID operations, hurricane and wildfire responses, foreign disaster relief in the Bahamas, earthquake response in Puerto Rico, and the Southwest Border mission. Simultaneously, we executed security cooperation programs and developed strong relationships with our Mexican Army and Air Force partners, as well as our Canadian Army allies.

As a General Officer in NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Command, I was responsible for ISAF's strategic communications, with the additional mission to train, advise, and assist the President, Ministry of Defense, and Ministry of Interior Spokesmen/Public Affairs Teams. Working with the militaries of more than 40 nations on the ISAF Staff demonstrated to me the strategic importance of NATO and the coalition of allies and partners. I have also had the privilege to serve as the Army's Chief of Legislative Liaison, and also the Army Senate Liaison Chief, which broadened my understanding of the Legislative Branch, our government processes and the vital constitutional role of Congress in defense and oversight. I commanded Soldiers in combat during the initial assault and first year in Iraq while assigned to the 101st Airborne Division, and conducted stability operations for a geographic area working with Iraqi civilian leaders to provide security and care for their citizens. As a young officer, I served in the Executive Branch as an emergency action officer for the Vice President and worked within our national security enterprise at the strategic level which was foundational as I progressed through my career. These experiences have prepared me for the challenges and opportunities I will face as Commander SOUTHCOM, and if confirmed, I will draw upon the lessons I have learned throughout my career.

*Question.* Do you believe that there are any steps that you need to take to enhance your expertise to perform the duties of the SOUTHCOM Commander?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I will review all plans for which SOUTHCOM is responsible. I will utilize the expertise of the SOUTHCOM staff to understand the laws, treaties, and agreements applicable within the SOUTHCOM Area of Responsibility (AOR). I will also seek out the expert perspectives within the U.S. Government, academia, and the private sector. Traveling in the AOR and meeting directly with our U.S. missions and the partner nations' leaders and security forces, will be the best opportunity to learn about their culture, country, and security challenges. Working with our Partner Nations is a privilege, and I am extremely humbled to be afforded the opportunity to advance our vital national interests in a region with whom we share such deep cultural ties and geographical proximity.

#### RELATIONSHIPS

*Question.* Section 162(b) of title 10, United States Code, provides that the chain of command runs from the President to the Secretary of Defense and from the Secretary of Defense to the Combatant Commands. Other sections of law and traditional practice, however, establish important relationships outside the chain of command. Please describe your understanding of the relationship of the Commander, U.S. Southern Command, to the following:

The Secretary of Defense.

*Answer.* The Commander, U.S. Southern Command, reports directly to the Secretary of Defense and is responsible to the President and the Secretary of Defense for performing the military missions assigned to the Command and for exercising command authority over the forces assigned by the Secretary of Defense. The Commander is directly responsible to the Secretary of Defense for the ability of the Command to carry out its mission and looks to the Secretary to provide sufficient authority and forces to carry out those missions.

*Question.* The Deputy Secretary of Defense.

*Answer.* The Deputy Secretary of Defense performs duties delegated by the Secretary and performs the Secretary's duties in his absence. The Commander, U.S. Southern Command must ensure that the Deputy Secretary has the information necessary to perform those duties and coordinates with the Deputy on delegated issues.

*Question.* The Under Secretaries of Defense.

*Answer.* While the Commander, U.S. Southern Command does not have a direct command relationship with the Under Secretaries of Defense, it is important that

the Commander communicate regularly with the appropriate Under Secretaries on strategic and regional security issues to ensure alignment within the Department.

*Question.* The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

*Answer.* The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) is the principle military advisor to the President, the National Security Council, the Homeland Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense. According to the 2021 Unified Command Plan, the CJCS serves as the global integrator across combatant commands and the communication link between the Secretary of Defense or the President to the Combatant Commander. Facilitating the Chairman's role requires consistent communication and information from the Commander, U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) on events and activities in the AOR. The Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff performs duties assigned by the CJCS and performs the Chairman's duties in his absence. Accordingly, the SOUTHCOM Commander communicates with the Vice Chairman to enable his performance of these duties and responsibilities.

*Question.* The Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

*Answer.* The Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs is the principal advisor to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy and the Secretary of Defense on all matters of international security strategy and DoD policy in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Russia, Eurasia, and, most importantly for the SOUTHCOM Commander, the Western Hemisphere. This position also oversees security cooperation programs and military education and training, which are ultimately the primary engagement tools in the Western Hemisphere. Although the SOUTHCOM Commander does not have a direct command relationship with the Assistant Secretary, in my view, SOUTHCOM should be in regular communication with this office to ensure alignment with DoD security policy in the Western Hemisphere.

*Question.* The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Global Security.

*Answer.* The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Global Security's responsibility in the areas of cyber, space, countering weapons of mass destruction, and homeland defense, make it a cross-cutting policy office. Given SOUTHCOM's mission to deter threats in all domains, I believe that the Commander should coordinate with the Assistant Secretary on all matters impacting the Homeland from Central and South America and the Caribbean, even though there is no direct command relationship with this office.

*Question.* The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict.

*Answer.* The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (SO/LIC) is responsible for many of the activities conducted every day within the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) AOR including counterterrorism, information operations, counterdrug operations, detention operations, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts. While the SOUTHCOM Commander does not have a direct command relationship with the Assistant Secretary, my view is that regular coordination with the Assistant Secretary on issues of mutual concern and interest is important to mission success in these important areas.

*Question.* The Service Secretaries and Service Chiefs.

*Answer.* The Service Secretaries and Service Chiefs are responsible for organizing, training, and equipping their forces. They execute administrative control and support of forces assigned to SOUTHCOM through the Service Component Commands. The SOUTHCOM Commander coordinates regularly with the Service Secretaries and Chiefs to ensure the Services provide trained and ready forces to fulfill specific roles and missions. In order to be operationally successful and permit the Services to provide forces globally, the SOUTHCOM Commander clearly communicates operational requirements, and works with the Services to effectively and efficiently employ the assigned capabilities. The Commander also must convey future capability requirements so that the Services may program, design, and develop a lethal Joint Force.

*Question.* The other Combatant Commanders, particularly U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM).

*Answer.* The Commander U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) must frequently crosstalk and maintain open lines of communication with other Combatant Commanders in order to synchronize efforts against global threats. This means sharing information, intelligence, and coordinating across all domains. The SOUTHCOM Commander must maintain a close relationship with Commander of NORTHCOM regarding matters of Homeland Defense and Hemispheric concerns in order to secure the southern approaches to the homeland.

*Question.* U.S. Chiefs of Mission within the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility (AOR).

*Answer.* All SOUTHCOM operations and initiatives in the AOR are executed by, with, and through the embassies and Chiefs of Mission—the U.S. leadership and expertise on the ground. While the Commander, U.S. Southern Command does not have a formal relationship with the Chiefs of Mission, they are in regular communication to ensure unity of effort in each country, to include planning of security cooperation programs to meet national security objectives. SOUTHCOM also benefits from having a Civilian Deputy to the Commander, a senior State Department official, to facilitate regular engagement with Chiefs of Mission and the Department of State. On the ground, Senior Defense Officials are integrated into the country team and provide daily coordination with the embassies.

#### NATIONAL DEFENSE STRATEGY AND GLOBAL POSTURE REVIEW

*Question.* The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) prioritized the long-term, strategic competition with revisionist powers China and Russia as the primary challenge with which the United States must contend, while also recognizing the need to deter and counter rogue regimes like North Korea and Iran and move to a more resource-sustainable approach to counterterrorism. Implementing the NDS will require the Secretary of Defense and combatant commanders to carry out missions efficiently and make hard choices—including in AORs such as SOUTHCOM which prior commanders have identified as an “economy of force” combatant command.

How would you define SOUTHCOM’s essential missions in the AOR and what steps would you take to accomplish them within an economy of force approach?

*Answer.* I understand that SOUTHCOM deters aggression, defeats threats, rapidly responds to crises, and builds regional capacity, working with allies, partner nations, and U.S. government team members to enhance security and defend the U.S. homeland and national interests. This critical role in the hemisphere includes supporting USG interagency-led efforts to counter Transnational Criminal Organizations and counter narcotics operations, as well as building partner capacity efforts, and when called upon, humanitarian efforts and disaster relief. In my view, by working together with international allies, partners in the region and U.S. government organizations active in the theater, SOUTHCOM can achieve a great return on investment for the United States.

*Question.* If confirmed, how do you plan to support the objectives of the National Defense Strategy in the context of the SOUTHCOM AOR, particularly with respect to long-term, strategic competition with revisionist powers?

*Answer.* Prevailing in strategic competition with China, or any other nation, is an enduring national security objective highlighted in both the 2018 National Defense Strategy and the 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance. In the SOUTHCOM AOR, I assess that China, Russia, as well as Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) will seek to exploit vulnerabilities exacerbated by the global pandemic. If confirmed, I intend to maximize engagements with our military partners to strengthen regional resiliency, and expand the competitive space by reinforcing the actions of our diplomatic corps and key Executive Branch agencies including USAID and the Departments of State, Treasury, and others as they employ all elements of national power in the hemisphere. Additionally, the SOUTHCOM enterprise must deepen interoperability with allies and partners and integrate combined and joint solutions to global challenges. Together with our partners, I assess that we will overcome the corrupt and corrosive influence of China, the malign intentions of Russia, and stem the violent actions of TCOs.

*Question.* Secretary of Defense Austin has announced that the Department will conduct a Global Posture Review to assess requirements for military capability.

If confirmed, what role would you expect to play in that review?

*Answer.* The Global Posture Review is a foundational process for achieving our national security objectives. If confirmed, I will provide my best military advice to the Secretary of Defense and the Department of Defense policy leadership on the appropriate level of presence and capability in the AOR.

*Question.* In your view, what, if any, changes should be considered in reshaping the National Defense Strategy, taking into account recent developments in the SOUTHCOM AOR?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I will conduct a full review of the priorities, challenges, and opportunities in the SOUTHCOM AOR. Much of the 2018 National Defense Strategy is still applicable to today’s defense challenges in the strategic environment, such as our long-term competition with China, and the importance of strengthening alliances and attracting new partners.

## MAJOR CHALLENGES, PROBLEMS, PRIORITIES

*Question.* If confirmed as the Commander of SOUTHCOM, you will be responsible for all military operations in that region. These include operations supporting homeland defense and security; supporting law enforcement activities to counter illicit trafficking efforts in source and transit countries and to counter transnational criminal organizations; responding to natural disasters and building foreign capability for disaster response; conducting detainee operations at Guantanamo Bay; and building the institutional capacity of foreign security forces that promotes the development of democratic values within the militaries of the region.

In your view, what are the major challenges and problems you would confront if confirmed as the next Commander of SOUTHCOM?

*Answer.* I am concerned about the increasing Chinese and Russian presence and influence in our hemisphere, particularly where these nations are strengthening ties with governments that do not share our democratic values (like Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua), or taking advantage of our partners facing insecurity, instability, and long-term impacts of COVID-19. I am also concerned about Transnational Criminal Organizations. These organizations pose a direct threat to the United States as they traffic in drugs, weapons, humans, and other illicit goods. Their activities enable violence and corruption, and also drive migration. Additionally, the SOUTHCOM Area of Responsibility is currently experiencing a humanitarian crisis as millions of Venezuelans flee the tragic conditions in their homeland. Further, the region is prone to natural disasters and SOUTHCOM must be ready to assist when these strike. Finally, with instability in both Cuba and Haiti, SOUTHCOM must be ready to respond in the event of a mass migration event in the Caribbean. In addition to these challenges, if confirmed, I would also be responsible for continuing the detainee operations mission at Joint Task Force Guantanamo.

*Question.* If confirmed, what plans do you have for addressing these challenges and problems?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I will maintain SOUTHCOM's primary mission of securing the southern approaches and collaborating with other U.S. Government agencies to advance security, economic prosperity, and regional stability. I fully expect that SOUTHCOM will return to pre-COVID levels of bilateral and multilateral training exercises to deepen interoperability with key strategic partners. I will also ensure that SOUTHCOM strengthens security cooperation and civil-military coordination on shared challenges like disaster response, supporting interagency-led efforts to countering criminal and terrorist networks, and stemming the flow of illicit drugs and other goods. I will also seek opportunities to expand human rights-related engagements in the region, increase professional military exchanges through International Military Education and Training (IMET) and other education and training, and foster partner nation defense institution building. I believe that SOUTHCOM is stronger and more effective against the challenges in the region when our partners are better trained, ethical, and effective members of the profession of arms, who understand their role in a democratic society. If confirmed, I will also continue to ensure the safe, legal, and humane care and treatment of detainees at Joint Task Force Guantanamo for as long as this mission continues.

*Question.* If confirmed, what broad priorities would you establish and how would you define success and failure in your core missions in tangible terms?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I see SOUTHCOM's success being determined by three mutually supporting priorities: (1) building regional resilience, (2) increasing interoperability and integration, and (3) remaining the partner of choice in the region. Building regional resilience will be an important key to countering all threats, including the corrosive influence of China, Russia, and Transnational Criminal Organizations. In my view, greater regional security and stability will, in turn, increase partner capacity to respond to crisis, provide humanitarian assistance, and execute disaster response, making the SOUTHCOM Area of Responsibility safer and stronger. Further, the United States can increase interoperability and integration with our partners across all domains by expanding participation in multilateral exercises, increasing professional military education opportunities, and expanding gender integration. These efforts will yield a high return on investment and will allow us to maintain a competitive security advantage. If confirmed, I will work to ensure the U.S. remains an engaged and trusted partner in the region, demonstrating our commitment through continued presence and serving as the example of a professional military force. In my view, failure would be SOUTHCOM's inability to (1) operate effectively below the level of conflict, (2) rapidly respond to a crisis when called upon, or (3) deter threats to the homeland emanating from this region. Undoubtedly, failure in our own hemisphere would threaten U.S. national security interests.

*Question.* If confirmed, how would you work to ensure that Department of Defense (DOD) efforts in your AOR complement the efforts of civilian agencies?

*Answer.* I have learned that SOUTHCOM has multiple well-established relationships with intergovernmental organizations including USAID, the Departments of State, Homeland Security, Treasury, and other agencies. I understand that the civilian deputy position at SOUTHCOM is held by an ambassador who serves as a conduit with the Department of State, embassies, and key leaders in the region. Additionally, liaisons from many of these executive agencies are integrated into the SOUTHCOM staff and operations. If confirmed, I would capitalize on these relationships to expand our effectiveness in the region. SOUTHCOM serves as an enabler for the U.S. government in this region and the U.S. cannot be successful without a whole-of government approach in the SOUTHCOM Area of Responsibility.

#### INFLUENCE OF COUNTRIES OUTSIDE THE REGION IN LATIN AMERICA

*Question.* In the last few years, China, Russia, and Iran have been increasingly engaged in Latin America, particularly expanding their relations with Venezuela, Cuba, and Nicaragua. They have sought to use malign political and financial influence, corruption, and disinformation to gain strategic advantage in Latin America.

What is your assessment of China, Russia, and Iran's presence and objectives in the region?

*Answer.* In my assessment, China, Russia, and Iran all seek power and influence in SOUTHCOM's Area of Responsibility. They are actively courting strategically important Latin American and Caribbean partners and support authoritarian, or anti-American regimes in various ways. China is aggressively expanding its economic, political, and diplomatic influence across the region through infrastructure investments, loans, financing, and disingenuous vaccine diplomacy. Globally, China seeks defense relationships and access to allow the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to project and sustain military power on a global scale. As in other theaters, Russia employs the full range of diplomatic, intelligence, and informational tools to influence public attitudes and decision makers in the region. Russia has made significant inroads into the regional information domain, saturating the internet, social media, and television outlets to sow doubts about U.S. intentions. Iran's efforts in the region have primarily been aimed at circumventing international sanctions.

*Question.* What is the extent of China, Russia, and Iran's military-to-military engagement with Latin American countries?

*Answer.* In my view, China and Russia continue to compete directly with the United States in arms sales and security cooperation in the Western Hemisphere. China and Russia conduct military deployments to the region ranging from the Chinese hospital ship PEACE ARK missions and PLA naval exercises, to Russian strategic bomber flights and partnered counter-narcotics operations in Central America. China offers all-expenses-paid training at its military institutions in Beijing as it seeks to deepen military relationships. Iran is a leading sponsor of terrorism and its role in the region is concerning. In recent years, Iran has curtailed its overt military engagements, but maintains its ties, particularly with the Maduro regime in Venezuela.

*Question.* What is your assessment of the nature and extent to which China, Russia, and Iran are engaged with transnational criminal organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean?

*Answer.* In my view, the potential for China, Russia or Iran to collaborate with transnational criminal organizations (TCO) in Latin America and the Caribbean is a concern. While it is publicly documented that Chinese and Russian enterprises and criminal elements operate in Latin America and the Caribbean, I am not aware of direct Chinese or Russian government participation in these activities. I assess that Iranian associates in Latin America are more likely to engage low-level criminal elements than TCOs through commercial ventures, as Iran seeks to acquire hard-currency (remittances, etc.) and circumvent economic sanctions.

*Question.* To what extent have China, Russia, and Iran taken advantage of the current pandemic crisis, and economic hardships exacerbated by that crisis, to expand their influence in the Latin American region?

*Answer.* I believe the devastation caused by COVID-19 in this region is more than a humanitarian crisis; it is changing the geo-political landscape. COVID-19 has brought on a new era of vaccine, mask, and health diplomacy that China is leveraging to its advantage. In many cases, these acts of good will are thinly veiled extortion, leaving vulnerable nations beholden to Chinese coercion and economic leverage. Additionally, Chinese and Russian information operations are aggressive and full of disinformation hiding their minimal capacity to deliver on assistance and investment. China, Russia, and Iran are using their influence in the region to bol-

ster authoritarian regimes, including the Maduro regime in Venezuela, with disastrous consequences to the populations there, furthering a humanitarian crisis and mass migration throughout the region.

*Question.* In your view, what is the appropriate method to counter any malign influence that countries from outside the region may attempt to exert on Latin American and Caribbean nations?

*Answer.* In my view, with diplomacy as the lead element, all elements of national power are necessary to counter malign influence and compete with adversaries in long-term strategic competition. The military activities of the United States in the region should be integrated with diplomatic efforts through consistent security cooperation and engagement with our partner militaries. This will enable us to expand our competitive space and maintain our strength as the most trusted and reliable partner in the region.

#### DOD COUNTER-NARCOTICS AND COUNTER-ILLCIT TRAFFICKING ACTIVITIES

*Question.* DOD serves as the single lead agency for the detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime foreign shipments of drugs flowing toward the United States. On an annual basis, DOD's counter-narcotics (CN) program expends over \$750 million to support the Department's CN operations, including to build the capacity of U.S. federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, and certain foreign governments, and provide intelligence support on CN-related matters and a variety of other unique enabling capabilities. Much of this funding is directed towards the SOUTHCOM AOR.

In your view, what is the appropriate role of DOD – and by extension SOUTHCOM – in U.S. counterdrug and counter-illicit trafficking efforts?

*Answer.* The Department of Defense (DOD) has a statutory mission to detect and monitor the aerial and maritime transit of US-bound illegal drugs. The intelligence and information gathered by these efforts are then used by law enforcement agencies to disrupt or interdict those drugs under the authorities those partner agencies bring to the fight. In my view, DOD also enables partner nation counterdrug efforts by sharing actionable information and intelligence, providing training and equipment, and minor infrastructure support.

*Question.* How would you measure the effectiveness of U.S. and DOD counter-narcotics and counter-illicit trafficking programs?

*Answer.* Traditionally, I understand that the amount of drugs disrupted or interdicted has been the most widely-used metric for counterdrug programs. In my view, this may not be the most effective measurement of success because it only measures the impact to the final product of large transnational criminal organizations and does not measure the impact to the organizations themselves. The efforts to prevent hundreds of tons of drugs from entering the U.S. and harming our citizens should continue but, in my view, stopping the drug shipments is only part of the solution. Ultimate success in this mission will depend on continued partnerships to enable the dismantling of the transnational criminal organizations responsible for the trafficking of drugs and other illegal commodities. If confirmed, I commit to fostering these continued partnerships, and I also believe that SOUTHCOM should consider the effectiveness of U.S. security cooperation programs that build partner capacity to participate in this transregional mission.

*Question.* In your view, what should be the role of the United States in countering the flow of narcotics to other nations in Latin America?

*Answer.* DOD's statutory mission is to detect and monitor the flow of illicit drugs heading to the United States. However, as those illicit drugs make their way to the U.S., they leave in its wake corruption and violence that destabilize our hemisphere and drive migration toward our border. I believe this poses a national security threat, as well as a regional threat and that we should work with our partner nations through security cooperation programs to build their capacity to face this challenge with us.

*Question.* The production and trafficking of particular drugs in the SOUTHCOM AOR – such as cocaine and, to a lesser extent, heroin and synthetic opioids – threatens the health and safety of U.S. citizens, Latin Americans, and regional stability.

What is your understanding of the principal illegal drugs produced and trafficked in the SOUTHCOM AOR?

*Answer.* The Center for Disease Control has released data showing that over 93,000 people died from drug overdoses in the United States in 2020—an increase of almost 30 percent from the previous year. This reflects an increase in deaths from opioids, as well as cocaine. Cocaine is almost exclusively produced in this Hemisphere, with all the world's source countries in South America. There is also a small amount of heroin produced in SOUTHCOM's AOR. My understanding of these sub-

stances is that they—and the criminal networks that create and move them—represent an enduring threat to our citizens and to our partner nations.

*Question.* What is your assessment of the threat posed by the trafficking of heroin into the United States from Mexico, Central and South America?

Answer. Heroin is a highly addictive and dangerous drug. The rising death toll in the United States is destroying families and fracturing communities. Although the majority of heroin entering the United States originates in Mexico, I understand that China has been trafficking precursor chemicals for synthetic opioids through the SOUTHCOM AOR. It is well known that illicit drugs and precursors are the primary source of funding for Transnational Criminal Organizations in the region, which threaten stability and security in the southern approaches to the United States.

*Question.* What is your assessment of the threat posed by the flow of fentanyl and chemical precursors from China and elsewhere in Asia into Mexico and Central America, and from there into the United States?

Answer. I understand that China is the principal source of precursor chemicals used in the production of fentanyl and other synthetic opioids that are killing thousands of Americans every year. The data shows that in 2020, the number of deaths in the U.S. from opioids alone was nearly 70,000. Fentanyl is also being mixed into more commonly used drugs like cocaine, making them exponentially more lethal to users. Accordingly, the threat posed by the flow of precursor chemicals through the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility to the United States is very high.

*Question.* In your view, what more can DOD do to combat this effort, including in cooperation with U.S. Northern Command and with interagency and law enforcement partners?

Answer. Intelligence drives operations, and effective sharing of intelligence across the interagency is vital. SOUTHCOM's coordination with NORTHCOM in this effort is robust and regular. The Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S) joint operating area overlaps the NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM areas of responsibility, which enables the Task Force to act as a natural synchronizer of efforts. JIATF-S also integrates personnel from the law enforcement and intelligence communities, as well as from our partner nations, to integrate efforts across stakeholders. I believe that more can always be done against transnational criminal organizations, but targeting how they do business—including financial flows, logistics and communications will yield more impactful results. If confirmed, I will also look to enable interagency and partner nation efforts to combat the flow of narcotics through the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility into the United States, and increase security cooperation efforts to improve regional interoperability to combat narcotics trafficking.

#### BUILDING PARTNER CAPACITY

*Question.* In the past few years, Congress has provided DOD a number of authorities to build the capacity of partner nations' security forces and institutions.

In your view, what should be our strategic objectives in building the capacities of partner nations in the SOUTHCOM AOR?

Answer. In my view, building partner capacity in the SOUTHCOM Area of Responsibility is a strategic imperative and a long-term approach to regional and global security challenges. By increasing interoperability with partners and integrating whole-of-government efforts, SOUTHCOM can improve domain awareness, enable regional solutions, and expedite threat interdictions. I assess that strengthening defense institutions achieves regional resiliency against the corrosive effects of China, Russia, and Transnational Criminal Organizations.

*Question.* What would be your priorities, if confirmed, for building partner capacity, including institutional capacity, and other security cooperation efforts in the SOUTHCOM AOR?

Answer. I believe the United States must be present and engaged in our shared neighborhood. We cannot expect to remain relevant in our hemisphere if we are not engaged with our regional partners. Partner nations in the SOUTHCOM Area of Responsibility share common objectives, face common threats and frequently have the same desired outcomes. If confirmed, a priority for me would be a focused regional approach to security cooperation that would enable us to identify and respond to shared threats, narrow and constrict capability gaps in the region, and create synergies in the delivery and development of capabilities. If confirmed, I will continue developing partner institutional capacity to reflect responsible, effective, and sustainable defense institutions.

*Question.* In your view, what is the appropriate balance between efforts to build partnership capacity at the tactical and operational level and at the institutional and ministerial-level?

*Answer.* In my view, establishing and building partner nation capacity at the tactical and operational levels works for near-term operations, however, over time there is an invariable erosion of those capabilities without a sustainable institutional infrastructure. Building capacity at the institutional and ministerial levels is foundational to the long-term success of building partner capacity. This is a whole-of-government approach through various efforts, to include engagement with Ministry of Defense Advisors, to ensure SOUTHCOM incorporates institutional capability building in security cooperation efforts.

*Question.* In your view, how should our security cooperation be modified, conditioned, or restricted with countries in which there is significant corruption at the institutional and ministerial level?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I will review the existing authorities periodically to ensure the adequacy of these authorities to enable SOUTHCOM's responsiveness to emergent requirements, and I will recommend any necessary changes to the Secretary of Defense and Congress.

*Question.* In your view, how should SOUTHCOM approach building partner capacity with host nation militaries that have been tasked to take on the role of police and internal security forces?

*Answer.* In my view, SOUTHCOM must continue to cooperate and synchronize efforts and resource expenditures with other U.S. Government institutions that are the lead federal agencies for providing security and policing support to regional partner nations. At the same time, it is important to recognize the times when defense support to civil authorities is necessary and legitimate in cases where the threat exceeds the ability of a nation's public security forces to secure its citizens. In these cases, working closely with the Department of State and Department of Justice, if confirmed, I will emphasize the importance of respect for human rights with my counterparts, and will ensure that human rights training is incorporated into SOUTHCOM's security cooperation program.

#### TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS

*Question.* Transnational criminal organizations are engaged in a diversity of illicit activities, including money laundering, human trafficking illicit financial flows, illegal trade in natural resources and wildlife, and trade in illegal drugs, precursors and weapons. These activities reach not only the entirety of the Western Hemisphere, but increasingly throughout the world.

In your assessment, how has the threat to the United States from transnational criminal organizations, evolved?

*Answer.* It is my understanding that Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) traffic in arms, humans, and drugs, engage in illegal mining, corrupt money laundering, and perpetrate illegal unregulated and unreported fishing—estimated at billions of dollars a year. These organizations capitalize on the instability that drives illegal migration, fuels violence, and causes great security concerns throughout the region. TCOs are dynamic and were able to continue and, in some cases, increase their trafficking activities despite the global pandemic, ultimately undermining security and prosperity for our partners in the region.

*Question.* In your view, what kind of additional support, if any, should DOD—and SOUTHCOM in particular—provide to U.S. law enforcement to counter and degrade these transnational criminal organizations?

*Answer.* Transnational criminal organizations are a national threat that directly impacts the security of our citizens. In my view, DOD should continue to conduct detection and monitoring of the transit of illegal drugs, support interdiction operations, and build the capacity of partner nation defense and security forces through training, equipping, and infrastructure support. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly within DOD and across the U.S. Government to enable those operations that combat transnational threats.

*Question.* What additional resources, if any, do you believe SOUTHCOM requires to more effectively carry out its mission in countering transnational criminal organizations?

*Answer.* It is my understanding that SOUTHCOM receives less than one percent of the Department's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance allocation each year. Intelligence is critical to success in this region. A small investment in this region provides an enhanced return on the investment toward stability and our national security. It is also critical that SOUTHCOM remains present and engaged. It is my understanding that for the first time SOUTHCOM is employing Security Force Assistance Teams to provide training and expert exchanges to the Colombian, Honduran, and Panamanian forces. I believe that efforts like these make a measur-

able impact for a relatively small investment, and pays significant dividends when it comes to building trust and interoperability in the region.

#### NORTHERN TRIANGLE

*Question.* In April, the Biden Administration announced a \$4 billion plan to address the causes of migration in the Northern Triangle countries of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. These causes include corruption, anti-democratic governance, criminal violence, environmental devastation from two hurricanes and the coronavirus pandemic.

What is your understanding of the objectives and priorities of the Administration's plan for the Northern Triangle countries?

*Answer.* I understand the Administration's plan in the Northern Triangle is a long-term effort designed to address the root causes of some of the most significant challenges causing irregular migration, corruption, and the looming humanitarian crisis in the area. It is my understanding that President Biden has pledged \$4 billion in additional assistance to the region to focus on these root causes.

*Question.* What is your understanding of how SOUTHCOM's activities will implement or complement the plan for the region?

*Answer.* As I understand them currently, SOUTHCOM's ongoing activities and operations complement whole-of-government efforts in the region. Security cooperation and humanitarian assistance activities in the Northern Triangle help achieve improvements in regional security and health environments, help reduce irregular migration, and mitigate drivers of instability. SOUTHCOM's human rights initiative improves host nation security forces' respect for fundamental human rights. It also promotes better governance, respect for the rule of law, and increased transparency and anti-corruption goals with military leadership. All of these efforts strengthen partner capacity, degrade the transnational criminal organization threat networks, and advance and support U.S. national interests in the region.

*Question.* In your view, what is the impact of corruption among government and military leaders in the Northern Triangle countries on the stability and security of the region?

*Answer.* Corruption at any level weakens public institutions which negatively affects stability and security. DOD and SOUTHCOM serve as an example for other governments and military leaders to follow, not only for honesty and integrity, but also respect for human rights and adherence to the rule of law.

*Question.* What do you believe is the appropriate role, if any, of SOUTHCOM in supporting civilian-led stabilization assistance activities in the region?

*Answer.* It is my understanding that SOUTHCOM has a lot to offer in support of civil activities in the Northern Triangle. Many of SOUTHCOM's activities are in support of a civilian lead federal agency, and I am familiar with this concept from my time as the Commander of U.S. Army North. I believe SOUTHCOM will continue to contribute to solutions by supporting our partners, building regional resiliency, and increasing interoperability.

#### MEXICO AND COOPERATION WITH U.S. NORTHERN COMMAND (NORTHCOM)

*Question.* Much of the illegal narcotics supply flowing into Mexico comes from the SOUTHCOM AOR. While Mexico is in the NORTHCOM AOR, the rest of Latin America is in the SOUTHCOM AOR.

In your view, how should SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM work together to ensure a fully coordinated effort with respect to illegal narcotics flowing into Mexico and other security challenges?

*Answer.* In my view, SOUTHCOM has been effective against illegal narcotics entering the U.S. through air and maritime avenues of the Caribbean and Pacific. However, I assess that a missing element is the land domain. Working with NORTHCOM in support of the US law enforcement agencies to synchronize and integrate the joint, interagency, and multinational efforts in this hemisphere will begin to close this gap. Working in concert with partner nation LEAs and militaries will require the continuous coordination and integration that should exist in the interagency and between the Combatant Commands.

#### COLOMBIA

*Question.* U.S. assistance and security cooperation programs operating through Plan Colombia contributed to enabling the Colombian government to engage in an intensive peace and reconciliation process with members of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and other paramilitary forces. Now implementation of the peace accord appears at risk as violence escalates.

What is your assessment of the current security situation in Colombia?

*Answer.* I assess that, although Colombia and the FARC reached a formal peace agreement in 2016, Colombia continues to face security challenges from Transnational Criminal Organizations, FARC dissidents, and the designated terrorist organization ELN. The current crisis in Venezuela has allowed these actors freedom of movement and resulted in over one million refugees straining Colombia's government services. If confirmed, I will work with our willing and able Colombian partners to support security and humanitarian efforts that will enable them to defeat COVID, provide security for their people, effectively fight transnational criminal organizations, and withstand the pressures of mass migration.

*Question.* How should U.S. security cooperation programs and activities be adjusted in response to the situation on the ground in Colombia?

*Answer.* Like all U.S. security cooperation programs, consistent engagement and support is important to the success of our security efforts and our strong partnerships; Colombia is no exception. If confirmed, I will make a full assessment of the situation on the ground in Colombia. Colombia is one of our strongest partners in the region, and in my view we should continue our support.

*Question.* How would you approach the issue of respect for human rights in the Colombian military?

*Answer.* It is my understanding that promoting respect for human rights has been a top priority for SOUTHCOM for over two decades. SOUTHCOM integrates human rights across its operations and activities, including in its engagement and assistance programs with its partners. If confirmed, I will continue SOUTHCOM's emphasis on human rights in all forms of security assistance.

*Question.* Colombia has demonstrated a willingness to become more involved internationally, to include increased engagements with regional partners. Colombia has also deployed forces as part of overseas peacekeeping missions.

How should SOUTHCOM assist Colombia in its efforts to assume a greater role as a security provider, both regionally and internationally?

*Answer.* I believe persistent support of Colombia is critical to its continued efforts to provide both regional and international security. Colombia has become a key exporter of security to the region, and the Colombian military now trains—through the U.S. Colombia Action Plan and other programs—our partner militaries throughout the region. Additionally, Colombia's status as NATO's only Global Partner in Latin America demonstrates its commitment to the shared values of the alliance, as well as its political and security leadership role in the region. The United States' encouragement and support of such leadership provides a valuable contribution to Colombia's efforts—and those of the United States—to provide both regional and international security.

#### VENEZUELA

*Question.* Venezuela continues to suffer a deep political and economic crisis under President Maduro's authoritarian regime. As a result, Venezuela's dysfunction threatens stability throughout the region.

What is your assessment of the impact of Venezuela's deteriorating political and economic situation on regional security in the SOUTHCOM AOR?

*Answer.* In my view, the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela is broadly impacting the security and stability of the region. Driven by food insecurity and repression, millions of Venezuelans have sought refuge in neighboring countries, straining limited healthcare, security and economic resources.

*Question.* What is your understanding of U.S. policy towards Venezuela and DOD's role in carrying out that policy?

*Answer.* The United States recognizes Juan Guaido as the interim President of Venezuela. The U.S. also supports the Venezuelan people and their right to basic civil liberties. DOD's role would be limited in support of a broader U.S. diplomatic effort for a peaceful transition to democracy.

*Question.* What is your view of President Maduro's intentions in the region?

*Answer.* I believe the Maduro regime looks to consolidate authority and subvert regional democracies. The regime also seeks to undermine the United States and like-minded partners in the region through extensive disinformation and misinformation campaigns.

*Question.* How would you assess Venezuelan relations with China, Cuba, Iran, and Russia vis-&-vis the national interests of the United States?

*Answer.* In my view, Venezuela offers a permissive environment for countries that seek to undermine the United States. The Maduro regime relies on China, Russia, Cuba, and Iran to help control its narrative and its population, provide security assistance, and evade sanctions. China offers Venezuela economic and political support. The Russian military supports the Venezuelan military with training and in-

telligence support. Cuba helps Maduro stay in power by advising on tactics to control its population. Iran and Venezuela support each other in evading sanctions.

*Question.* What is your understanding of the extent to which Venezuelan government or military forces are involved in the drug trade?

*Answer.* It is my understanding that senior members of the Venezuelan government have been sanctioned by the Department of Treasury for their involvement in illicit activity, to include the drug trade.

#### CUBA

*Question.* What is your assessment of Cuba's impact on regional security in the SOUTHCOM AOR?

*Answer.* In my assessment, Cuba has had a significant impact on security in the region. For decades, the authoritarian dictatorship in Cuba has worked to destabilize the region, undermine U.S. authority, and support other like-minded regimes in the SOUTHCOM AOR, to include the Maduro regime in Venezuela. I understand that Cuba supports these other authoritarian governments with intelligence and security support, and provides as the leaders of these governments with advice on how to maintain power over their populations.

*Question.* What is your understanding of U.S. policy towards Cuba and DOD's role in carrying out that policy?

*Answer.* The White House has recently stated that its U.S. policy toward Cuba is under review. I understand that U.S. law prohibits security assistance to Cuba and current policy prevents military-to-military engagement, including security cooperation activities. While the U.S. Coast Guard does maintain minimal communication with its Cuban counterparts on issues like trafficking and migration, I am aware that the Department of Defense's only contact with the Cuban military is between the Commander of the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay and the local Cuban military commander. However, I understand that this engagement is limited to local matters.

#### DETAINEE MATTERS

*Question.* What role do you expect to play, if confirmed, in regard to the operation, management, and oversight of the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and the policies applicable to the facility's detainee population?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I expect that my role as the SOUTHCOM Commander will be to oversee the safe, humane, and legal detention operations, to include detainee healthcare delivery at Joint Task Force Guantanamo.

*Question.* Do you support the standards for detainee treatment specified in the revised Army Field Manual on Interrogations, FM 2-22.3, issued in September 2006, and in DOD Directive 2310.01E, The Department of Defense Detainee Program, dated August 19, 2014, and required by section 1045 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 (Public Law 114-92)?

*Answer.* Yes.

*Question.* In your view, how will President Biden's ordered withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan affect the Department's detention of unlawful enemy combatants at Guantanamo?

*Answer.* The decision to withdraw U.S. Forces from Afghanistan is a national strategic-level decision, as is the policy related to the detention of unlawful enemy combatants. Joint Task Force Guantanamo executes detention operations in accordance with the law and the policy of the President and the Secretary of Defense. If confirmed, Joint Task Force Guantanamo will continue to do so with my oversight and supervision.

*Question.* In your view, how has the establishment of a Chief Medical Officer to oversee the provision of medical care to individuals detained at Guantanamo affected the standard of medical care provided to such detainees?

*Answer.* I understand that there is a Chief Medical Officer (CMO) in place on the island who has an oversight role of the medical care being provided to the individuals detained at Guantanamo Bay. The CMO position is managed by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs and the staff at Guantanamo Bay work closely with the CMO on these medical issues. In my view, this type of conduit is essential to ensure smooth medical policy implementation.

*Question.* It is the committee's understanding that as many as 9 of the 40 detainees still at GTMO have been designated for transfer.

What role would you expect to play, if confirmed, in the Periodic Review Board process applicable to detainees at Guantanamo?

*Answer.* As I understand, the Commander of SOUTHCOM does not have a direct role in the Periodic Review Board, but SOUTHCOM currently supports the Periodic

Review Board process with medical summaries and intelligence reports. If confirmed, I intend to ensure this support continues, providing oversight and supervision of the support.

*Question.* What role would you expect to play, if confirmed, in the detainee transfer process?

*Answer.* Based on my current understanding, SOUTHCOM provides medical and intelligence reports to the interagency team responsible for making recommendations to the Secretary of Defense in the detainee transfer process. Additionally, SOUTHCOM works across multiple commands to execute detainee transfers if and when they are directed. If confirmed, I expect to provide this same level of support to the detainee transfer process and will provide oversight and supervision of this support.

#### MILITARY COMMISSIONS

*Question.* In your view, do military commissions constituted pursuant to the Military Commissions Act of 2009 provide an effective forum for addressing the crimes committed by detainees at Guantanamo Bay?

*Answer.* I believe this is a policy question that is best answered by the Department of Defense and the Administration. If confirmed, I will be committed to overseeing the safe, humane, and legal detention operations, to include detainee healthcare delivery at Joint Task Force Guantanamo as long as SOUTHCOM is directed to do so.

*Question.* What role would you expect to play, if confirmed, in the preparation for and conduct of trials by Military Commission of detainees at Guantanamo?

*Answer.* I understand that SOUTHCOM and Joint Task Force Guantanamo are responsible for providing security and limited logistical support to the Office of Military Commissions at Guantanamo Bay. If confirmed, I expect SOUTHCOM to provide the same support.

#### SOUTHCOM FORCE REQUIREMENTS

*Question.* SOUTHCOM does not have assigned forces and, as a result, is required to compete for forces within the global request for forces process.

Given the Department's shift to long-term strategic competition with near-peer rivals will you be able to ensure, if confirmed, that you are able to secure the necessary personnel to carry out SOUTHCOM's partnering and engagement missions within the AOR?

*Answer.* I believe the Southern Command Area of Responsibility is of tremendous strategic importance. This region contains the southern approaches to the homeland, and our competitors are expanding their presence and influence at a rapid rate. From my perspective, communication is key to ensuring that a Combatant Command has the forces necessary to execute its mission. If confirmed, I will advocate for the missions that will yield the greatest improvement to security and stability in the region, and for the resources (including personnel) to succeed in those missions. Further, I will ensure that SOUTHCOM uses all forces and resources to their fullest effect.

*Question.* If not, how would you assess the risk to U.S. strategic interests in the region?

*Answer.* If confirmed, managing risk is a key component of command, and risk management informs decisions at every echelon. Strategic risk to our interests in the region will be a foundational element in my best military advice to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Secretary of Defense.

#### WESTERN HEMISPHERE INSTITUTE FOR SECURITY COOPERATION

*Question.* The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), which replaced the School of the Americas in 2001, has the mission of contributing to theater cooperation activities through the education and training of students in the Western Hemisphere from Canada to Chile.

What is the relationship between SOUTHCOM and WHINSEC?

*Answer.* In my view, professional military education and training is one of the most important tools our Nation has, not just for building the technical capacity of partner nation militaries, but for building strong relationships with the future leaders of those militaries. WHINSEC provides education and training grounded in democratic values, including respect for human rights and the rule of law. WHINSEC focuses on partner nations from the Western Hemisphere, and its courses directly support the security cooperation plans of both NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM. I understand that the SOUTHCOM Commander has a permanent position on the WHINSEC Board of Visitors, participating in curriculum selection and

periodic reviews to ensure the institute is appropriately supporting the security cooperation goals of the Command.

*Question.* In your view, does WHINSEC promote the national security interests of the United States in the Western Hemisphere?

Answer. Based on WHINSEC's charter and the transparency with which it conducts its instruction, I believe that WHINSEC promotes U.S. national security interests in the Western Hemisphere. It does so, first, by working closely with both NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM to maintain alignment with their theater security cooperation plans. Additionally, WHINSEC increases interoperability of regional partners to advance regional security. Finally, it instills respect for human rights, the rule of law, due process, civilian control of the military, and the role of the military in a democratic society.

*Question.* In your view, what more – if anything – does WHINSEC need to do to emphasize human rights in its curriculum and contribute to institutional capacity building in the region?

Answer. I am aware that WHINSEC has a Human Rights Center that provides human rights training to all its students and helps develop human rights capabilities in partner nation militaries and Ministries of Defense. If confirmed, I will actively participate in the WHINSEC Board of Visitors, including studying more closely the current curriculum and making any recommendations that I believe would strengthen its education and training program.

*Question.* Will you attend the regularly scheduled WHINSEC Board of Visitors meetings?

Answer. Yes.

#### HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

*Question.* What should be the role for the U.S. military in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the SOUTHCOM AOR?

Answer. As specified in the Unified Command Plan, Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief is one of SOUTHCOM's primary missions. The SOUTHCOM Area of Responsibility experiences a broad range of natural disasters every year, to include hurricanes, earthquakes, and volcano eruptions. The DOD has unique capabilities to save lives immediately following these disasters. Beyond immediate life-saving, the military is in support of the lead federal agency in a disaster response, and can deliver unique military capabilities (like air lift) that are critical in these operations.

*Question.* What role should SOUTHCOM play in building the capabilities of foreign military and security forces to conduct humanitarian response and disaster risk reduction?

Answer. I understand that many of the nations in the SOUTHCOM Area of Responsibility are very willing partners who, with just a little support, can step up to respond to either their own or a regional humanitarian crisis. SOUTHCOM provides training on response and risk reduction through the exercise program, subject matter expert exchanges, and key leader engagements. In my view, SOUTHCOM's regular engagements with partners are critical to building their capabilities, as well as strengthening our partnerships and interoperability, which are key to success in any disaster or other humanitarian response.

*Question.* Are the resources and authorities necessary to fulfill this role currently available to the SOUTHCOM Commander? If not, what additional resources or authorities are necessary, in your view?

Answer. I am aware of the recent humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations SOUTHCOM has conducted in response to Hurricanes Eta and Iota. If confirmed, I will fully assess the resources and authorities available to the command in greater detail, and I will make any recommendations on additional requirements or authorities to the Secretary of Defense.

#### SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

*Question.* The Department of Defense has developed comprehensive policies and procedures to improve the prevention of and response to incidents of sexual assaults, including providing appropriate resources and care for victims of sexual assault.

What is your view of the steps taken to prevent and respond to sexual assaults in SOUTHCOM, including assaults by and against U.S. civilian and contractor personnel?

Answer. I have not conducted a full assessment of SOUTHCOM's procedures at this time, but if confirmed, I will undertake a thorough review of SOUTHCOM's sexual assault prevention and response efforts. I will also ensure that review covers

not only service members, but also assaults by and against U.S. civilian and contractor personnel.

*Question.* What is your view of the adequacy of SOUTHCOM policies and procedures to protect victims of sexual assault from retaliation for reporting the assault?

Answer. There is no place in the Armed Forces for retaliation against individuals who report sexual assault and retaliation is an offense under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Such retaliation not only has the potential to cause serious harm to the lives and careers of victims, but it also undermines readiness and weakens our culture of dignity and respect. At this point, I do not have a view of the adequacy of SOUTHCOM's policies and procedures to protect from retaliation those who report sexual assault, but if confirmed, I will conduct a thorough review of those policies to ensure that SOUTHCOM has effective measures in place.

*Question.* What is your view of the adequacy of the training and resources in place in SOUTHCOM to investigate and respond to allegations of sexual assault?

Answer. Effective investigation of sexual assault allegations is the cornerstone of accountability for perpetrators. Response to those offenses, including care and ongoing support, is the cornerstone of healing for victims. If confirmed, I will immediately review and evaluate the adequacy of training and resources in place at SOUTHCOM to investigate and respond to allegations of sexual assault.

*Question.* What is your view of the willingness and ability of military leaders to hold service members accountable for sexual misconduct?

Answer. In my experience, military leaders are both willing and able to hold service members appropriately accountable for sexual misconduct. As a current General Court-Martial Convening Authority, I have been diligent in carrying out my responsibilities under the law, holding service members appropriately accountable for sexual misconduct, with the advice of my legal advisor, based on the facts of the individual case, and the applicable law, policy, and regulation. I have also personally observed the same diligence among other commanders at all levels in the chain of command. In my exercise of this authority, I feel neither outside pressure nor undue or unlawful influence.

*Question.* What is your understanding of the adequacy of the resources and programs in SOUTHCOM to provide victims of sexual assault the medical, psychological, and legal help they need?

Answer. I have not yet had the opportunity to fully assess the adequacy of SOUTHCOM's resources and programs, particularly those related to sexual assault. If confirmed, however, I will carefully assess the adequacy of the resources and programs in SOUTHCOM to provide victims of sexual assault the medical, psychological, and legal help they need.

*Question.* What is your view about the role of the chain of command in providing necessary support to the victims of sexual assault?

Answer. I absolutely agree with the Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military on the role of the chain of command in supporting victims of sexual assault. Specifically, as the report stated, "In the military, no one is more consequential to the wellbeing and recovery of survivors of sexual assault and sexual harassment than their commanders. Commanders who grasp the seriousness of these crimes and are equipped to respond can make a measurable difference in survivors' lives."

My charter for the Joint Base San Antonio – Fort Sam Houston Sexual Assault Review Board, which I chair, includes three separate and mutually supporting purposes: (1) ensure victim safety; (2) facilitate victim access to restorative services; and (3) direct response system coordination and appropriate accountability. To effect these ends, I continuously emphasize commander involvement and accountability in providing ongoing support to sexual assault victims in their formations. If confirmed, I will continue to hold commanders and leaders appropriately accountable for the support they provide sexual assault victims in their formations.

*Question.* What is your view about the role of the chain of command in changing the military culture in which these sexual assaults have occurred?

Answer. Under DoD policy (DoD Directive 6495.01), sexual assault awareness and prevention programs are commanders' programs, required to be established by, and supported by, all commanders. Accordingly, the chain of command's role in the changing of the military culture in which sexual assaults have occurred is absolutely fundamental. This is a leadership issue and requires engaged leadership. Long-standing Department research finds that there is a strong correlation between unit sexual harassment rates and unit sexual assault rates. It is incumbent upon commanders and leaders at all levels to discourage harmful behaviors and ensure workplaces that value dignity, respect, and inclusion. This means every level of leadership is responsible for ensuring good order and discipline and holding perpetrators appropriately accountable for their actions. Commanders must also ensure that

service members under their command have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and the consequences for misconduct.

*Question.* What is your assessment of the potential impact, if any, of proposals to remove disposition authority from military commanders over felony-level violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, including sexual assault?

*Answer.* Ensuring that sexual assault perpetrators are held appropriately accountable is essential in combatting the scourge of sexual assault. The Independent Review Commission on Sexual Assault in the Military recommended that an independent prosecution authority, rather than military commanders, should decide whether to pursue criminal charges in sexual assault and related cases. Secretary Austin has endorsed this recommendation and has committed to working with Congress to effect the legislative change necessary to implement it. I fully support the Secretary's position and his efforts. However, I cannot speculate on how such a system might be constructed or the potential effects. If confirmed, I will provide my best insight as a commander to the Secretary regarding changes to the UCMJ.

*Question.* Do you consider the current sexual assault policies and procedures, particularly those on restricted reporting, to be effective?

*Answer.* In my experience, I have found current sexual assault policies and procedures, including those on restricted reporting, to be effective. I am aware, however, of instances where restricted reports became unrestricted—inadvertently, but against the victims' wishes—causing additional and unnecessary trauma to the victims who expected their reports to remain confidential. I would support strengthening the restricted reporting process and giving victims more agency over their reporting process.

*Question.* If confirmed, what actions will you take to reassess current policies, procedures, and programs and to ensure senior level direction and oversight of efforts to prevent and respond to sexual assaults in SOUTHCOM?

*Answer.* If confirmed, I will undertake a thorough review to, first, ensure we are in full compliance with the Secretary of Defense's directives to combatant commanders concerning sexual assault prevention and response and, second, to determine the effectiveness of current policies, procedures, and programs. This review will be interdisciplinary, consisting of both trained SHARP personnel and other appropriate members of my staff, and it will identify and develop measures of performance and measures of effectiveness, with the ultimate goals of reducing the percentage of personnel sexually assaulted each year and increasing the percentage of sexual assault victims who file unrestricted reports. Recognizing that, if confirmed, I will be responsible for direction and oversight of these policies, procedures, and programs, I will rely on this review to determine the areas that require immediate focus, and identify the best way to ensure ongoing senior-level direction and oversight.

*Question.* What methods for monitoring overall trends and gauging the sufficiency of component commanders' efforts in preventing and responding to incidents of sexual assault do you consider appropriate and intend to implement as SOUTHCOM Commander?

*Answer.* In my experience, receiving periodic briefings on key measures of performance and effectiveness, and receiving subordinate commander feedback on trends and the effectiveness of key measures, are two important ways to monitor commanders' efforts. If confirmed, I will assess the methods currently in place for monitoring overall trends and gauging the sufficiency of component commanders' efforts in preventing and responding to incidents of sexual assault.

#### RELATIONS WITH CONGRESS

*Question.* If confirmed, what actions would you take to sustain a productive and mutually beneficial relationship between SOUTHCOM and Congress, and in particular the congressional defense committees?

*Answer.* Ensuring a productive and mutually beneficial relationship between SOUTHCOM and Congress will be a priority for me if I am confirmed. As a former Chief of Legislative Liaison for the Army, I have been fortunate to work directly with Congress in my career, and I have seen firsthand the value of an open and collaborative relationship between Congress and the Department of Defense. I understand that SOUTHCOM has developed strong relationships with Congress, and in particular, with the defense oversight committees. I understand that strong Congressional support has been key to ensuring that SOUTHCOM has the resources and authorities necessary to carry out its responsibilities in the region. If confirmed, I intend to empower my team to continue the collaborative activities that have led to such a productive and mutually beneficial relationship, and I will lead by example through regular personal engagement and communication with Congress.

## CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT

*Question.* In order to exercise its legislative and oversight responsibilities, it is important that this Committee and other appropriate committees of Congress are able to receive testimony, briefings, reports, records (including documents and electronic communications) and other information from the Department.

Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, and on request, to appear and testify before this committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate committees of Congress? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Answer. Yes.

*Question.* Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to provide this committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate committees of Congress, and their respective staffs such witnesses and briefers, briefings, reports, records (including documents and electronic communications), and other information as may be requested of you, and to do so in a timely manner? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Answer. Yes.

*Question.* Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to consult with this committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate committees of Congress, and their respective staffs, regarding your basis for any delay or denial in providing testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information requested of you? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Answer. Yes.

*Question.* Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to keep this committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate committees of Congress, and their respective staffs apprised of new information that materially impacts the accuracy of testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information you or your organization previously provided? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Answer. Yes.

*Question.* Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, and on request, to provide this committee and its subcommittees with records and other information within their oversight jurisdiction, even absent a formal Committee request? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Answer. Yes.

*Question.* Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to respond timely to letters to, and/or inquiries and other requests of you or your organization from individual Senators who are members of this committee? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Answer. Yes.

*Question.* Do you agree, without qualification, if confirmed, to ensure that you and other members of your organization protect from retaliation any military member, federal employee, or contractor employee who testifies before, or communicates with this committee, its subcommittees, and any other appropriate committee of Congress? Please answer with a simple yes or no.

Answer. Yes.

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[Questions for the record with answers supplied follow:]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR MAZIE K. HIRONO

QUESTIONS RELATED TO SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

1. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, as part of my responsibility as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and to ensure the fitness of nominees for appointment to senior positions within the Department of Defense I will be asking the same two questions that I ask nominees to all of the committees on which I serve. Since you became a legal adult, have you ever made unwanted requests for sexual favors, or committed any verbal or physical harassment or assault of a sexual nature?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. No.

2. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, have you ever faced discipline, or entered into a settlement related to this kind of conduct?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. No.

## MALIGN INFLUENCE IN THE U.S. SOUTHERN COMMAND REGION FROM CHINA AND RUSSIA

3. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, over the last decade, both China and Russia have significantly increased their presence and influence in Latin and South America via a combined economic and military strategy to bolster authoritarian regimes, undermine our traditional allies, and gain a foothold in the region. How do you view the threat posed by China and Russia in the region?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. China and Russia, both strategic competitors, seek to undermine the United States and gain power and influence in Latin America and the Caribbean. They actively court strategically important U.S. partners in this region, while supporting authoritarian regimes like those in Cuba and Venezuela. China actively works to gain global influence including in the SOUTHCOM AOR. China aggressively expands its dominating economic presence in the hemisphere through its Belt and Road Initiative and by using predatory and corrupt economic practices and disingenuous vaccine diplomacy. China also gifts equipment, supplies, and training to militaries in the region to gain leverage over decision makers. Russia employs a full range of diplomatic, intelligence, and informational tools to influence public attitudes and decision makers in the region. Russia employs active disinformation tactics across social and broadcast media to sow doubts about U.S. intentions and undercut our efforts to build strong partnerships.

4. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, what steps do you plan to take, if confirmed, to combat China and Russia's growing influence?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. In my view, I believe that the best way to counter China and Russia's nefarious activities is to strengthen our partnerships throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. If confirmed, I will carry on SOUTHCOM's robust efforts to build partner nation capacity, interoperability, and resilience to external threats and influence. This includes critical programs like exercises, professional military education and International Military Education and Training (IMET), subject matter expert exchanges, and Section 333 training and equipment.

## GLOBAL FORCE POSTURE REVIEW

5. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, the new Administration is currently conducting a global military force posture review aimed at tying our national strategy focused on great power competition to defense policy and military basing decisions. If confirmed, what advice do you plan to provide Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and the Department related to the U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) area of responsibility (AOR)?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. If confirmed, I will conduct a thorough review of the SOUTHCOM mission requirements and the resourcing levels available to the command to meet those mission requirements. Once complete, I will provide my best military advice to the Secretary of Defense on what I view as the appropriate level of presence and capability in the SOUTHCOM AOR. As part of my assessment, I would consider the full spectrum of presence, which includes not only access and basing, but also levels of rotational forces that conduct training, exercises, and security cooperation activities.

## COUNTER-DRUG OPERATIONS

6. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, the Department of Defense (DOD) serves as the single lead agency for the detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime foreign shipments of drugs flowing into the United States. If confirmed, what steps will you take to more efficiently and effectively interdict the flow of drugs coming into the country from the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. The detection and monitoring of drug trafficking in SOUTHCOM's AOR is coordinated primarily out of Joint Interagency Task Force-South (JIATF-S), a multiagency, multinational "team of teams" effort that provides the intelligence backbone for effective interdiction. ISR is central to this detection and monitoring effort, which in turn drives drug seizures. One step would be to work diligently to gain additional ISR for this mission set and this region, which receives approximately 1 percent of DOD ISR. While intelligence is critical to success, consistent presence is needed in order to deter and interdict. If confirmed, I would advocate for adequate sourcing of U.S. air and maritime platforms to help bolster our presence and ability to respond to identified threats. Due to SOUTHCOM's sustained and effective partnerships and security cooperation relationships with partner nations, over half of interdictions were actively assisted or executed by partner nations. This is a valuable force multiplier, widening coverage

and expanding the number of capable assets and personnel dedicated to stopping these deadly substances. If confirmed, I would continue these partnerships to further grow our interdiction capabilities in the region.

7. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, in an answer to advance policy questions on this subject, you stated that “stopping the drug shipments is only part of the solution . . . ultimate success in this mission will depend on continued partnerships to enable the dismantling of the transnational criminal organizations responsible for the trafficking of drugs.” How would you go about achieving this objective with partners in the region?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. ADM Faller has mentioned that we cannot interdict our way out of this problem, and I agree that stopping drugs alone does not strike at the centers of gravity of the Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs) nor is it enough to lead to their dismantling. In order to achieve this, SOUTHCOM is employing 21st century tools such as artificial intelligence and machine learning that can be used to analyze and strike at critical nodes of these TCOs. In my view, these networks are by definition transnational, and partnerships with other affected countries—in information sharing, security cooperation, and other efforts—are vital to sustained success.

MASS MIGRATION FROM THE NORTHERN TRIANGLE COUNTRIES OF GUATEMALA,  
HONDURAS, AND EL SALVADOR

8. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, the Biden administration recently unveiled a strategy to address the root causes of mass migration from the Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador—including \$4 billion in aid over 4 years to address this difficult issue. How do you envision SOUTHCOM contributing to this whole of government approach?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. SOUTHCOM’s ongoing activities and operations complement the whole of government efforts in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Security cooperation and humanitarian assistance activities in the Northern Triangle aim to improve regional security and stability to minimize root causes that drive illegal migration from these countries, such as violence from transnational criminal organizations. In my view, SOUTHCOM also strives to build institutional capacity and improve the professionalism of the security forces in the region by promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law, increased transparency and anti-corruption efforts, and integration of gender perspectives. These efforts advance and support U.S. national interests in the region.

9. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, how can SOUTHCOM better coordinate with interagency partners to counter transnational criminal organizations?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. It is my understanding that SOUTHCOM has many longstanding relationships with interagency, as well as international partners in their collective efforts to counter transnational criminal organizations. This mission requires integrated deterrence of intelligence, law enforcement, military, and international partners and Allies. In my view, as a government we must identify and eliminate seams and barriers to sharing information at the speed of relevance in order to compete with an enemy that is well funded and has no concern for laws and international order.

ASSASSINATION OF HAITI’S PRESIDENT

10. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, last month, Haiti’s President, Jovenel Moise, was assassinated—while the investigation is still ongoing, several of the dozens arrested so far are former Columbian military members now working for private security firms—seven of whom received U.S. military training in the past. While military training with partner nations in the region is vitally important, what steps will you take if confirmed to ensure appropriate oversight mechanisms are in place for these important programs?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Military training and education are vital to building our partners’ capabilities and professionalism. There are many oversight mechanisms in place to guard against these types of incidents and to ensure that students of U.S. training are vetted individuals. All international military students attending courses at U.S. DoD schools or participating in training or education events provided by DoD units must undergo vetting under Leahy law. All education courses and training must include human rights blocks of instruction as part of their curriculum. To guarantee transparency, all military training must be reported annually to Congress in the Foreign Military Training Report (FMTR) and all train-

ing records are maintained electronically and physically. In response to the tragic events in Pensacola, DoD has also instituted a new vetting requirement for international students and their adult family members that reviews biographic information and biometric data before they report to any school in the U.S. If confirmed, SOUTHCOM will be uncompromising in adhering to all of these processes.

11. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, the security situation in Haiti has been fragile for years, even before the President's assassination—how can SOUTHCOM support the State Department and other interagency partners to aid the Haitian people and the interim government?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. It is my understanding that the Department of Defense is in support of the Department of State regarding the situation in Haiti, and SOUTHCOM stands ready to respond to requests for assistance with capabilities including humanitarian aid and logistics support.

#### PROTESTS IN CUBA

12. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, since July 11th, the Cuban people have held a series of protests against the Cuban Government and the ruling Communist Party over food and medicine shortages and the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. How do you view this issue?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. In my assessment, Cuba's authoritarian regime remains unable to provide for the basic needs of its people, to include essential food and medicine. The COVID pandemic has clearly exacerbated the regime's previous failings. Social media helped enable these protests and led to their large size. In response, the authoritarian government cut off access to the internet, denying the protestors freedom to communicate. If confirmed, I will ensure SOUTHCOM is in support of a whole of government approach to address the current challenges in Cuba.

13. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, what steps can DOD take alongside the Departments of State and Treasury to support the Cuban people's right to engage in peaceful protests?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. I understand that security assistance to Cuba, and military-to-military engagement, including security cooperation activities is prohibited. If confirmed, I will ensure that SOUTHCOM is postured to support a whole of government approach.

#### INCREASING THE NUMBER OF WOMEN AND MINORITIES IN THE SENIOR RANKS OF THE MILITARY

14. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, if confirmed, you would only be the second woman ever to lead a military combatant command, a truly historic achievement. One of the areas I'm particularly interested in is making sure the Active Duty Force is providing a level playing field to ensure women and minorities have the same opportunities to assume senior leadership positions. How do you view this issue?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. It is well documented that diverse organizations perform the best when solving complex and complicated problems. While not perfect, the military continues to make progress in diversity, equity, and inclusion. In my view, I agree that it is critical that the military provide equal access to opportunities to ensure that all service members are competing as effectively as possible.

15. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, what steps do you think DOD can take to increase gender and racial diversity in the senior military ranks?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. In my assessment, there are two broad areas where the Department of Defense can assess and address in order to increase diversity in the senior military ranks. The first is in the consistent mentorship and talent management of our subordinates. The military requires engaged leadership that seeks diversity on our teams and mentors diverse groups of officers and enlisted in the Joint Force. The second area is more structural in nature, but would ensure that there are opportunities available for a 21st century workforce that includes a growing number of dual military, dual income, and single parent households. We should also evaluate and adapt the qualifications and requirements for positions and opportunities that are seen as developmental and prerequisite for senior leader service.

DEMAND FOR INTELLIGENCE, SURVEILLANCE, AND RECONNAISSANCE ASSETS IN THE  
REGION FOLLOWING THE U.S. PULLOUT FROM AFGHANISTAN

16. Senator HIRONO. Lieutenant General Richardson, as the United States completes its troop pullout in Afghanistan, senior administration officials have indicated the United States will need to rely on more over the horizon intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and kinetic assets to support any future operations in that country. How do you assess this additional demand for over the horizon ISR assets in Afghanistan affecting the availability of ISR assets in the SOUTHCOM AOR, especially given the difficulty in recent years SOUTHCOM has had in meeting the ISR demand signal?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Intelligence is critical to success in the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility. It is my understanding that SOUTHCOM currently receives less than one percent of the Department's ISR allocation. If confirmed, I will continue to advocate to the Secretary of Defense for the resources required to accomplish SOUTHCOM's mission—including ISR assets.

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QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR MICHAEL ROUNDS

CHINESE INFLUENCE IN LATIN AMERICA

17. Senator ROUNDS. Lieutenant General Richardson, I recognize that we were a little short on time during the hearing on Tuesday, so I want to provide you with the chance to fill in more of the details on my previous question pertaining to Chinese influence in Latin America.

During the hearing, you suggested that you share my concern about China's growing influence in Latin America. You also mentioned some of our security cooperation initiatives to combat Chinese influence, but I would appreciate more detail on how these initiatives help limit Chinese influence. Most importantly, what are additional resources this committee can help provide SOUTHCOM to better address the threat of Chinese influence in Latin America?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. In my view, effectively competing against Chinese influence in the SOUTHCOM region involves real, continuous presence and strong, collaborative relationships. Security cooperation and Institutional Capacity Building initiatives including multilateral exercises, Section 333 Training and Equipment programs, and IMET—International Military Education and Training—strengthen our partnerships, build trust, and teach rule of law and human rights. If confirmed, I will assess SOUTHCOM's programs and provide the Secretary of Defense and this committee a request for the resources required to address Chinese attempts to increase influence in the region.

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QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR DAN SULLIVAN

CHINESE PRESENCE IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE

18. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Richardson, earlier this year Admiral Craig Faller testified before this committee at the SOUTHCOM posture hearing. In his statement for the record, Admiral Faller stated, “[t]his Hemisphere in which we live is under assault.” He went on to further say, “[w]e are losing our positional advantage in this Hemisphere and immediate action is needed to reverse this trend.” Of course, he was referring to the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) malign influence and activities which he characterized as, “. . . weakening democratic institutions and leveraging the future of this Hemisphere.” First, how would you characterize China's strategic objectives in the SOUTHCOM AOR over the 5, 10, and 20 year-time horizon?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. China has made it clear in other regions of the world that economic overtures are merely a precursor to political and diplomatic influence that threaten sovereignty. Currently in the SOUTHCOM AOR, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is actively seeking to improve its overseas operation and support capabilities by building ‘far seas forces’ and developing overseas logistical facilities. China's influence can be seen in projects throughout Latin America and the Caribbean with ports, illegal economic activity, and disingenuous vaccine diplomacy. Their robust Belt and Road Initiative is the long-term pathway that would involve Chinese control of logistics and trade routes, rare earth minerals, ports, and financial sectors across all domains spanning continents and oceans.

19. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Richardson, second, why should the American people care what the CCP is doing in the Western Hemisphere?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. A permanent Chinese presence in the Western Hemisphere adversely impacts democratic countries within the region and ultimately causes regional instability. China's efforts to establish access through infrastructure projects increases global logistics and basing infrastructure for potential military power projection and sustainment within proximity to the United States. Additionally, China's presence near strategic locations within the hemisphere, such as the Panama Canal, potentially threatens United States' national interests.

20. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Richardson, third, if confirmed, will you commit to taking on China's malign activities in the Western Hemisphere with—as Admiral Faller described—“an incredible sense of urgency”?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Yes.

#### ONE BELT, ONE ROAD INITIATIVE

21. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Richardson, China has committed a significant amount of resources to establish its presence and influence throughout the SOUTHCOM AOR, primarily through the One Belt, One Road Initiative. In fact, over 60 percent of the countries in Central and South America have joined the Initiative and over 80 percent host Chinese infrastructure projects. In your personal opinion, how effective is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in gaining and maintaining influence for China?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. As we have seen in other parts of the world, China has been very effective at making strategic investments that can be leveraged to gain and maintain global influence. Nineteen countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have signed onto BRI, and China is funding infrastructure projects throughout the hemisphere. China's pragmatic attitude towards advancing outward investment under the banner of BRI is attractive to even those Latin American countries who are not formal signatories. Earlier this year, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Colombian President Ivan Duque discussed BRI and deepening cooperation in areas such as energy, infrastructure, and telecommunications, despite Colombia expressing no interest in becoming a formal BRI signatory.

22. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Richardson, what are your biggest concerns regarding the BRI's proliferation?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. I am greatly concerned about the possibility of Chinese-funded shipping, logistics, and telecom infrastructure having dual (military-civilian) use potential in the SOUTHCOM AOR. China's push to export its technologies to dozens of BRI countries also poses security challenges and concerns for our partners and could impact our ability to share information on mutual threats.

23. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Richardson, Admiral Faller has previously noted that “nine nations in the Western Hemisphere (out of 15 worldwide) still recognize Taiwan—a fact that has not gone unnoticed by Beijing, which is engaging in persistent (and successful) dollar diplomacy to lower that number to zero.” How do programs—like the Belt and Road Initiative—contribute to this desired end state for China?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Switching recognition largely stems from China's increased economic clout in Latin America. When a country grants diplomatic recognition to Taiwan, it cannot also maintain relations with China—the world's second largest economy. China's spending in Latin America has increased significantly in the past decade under the Belt Road Initiative. China is the AOR's second largest trading partner not far behind the U.S. In 2019, Chinese companies invested \$12.8 billion in Latin America, up 16.5 percent from 2018, concentrating on regional infrastructure such as ports, roads, dams and railways. Countries recognizing Taiwan were not part of this Chinese economic activity. In the past four years, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Panama have each switched their recognition from Taiwan to China. China is also using the pandemic to pressure countries to switch recognition in exchange for desperately needed COVID vaccines.

24. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Richardson, if confirmed, how will you go about—alongside your interagency counterparts—reversing the negative trends, to include the shrinking recognition of Taiwan, realized by the CCP's malign influence?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. In my view, the U.S. must work across the interagency and with international partners and allies to ensure that our partner

nations in the region have options other than turning to the Chinese for these disadvantaged loans and deals. We must also share information quickly and broadly with partners on Chinese tactics and trends so that they make informed decisions on partnerships. We must shine a light on these predatory practices so that partners can protect themselves from these corrosive deals. For example, PRC-backed projects have caused extensive environmental damage and have failed to deliver on contractual agreements. The PRC conducts outreach to partners at the sub-national/local level, allowing them to create long term partnerships and cultivate influence with rising regional leaders. Expanding and increasing our regional engagement across the diplomatic, economic, and military domains can demonstrate the enduring value of the U.S. partnership.

#### CHINA AND TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS

25. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Richardson, what roles is China playing in the production and shipment of precursor chemicals that are used by transnational criminal organizations to produce devastating drugs like fentanyl and methamphetamine in the SOUTHCOM AOR?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. I understand that China is the principal source of the precursor chemicals that are used in the production of fentanyl, methamphetamines, and other illicit synthetic drugs. In 2020, the number of deaths in the U.S. from opioids alone was nearly 70,000. I also am aware that Fentanyl is being mixed into more commonly used drugs, like cocaine, making them exponentially more lethal to users. Chinese synthetic drug networks have a transnational reach and establish relationships with clients abroad, including in Mexico and in other locations in the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility. In my assessment, these activities pose a sustained threat to the United States.

#### INFORMATION OPERATIONS

26. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Richardson, how are the Chinese using information operations, to include disinformation, in the SOUTHCOM AOR?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Malign actors continue to evolve their methods of disinformation with the intent of undermining the U.S. in the eyes of our allies and partners in the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility. Beijing's aggressive propaganda and disinformation campaigns promote the PRC and discredit the U.S. and Western nations. This disinformation grossly distorts U.S. activities, intentions, and values. Chinese state media publishes Spanish language media, disseminating Beijing's messaging and propaganda directly to Latina America audiences, but China primarily relies on building influence among regional media sources, coopting local journalists to publish pro-Chinese and often anti-United States media.

27. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Richardson, how would you compare United States and Chinese information operations in the SOUTHCOM AOR and who do you assess to be more effective?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. The United States utilizes the information space to communicate the benefits of democracy, the respect for human rights, and adherence to the rule of law. Conversely, the People's Republic of China uses this space to advance their interests through disinformation and misinformation against anything that prevents their ability to expand their influence.

28. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Richardson, how can SOUTHCOM more effectively operate in the information domain?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Efforts to counter information operations and malign cyber activity must be executed quickly and must be adaptable and relevant. That means our operations in the information domain must be robust, forward-leaning and completely coordinated, not only with the State Department and other inter-agency partners, but with our partners and allies as well. New technologies including machine learning, artificial intelligence, and scraping can help identify and address current threats, but we still have a long way to go in countering such threats as our competitors will no doubt continue to evolve their methods of disinformation. If confirmed, I will assess SOUTHCOM's operations in the information domain and provide feedback to the Secretary of Defense as part of my integrated strategic approach.

29. Senator SULLIVAN. Lieutenant General Richardson, what are the most pressing gaps in regards to policy, authority, or capabilities that need to be addressed?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. In my view, malign actors are actively competing in the information domain to undermine the United States and the demo-

cratic values we stand for. If confirmed, I will conduct a thorough review of the capabilities, resources, and authorities available to SOUTHCOM to be able to compete and win in the information space.

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QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR MARSHA BLACKBURN

U.S. SOUTHERN COMMAND INTELLIGENCE, SURVEILLANCE, AND RECONNAISSANCE  
SHORTFALLS

30. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Richardson, if nominated, do I have your commitment to work collaboratively with the committee in quantifying SOUTHCOM's ISR deficiencies—in terms of the number of lines, mix of assets, and supporting infrastructure required to address named areas of interest currently left uncovered?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Yes.

31. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Richardson, in the absence of reliable ISR, what alternative means can the United States leverage to understand the enemy and friendly situation in SOUTHCOM?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. In my view, we must leverage 21st century tools to gain better insights into the complex threats and challenges in the SOUTHCOM AOR. Advances in artificial intelligence and machine learning make it possible to data mine open source information at a fraction of the time and manpower that was once required. These innovative approaches are especially important when traditional ISR assets are limited.

ILLICIT TRAFFICKING AND BORDER SECURITY

32. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Richardson, is the current approach to combating illicit trafficking, which is largely focused on interdicting drugs while in transit, the right approach?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. I agree with ADM Faller when he said that we will not be able to fully combat illicit drug trafficking through interdiction alone. Illicit trafficking has many components which need to be addressed through a whole-of-government approach, as well as thorough engagement with our partners in the Western Hemisphere. If confirmed, I look forward to working with the interagency and with our partner nations to address these challenges.

33. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Richardson, is SOUTHCOM currently postured to counter illicit trafficking threats at their origin or through attacking their networks and finances?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. Drug trafficking in the region is the largest funding source for Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCOs). Aggressively working with the interagency, as well as our partners in the region, to interdict the flow of illicit narcotics is one of the major efforts to attack the financial resources of the TCO networks and address the root causes of violence, corruption, and instability in the region. It is my understanding that SOUTHCOM is postured to counter illicit trafficking. Although their ability to do this is greatly enhanced by the efforts of our interagency counterparts, as well as those of our key partner nations (who accounted for 60 percent of interdictions last year). If confirmed, I will assess SOUTHCOM's ability to counter these threats, and request any additional resources if needed.

34. Senator BLACKBURN. Lieutenant General Richardson, what role is China playing in the production and shipment of precursor chemicals that are used by Transnational Criminal Organizations to produce devastating drugs like fentanyl and methamphetamine in the AOR?

Lieutenant General RICHARDSON. I understand that China is the principal source of the precursor chemicals that are used in the production of fentanyl, methamphetamines, and other illicit synthetic drugs. In 2020, the number of deaths in the U.S. from opioids alone was nearly 70,000. I also am aware that Fentanyl is being mixed into more commonly used drugs, like cocaine, making them exponentially more lethal to users. Chinese synthetic drug networks have a transnational reach and establish relationships with clients abroad, including in Mexico and in other locations in the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility. In my assessment, these activities pose a sustained threat to the United States.

[The nomination reference of Lieutenant General Laura J. Richardson, USA follows:]

**NOMINATION REFERENCE AND REPORT**

**PN238**

AS IN EXECUTIVE SESSION,  
SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,  
March 5, 2021.

*Ordered*, That the following nomination be referred to the Committee on Armed Services:

The following named officer for appointment in the United States Army to the grade indicated while assigned to a position of importance and responsibility under title 10, U.S.C., section 601:

*To Be General*

Lt. Gen. Laura J. Richardson, 2595

\_\_\_\_\_, 2021.  
(Date)

Reported by Mr. Reed \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

with the recommendation that the nomination be confirmed.

**☐ The nominee has agreed to respond to requests to appear and testify before any duly constituted committee of the Senate.**

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[The biographical sketch of Lieutenant General Laura J. Richardson, USA, which was transmitted to the Committee at the time the nomination was referred, follows:]



## United States Army

Lieutenant General LAURA J. RICHARDSON

Commanding General  
 United States Army North  
 1837 Army Boulevard  
 Joint Base San Antonio, Texas 78234  
 Since: July 2019



### SOURCE OF COMMISSIONED SERVICE ROTC

### EDUCATIONAL DEGREES

Metropolitan State College – BA – Psychology  
 National Defense University – MS – National Resource Strategy

### MILITARY SCHOOLS ATTENDED

Rotary Wing Aviator Officer Basic Course  
 Aviation Officer Basic and Advanced Courses  
 United States Army Command and General Staff College  
 Industrial College of the Armed Forces

### FOREIGN LANGUAGE(S) None recorded

### PROMOTIONS                      DATE OF APPOINTMENT

2LT	5 Sep 86
1LT	5 Mar 88
CPT	1 Mar 91
MAJ	1 Mar 97
LTC	1 Jun 01
COL	1 Jan 07
BG	2 Sep 12
MG	2 Nov 14
LTG	9 Jun 17

### FROM    TO    ASSIGNMENT

Jul 19	Present	Commanding General, United States Army North, Joint Base San Antonio, Texas
Jun 17	Jun 19	Deputy Commanding General/Chief of Staff, United States Army Forces Command, Fort Bragg, North Carolina
Nov 14	Jun 17	Chief, Legislative Liaison, Office of the Secretary of the Army, Washington, DC
May 14	Nov 14	Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Army for Legislative Affairs, Washington, DC
Apr 13	Apr 14	Deputy Chief of Staff, Communications, International Security Assistance Force, OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan
Jun 12	Apr 13	Deputy Commanding General (Support), 1st Cavalry Division, Fort Hood, Texas
Jul 11	Jun 12	Commanding General, United States Army Operational Test Command, Fort Hood, Texas
Oct 09	Jul 11	Chief, Senate Liaison Division, Office of the Secretary of the Army, Washington, DC
Jul 07	Oct 09	Commander, United States Army Garrison, Fort Myer, Virginia
Aug 06	Jun 07	Student, National Resource Strategy, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, Fort McNair, Washington, DC
Jul 04	Aug 06	Army Campaign Planner, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans, G-3/5/7, United States Army, Washington, DC
Jul 02	May 04	Commander, 5th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Fort Campbell, Kentucky and OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, Iraq
Mar 01	May 02	Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Fort Campbell, Kentucky
Feb 99	Jan 01	Military Aide to the Vice President of the United States, The White House, Washington, DC
Jul 97	Feb 99	Operations Officer, later Executive Officer, 9th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), Fort Campbell, Kentucky

Aug 96	Jun 97	Student, United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
Jul 95	May 96	Aviation Observer Trainer/Assistant Operations Officer, Battle Command Training Program, United States Army Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
Jul 92	May 95	Commander, B Company, 1st Battalion, 158th Aviation Regiment, later Personnel Officer, 6th Cavalry Brigade, Fort Hood, Texas
Apr 92	Jul 92	Chief, Health and Fitness Section, G-1, III Corps, Fort Hood, Texas
Oct 91	Mar 92	Student, Aviation Officer Advanced Course, United States Aviation Center, Fort Rucker, Alabama
Sep 90	Sep 91	Commander, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 4th Battalion, 501st Aviation Regiment, 17th Aviation Brigade, Eighth United States Army, Republic of Korea
Apr 90	Sep 90	Personnel Officer, 4th Battalion, 501st Aviation Regiment, 17th Aviation Brigade, Eighth United States Army, Republic of Korea
Jul 89	Apr 90	Assistant Logistics Officer, 17th Aviation Brigade, Eighth United States Army, Republic of Korea
May 88	Jul 89	Administrative Officer, later Executive Officer, later Platoon Leader, C Company, 1st Battalion, 501st Aviation Regiment, 17th Aviation Brigade, Eighth United States Army, Republic of Korea
Dec 87	May 88	Section Leader, 128th Assault Helicopter Company, Eighth United States Army, Republic of Korea

SUMMARY OF JOINT ASSIGNMENTS

	<u>DATE</u>	<u>GRADE</u>
Deputy Chief of Staff, Communications, International Security Assistance Force, OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan	Apr 13 - Apr 14	Brigadier General
Military Aide to the Vice President of the United States, The White House, Washington, DC	Feb 99 - Jan 01	Major

SUMMARY OF OPERATIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

	<u>DATE</u>	<u>GRADE</u>
Deputy Chief of Staff, Communications, International Security Assistance Force, OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM, Afghanistan	Apr 13 - Apr 14	Brigadier General
Commander, 5th Battalion, 101st Aviation Regiment, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM, Iraq	Mar 03 - Feb 04	Lieutenant Colonel

US DECORATIONS AND BADGES

Distinguished Service Medal (with 1 Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster)  
 Defense Superior Service Medal (with 1 Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster)  
 Legion of Merit (with 3 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters)  
 Bronze Star Medal  
 Meritorious Service Medal (with 4 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters)  
 Air Medal (with numeral 8)  
 Joint Service Commendation Medal  
 Army Commendation Medal (with 1 Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster)  
 Army Achievement Medal (with 2 Bronze Oak Leaf Clusters)  
 Combat Action Badge  
 Parachutist Badge  
 Air Assault Badge  
 Senior Army Aviator Badge  
 Vice-Presidential Service Badge  
 Army Staff Identification Badge

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[The Committee on Armed Services requires certain senior military officers nominated by the President to positions requiring the advice and consent of the Senate to complete a form that details the biographical, financial, and other information of the nominee. The form executed by Lieutenant General Laura J. Richardson, USA in connection with her nomination follows:]

**117th CONGRESS, 2021--2022**  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
ROOM SR-228  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510-6050

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE QUESTIONNAIRE  
INFORMATION REQUESTED OF NOMINEES  
FOR CERTAIN SENIOR MILITARY POSITIONS

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE NOMINEE: Answer all questions and provide all requested information. If more space is needed, attach an additional sheet of paper to the Questionnaire and cite the part of the Questionnaire and the question number (e.g., A-9, B-4) to which the continuation of your answer applies. Unless otherwise required, an answer of "yes", "no", or "not applicable" is appropriate.

QUESTIONNAIRE, PART A

NOTE: Information furnished in this part of the Questionnaire will be made available in Committee offices for public inspection prior to the hearing, if any, and will be entered in the hearing record, also available to the public.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION TO BE MADE PUBLIC

1. Name (Include any former names you have used):  
Laura J. Richardson (maiden name: Strickland)
2. Position to which nominated: Commander, United States Southern Command
3. Date of nomination:
4. Government experience (List any advisory, consultative, honorary, and other part-time service or positions with Federal, State, or local governments, other than those listed in the service record extract provided to the Committee by the applicable agency/department/board): None
5. Business relationships (List all positions currently held as an officer, director, trustee, partner, proprietor, agent, representative, or consultant of any corporation, firm, partnership, or other business enterprise, and of any educational or other institution): None
6. Memberships (List all memberships and offices that you currently hold, as well

as any memberships and offices you have previously held, in professional, fraternal, scholarly, civic, business, charitable, and other organizations): Member: Association of the United States Army; Member: Army Aviation Association of America; Member: 101st Airborne Division Association; Member: Council on Foreign Relations.

7. Honors and awards (List all scholarships, fellowships, honorary degrees, honorary society memberships, and any other special recognition received for outstanding service or achievements, in addition to those listed in the service record extract and biographical provided to the Committee by the agency or department): Women in Aerospace Outstanding Leadership Award, 2011; Metropolitan State College Alumni Hall of Fame Honoree, 2012.

COMMITMENTS IN FURTHERANCE OF CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT

NOTE: In order to exercise their legislative and oversight responsibilities, it is important that this Committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate committees of Congress timely receive testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information from the executive branch.


8. Do you agree, if confirmed, and on request, to appear and testify before this Committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate Committees of Congress?  
Yes
9. Do you agree, if confirmed, and when asked before this Committee, its subcommittees, or other appropriate Committees of Congress to give your personal views, even if those views differ from the position of the Administration?  
Yes
10. Do you agree, if confirmed, to provide this Committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate Committees of Congress, and their respective staffs such witnesses and briefers, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information, as may be requested of you, and to do so timely? Yes
11. Do you agree, if confirmed, to consult with this Committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate Committees of Congress, and their respective staffs, regarding your basis for any delay or denial in providing testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information requested of you? Yes

12. Do you agree, if confirmed, to keep this Committee, its subcommittees, other appropriate Committees of Congress, and their respective staffs apprised of new information that materially impacts the accuracy of testimony, briefings, reports, records—including documents and electronic communications, and other information you or your organization previously provided? Yes
13. Do you agree, if confirmed, and on request, to provide this Committee and its subcommittees with records and other information within their oversight jurisdiction, even absent a formal Committee request? Yes
14. Do you agree, if confirmed, to respond timely to letters to, and/or inquiries and other requests of you or your organization from individual Senators who are members of this Committee? Yes
15. Do you agree, if confirmed, to ensure that you and other members of your organization protect from retaliation any military member, federal employee, or contractor employee who testifies before, or communicates with this Committee, its subcommittees, and any other appropriate committee of Congress? Yes

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[The nominee responded to Parts B-F of the Committee questionnaire. The text of the questionnaire is set forth in the Appendix to this volume. The nominee's answers to Parts B-F are contained in the Committee's executive files.]

I hereby state that I have read and signed Parts A and B of the foregoing Senate Armed Services Committee Questionnaire, and that the information provided therein, and in any document appended thereto, is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, current, accurate, and complete.



Laura J. Richardson  
Lieutenant General, U.S. Army

This 29th day of JAN 2021

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[The nomination of Lieutenant General Laura J. Richardson, USA was reported to the Senate by Chairman Reed on August 10, 2021, with the recommendation that the nomination be confirmed. The nomination was confirmed by the Senate on August 11, 2021.]

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