

**Advance Questions for Lieutenant General Francis L. Donovan, USMC**  
**Nominee to be Commander, United States Southern Command**

**Duties and Qualifications**

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

The Commander of U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) is responsible for executing the missions outlined in Title 10 of the United States Code and the Unified Command Plan. These include contingency planning, operations, and security cooperation across Central and South America and the Caribbean. The Commander ensures the defense of the Panama Canal, counters transnational threats, builds regional security partnerships, and serves as the principal military advisor on matters within the Area of Responsibility (AOR). This role requires close collaboration with interagency partners, allies, and regional governments to advance U.S. interests and maintain stability in the Western Hemisphere.

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

I am deeply honored to be considered for confirmation as Commander, United States Southern Command. My career spans decades of service as an infantry, reconnaissance, and special operations officer, during which I have led conventional, special operations and Joint forces in combat, contingency, and expeditionary operations in all geographic combatant commands. These experiences have prepared me to lead complex organizations and address multifaceted challenges.

I have commanded at every level, including a Force Reconnaissance Platoon, Battalion Landing Team, Marine Expeditionary Unit, Marine Expeditionary Brigade, and a Marine Division. Additionally, I have commanded Naval Task Forces in both the 5th Fleet (Commander, Task Force [CTF] 51) and 6th Fleet (CTF 61), providing me with firsthand experience in joint and multinational operations. My joint tours include serving as the J35 at U.S. Special Operations Command; Branch Chief for the Joint Staff J-5 Trans-regional Threats Coordination Center, Joint Staff; Assistant Commanding General at Joint Special Operations Command; and my current role as the Vice Commander of U.S. Special Operations Command.

These assignments have given me a deep understanding of the importance of interagency collaboration, building partnerships, and fostering interoperability with allies and partner nations. If confirmed, I will draw upon my years of experience in expeditionary warfare, special operations, and joint leadership to ensure the safety and security of the American

people while advancing U.S. interests in the region.

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

Continuous learning is essential for any leader. If confirmed, I will deepen my understanding of the region's history, geography, culture, and security dynamics. I will also prioritize engaging with South and Central America experts, interagency partners, academia, and regional leaders to gain insight into the challenges and opportunities within the AOR.

**Relationships**

**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:**

**4. The Secretary of Defense**

The Commander reports directly to the Secretary of Defense and is responsible for executing assigned missions and ensuring the readiness of forces within the AOR. The Secretary provides the authority and resources necessary for the Command to fulfill its responsibilities.

**The Deputy Secretary of Defense**

The Deputy Secretary of Defense supports the Secretary by overseeing delegated responsibilities. The Commander ensures the Deputy is informed of key issues and coordinates on matters requiring their attention.

**The Under Secretaries of Defense**

While there is no direct command of relationship, the Commander regularly communicates with the Under Secretaries on strategic and regional issues to ensure alignment with Department priorities.

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

The Chairman serves as the principal military advisor to the President and Secretary and acts as a key conduit between the combatant commands and senior leadership. The

Commander keeps the Chairman and Vice Chairman informed of significant developments within the AOR.

### **The Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs**

The Assistant Secretary provides policy guidance on international security matters. The Commander coordinates with this office to align SOUTHCOM's activities with broader U.S. policy objectives in the Western Hemisphere.

### **The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Global Security**

This office oversees policy areas critical to SOUTHCOM's mission, including policy and planning oversight for homeland defense and mission assurance, defense support of civil authorities, and Americas Security Affairs matters. Regular communication ensures alignment on shared priorities.

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

The Assistant Secretary oversees issues relating to the organization, training, and equipping of special operations forces, and activities such as counterterrorism, irregular warfare, counterdrug, countering transnational organized crime, and counter threat finance operations. The Commander collaborates closely to ensure these efforts are effectively resourced and executed.

### **The Service Secretaries and Service Chiefs**

The Service secretaries and Chiefs are responsible for organizing, training, and equipping forces assigned to SOUTHCOM. The Commander works with them to ensure operational requirements are met and future capabilities are developed.

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

Close collaboration with all of the other combatant commanders, especially NORTHCOM and INDOPACOM, is essential to addressing transregional threats and ensuring seamless operations across shared boundaries with SOUTHCOM

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

The Commander engages regularly with Chiefs of Mission to align military activities with U.S. foreign policy objectives. This collaboration ensures unity of effort in addressing regional challenges.

## **National Defense Strategy and Global Posture Review**

**The Department of Defense published Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance (INDSG) on March 13, 2025. The IND SG supersedes the Biden Administration's 2022 National Defense Strategy. The IND SG prioritizes defense of the homeland and deterrence of China over all other threats. Additionally, the Trump administration's National Security Strategy asserts a "'Trump Corollary' to the Monroe Doctrine," which prioritizes the stability and political, economic, and military leadership of the United States across the Western Hemisphere.**

### **5. How would you define SOUTHCOM's essential missions in the AOR and what steps would you take to accomplish them?**

Having read the NSS, SOUTHCOM's essential mission is clear: defend the US homeland by addressing urgent threats to our hemisphere and enlisting / expanding our network of regional partners to do the same. SOUTHCOM's top efforts should focus on Administration and Department priorities: countering narco-terrorist networks; denying non-Hemispheric competitors the ability to position forces or exert control over strategic locations; and enabling increased partner nation contributions to our shared security.

### **6. If confirmed, how do you plan to support the objectives of the IND SG and NSS in the context of the SOUTHCOM AOR, particularly with respect to long-term, strategic competition with revisionist powers and in contributing to regional stability, a factor that could prevent mass migration to the United States?**

If confirmed, I will build on the operational momentum the Department has entrusted to the Command and seek opportunities to support key NSS and IND SG taskings, as well as the Department's focus on warfighting. I see significant opportunities to accelerate security partnerships with regional champions and expand collaboration with new partners to help us neutralize cartels and stop illegal migration, among other threats. This expanded network can serve as a buffer to discourage inroads by non-hemispheric actors and harden the hemisphere's defenses against outside influence.

### **7. If confirmed, what role would you expect SOUTHCOM to play in supporting the Department's posture to support national security objectives like humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and counterdrug missions?**

If confirmed, I expect SOUTHCOM to play a critical role in supporting the Department's posture in humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and counterdrug missions. In each of these missions, SOUTHCOM should seek to leverage and expand its network of willing partners in the region in ways that support both U.S. interests and the defense of the hemisphere.

### **8. If confirmed, what role would you expect to play in supporting the Department's**

**posture to support U.S. government efforts on the range of transnational challenges and add to defense partnership activities in the SOUTHCOM AOR?**

Given the focus of the new NSS and INDSG, I fully expect SOUTHCOM to play a leading role in addressing transnational challenges that impact the US homeland. If confirmed, I intend to build on SOUTHCOM's long-standing and deep relationships with dozens of nations. This network of regional partners is a critical capability that should be leveraged, invested in, and expanded on to ensure that the Department has a robust, extensive first line of defense in our own hemisphere.

**Major Challenges, Problems, Priorities**

**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.**

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

As I understand it, SOUTHCOM and its AOR have been chronically under-resourced and underfunded. Clearly, that is changing, which presents both challenges and opportunities. If confirmed, I expect to confront challenges related to capacity, operational tempo, and organizational structure. The pace of operations and the priority missions in the NSS present an opportunity to optimize the SOUTHCOM headquarters staff and subordinate commands for warfighting. I commit to working with Congress to identify any obstacles to the Command's effectiveness and operational agility, including outdated authorities or legacy requirements that have not kept pace with mission needs or NSS expectations.

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

If confirmed, I will work across the Department and with Congress, to ensure appropriate authorities and resources exist for our expanding SOUTHCOM operational requirements.

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

If confirmed, the objectives of the NSS and the INDSG would be my priorities: countering transnational criminal and terrorist organizations, expanding SOUTHCOM's

network of regional partners, and denying non-Hemispheric competitors the ability to position forces or threaten the US homeland in our hemisphere. SOUTHCOM will also be prepared to rapidly pivot to address emerging threats to regional stability, including maritime mass migration events or disasters.

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

If confirmed, I will continue to leverage and collaborate with SOUTHCOM's Department of Homeland Security, State, Commerce, and law enforcement partners embedded within the command. These force multipliers ensure the command remains synchronized with our civilian counterparts and complements whole-of-government efforts in our AOR.

**Influence of Countries Outside the Region in Latin America**

**In the SOUTHCOM AOR, China has made efforts to expand their influence regionally, including through investments in strategic ports, to include the Port of Balboa in Panama, and other infrastructure such as 5G telecommunications and an expanding network of space tracking installations in Latin America. At the same time, China is exploiting resources in the region, including the extraction of critical minerals and illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing. Russia continues to work through proxies, primarily Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba, to create instability and challenge democracy in the region. Russia also has significant influence through its Spanish-language social media, such as RT en Espanol and Sputnik Mundo. Russia's influence in the region is demonstrated through the abstention by many Latin American countries from joining efforts in the United Nations and elsewhere to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine or impose sanctions.**

**13. In your view, what new authorities or approaches are needed for engaging with regional partners to counter this growing Chinese and Russian challenge?**

To effectively counter any non-hemispheric competitor in the AOR, the U.S. must be present, responsive, and engaged, committed to delivering tangible results and enabling partner nation successes. We must be able to meet our partners' needs at the speed of relevance. We need processes that allow us to train and equip within a greatly compressed period of time. We should also explore ways to better enable our partners to take the lead in addressing urgent threats to our hemisphere's security, including by accelerating information sharing. If confirmed, I will review existing authorities and explore where additional flexibility may be needed to execute SOUTHCOM's missions effectively.

**14. In your opinion, are countries in the region prepared to push back against**

**Chinese and Russian influence efforts and what tools are required to make a difference?**

If confirmed, I would work to ensure that the U.S. is the partner of choice, able to offer timely, affordable, and relevant alternatives to Chinese or Russian influence. Many countries within the region rely on outside assistance to build capacity and force readiness. By offering alternatives that deliver better ROI and increased capabilities, the U.S. can leverage agreements, sales, and training to reinforce long-term partnerships and our appeal as the partner of choice.

**15. What is your assessment of China and Russia's presence and objectives in the region?**

Based on China's Belt and Road Initiative activities in the SOUTHCOM AOR, they aim to secure access to critical infrastructure and resources, including minerals, telecommunications, ports, space, and security systems to compete with the United States. China's activities in Latin America and the Caribbean are designed to project power, to be perceived as an indispensable global actor, and counter U.S. influence in the region. Russia has had longstanding relationships with Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, engaging in defense cooperation and intelligence collection against the US and our allies and partners.

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

If confirmed, I intend to assess Chinese and Russian objectives associated with military-to-military engagement in the SOUTHCOM AOR and will provide further analysis in my 90-day assessment.

**Public reporting indicates that Venezuela has reached out to both Russia and Cuba for support in light of the United States' efforts to lethally target suspected drug traffickers in the Caribbean.**

**17. What is your assessment of the impact of the Operation Southern Spear on China and Russia's influence on not just Venezuela, but on the nations within the SOUTHCOM AOR with whom SOUTHCOM partners regularly?**

Based on my reading of open-source reporting, I understand that China and Russia are taking note of increased U.S. attention in and prioritization of the Western Hemisphere overall. They likely see efforts like Operation Southern Spear as a means for the United States to project strength and address the most significant threat to regional stability. As I understand it, neither Russia nor China contributes significantly to helping the region address drug trafficking or narco-terrorism, especially compared to the depth and breadth of U.S. assistance and collaboration. Both are likely aware of the United States' intent to

rollback inroads by non-Hemispheric competitors. If confirmed, I intend to accelerate efforts to demonstrate the “hidden costs” of engaging with these countries.

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

While Chinese and Russian enterprises and criminal elements operate in Latin America and the Caribbean, I am not aware of the extent of Chinese or Russian knowledge of, or participation in, transnational criminal organizations’ activities.

**19. 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?**

I believe the most appropriate method to counter malign influence from any actor is to remain proactively engaged within the region, reinforce our existing partnerships, and continue to expand our physical presence within Latin America and the Caribbean, especially in strategically important locations.

**20. In your view, has the United States appropriately postured it’s forces to best mitigate foreign intelligence collection in the region, particularly by Chinese intelligence collection sites on the Island of Cuba, and Russian military cooperation with the government of Cuba?**

Cuba’s collaboration with China and Russia is a significant foreign intelligence threat that requires our continued attention and efforts to counter. Cuba’s proximity to the United States and the Caribbean makes it a prime location from which China or Russia can collect signals intelligence on the United States and the region. If confirmed, I will further assess our forces and efforts to ensure we are properly postured to mitigate the threats.

**21. In your view, what opportunities exist in the SOUTHCOM AOR to utilize capital investments as a means to support national security objectives, particularly in cooperation with entities such as DOD’s Office of Strategic Capital, the Development Finance Corporation, and the Export-Import Bank?**

If confirmed, I intend to assess the degree to which SOUTHCOM’s cooperation with these entities can utilize investments to support security objectives.

**DOD Counter-narcotics and Counter-Illlicit Trafficking Activities**

**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 \$900 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.**

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

Congress has provided the Department with several specific counterdrug authorities. First, the Department serves as the lead federal agency for the detection and monitoring of the aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs into the United States. As I understand it, SOUTHCOM's component JIATF South is responsible for executing this statutory mission. Second, the Department is also authorized to provide its unique capabilities to support US and partner nation law enforcement agencies. This could include intelligence analysis, counter threat finance, transportation, and planning support.

**23. How would you measure the effectiveness of U.S. and DOD counter-narcotics and counter-illicit trafficking programs, to include the most recent lethal strikes on suspected drug traffickers in the SOUTHCOM AOR?**

If confirmed, I would ensure that any measure of effectiveness of counternarcotics efforts, to include lethal strikes, is assessed against clear, established objectives with measurable outcomes.

**24. How do the recent lethal strikes against alleged drug traffickers play into the larger strategy of the U.S. government and SOUTHCOM's strategy to use soft power to exercise positive influence?**

If confirmed, I intend to assess SOUTHCOM's strategy against illicit drug traffickers as well as evaluate the reflections and intelligence regarding lethal strikes.

However, based on my previous experience, I can say that regional military exercises influence in many ways, especially when we work side-by-side with our partners to build trust and establish generational partnerships.

**25. How will the Department continue to work with the interagency, particularly the Coast Guard and law enforcement, on interdiction efforts?**

The Department continues to work closely with the Coast Guard and law enforcement on a range of interdiction efforts. The Coast Guard plays a vital role in SOUTHCOM's AOR, and if confirmed I look forward to closely working with them.

**26. What is the SOUTHCOM Commander's role in determining which alleged drug trafficking vessels will be targeted for lethal strikes versus targeted for interdiction?**

While not briefed on these specific strikes, I do understand the role of the commander and the decision to execute a kinetic strike is deliberate and precise, based on comprehensive intelligence and established processes governing targeting and the application of capability.

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

The United States should enlist willing partners to contribute to this effort, expanding information sharing to enable combined or multinational operations to counter drug trafficking regardless of destination. Many of these criminal networks are global in reach, with affiliates and operations across the world. This requires a comprehensive approach targeting all elements of their operations, finances, and support, across all domains, that will lead to the dismantlement of the transnational criminal organizations responsible for trafficking narcotics that threaten the security of the region and nation.

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

My understanding is that the vast majority of cocaine consumed globally is produced within the SOUTHCOM AOR.

**29. Given the global nature of this challenge and the comprehensive network within which these illicit actors operate, do you believe DOD has all the necessary authorities to best support interagency efforts to mitigate this challenge?**

If confirmed, I commit to examining this issue in greater detail and stand ready to work with Congress to sustain or adapt our operational and fiscal authorities to keep pace with mission needs and an evolving threat. Recognizing the nature of this global threat, I will focus on coordinating and synchronizing efforts with NORTHCOM and other elements from the Department in supporting U.S. law enforcement efforts.

**30. 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? In addition, what do you see as SOUTHCOM's particular role in addressing this challenge?**

I believe SOUTHCOM can continue to play a significant role in the Department's efforts to detect and monitor the flow of illicit drugs in the region, and work with the interagency to interdict and stop the flow of drugs.

**31. In your view, is there more DOD could do, including in cooperation with U.S. Northern Command and with interagency and law enforcement partners?**

I do not have enough information to provide a complete assessment of SOUTHCOM's cooperation with NORTHCOM and with interagency and law enforcement partners, and whether more should be done. If confirmed, I commit to working closely with counterparts at all combatant commands and in key U.S. government agencies to understand their priorities and identify ways we can best support or enable their efforts

**32. In your opinion, do the recent lethal strikes in the Caribbean tie into NORTHCOM's border security mission? If so, how?**

If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with NORTHCOM and all other combatant commanders

**Building Partner Capacity**

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

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

Broadly, the strategic objectives associated with building partner nation capacity are to reinforce the United States as partner of choice in the AOR through combined / multinational operations and exercises, and to drive effective mil-to-mil engagements that ensure our partners contribute to equitable burden-sharing, aligning their capabilities with shared strategic interests to fortify the security of the Western Hemisphere.

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

If confirmed, one of my priorities will be to enhance the professionalization of our partners' defense institutions in a manner that enables our partners to become more effective while simultaneously contributing to a more stable region.

**35. 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?**

The appropriate balance requires a synchronized effort across all echelons, as tactical, operational, and institutional capacities are deeply connected. For security cooperation to have an enduring impact, we must pursue deliberate and sustained professionalization at the institutional level to address doctrine, education, lifecycle management, personnel, facilities and budgeting shortfalls. When we methodically help a partner strengthen that foundation, the positive effects naturally cascade to the operational and tactical forces.

**36. 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?**

Broadly, corruption is a concern with any security cooperation partnership. If confirmed, I look forward to engaging with our partners throughout the AOR and, as part of a whole -of -government approach, working to reduce the impact of corruption on these important programs.

**37. 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?**

The threat posed by transnational criminal and terrorist organizations often exceeds the capacity of many host-nation security forces. The nexus of actionable intelligence sharing between partner nation militaries and police forces is critical. In my view, SOUTHCOM should leverage the resources available for forces specifically designated to performing this role and in line with Congressional requirements.

**Civilian Casualties**

**38. If confirmed, how would you ensure civilian casualty allegations are adequately and promptly investigated by SOUTHCOM?**

If confirmed, I would ensure that the SOUTHCOM Staff is fully aligned and actively engaged with the current regulations and requirements that Congress, the Department, and the Joint Staff have promulgated through DoD Instruction (DODI) 3000.17 “Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response”. That document outlines the requirements of allegations and investigations to be fully compliant.

**39. Do you believe civilian casualty allegations should be independently investigated by personnel who are sufficiently removed from the unit or chain of command associated with the incident? Please be specific in your response.**

Referring back to the DODI 3000.17, if confirmed, I would ensure that we are meeting the requirements of the DODI and following the approved methodology for conducting investigations while ensuring respect and dignity to any alleged civilian casualty and their families.

**40. What is your understanding of SOUTHCOM's current policies with respect to public transparency, and if confirmed, what policies would you seek to establish in this regard?**

My understanding is the current policies of SOUTHCOM regarding transparency are consistent with the Department and the Joint Staff. If confirmed, I will continue to follow those current policies while supporting the Secretary and the President.

**41. Under what circumstances do you believe it is appropriate to provide ex gratia payments when civilian casualties or other civilian harm result from U.S. unilateral or partnered military operations?**

The guidance for ex gratia payments is set by the Department and the Joint Staff for any contingency. If confirmed, I will continue to support those policies and provide as much respect and dignity for the families of any civilian casualty.

**42. In your view, what are the primary challenges for the combatant commands in mitigating, investigating, and responding to allegations of civilian casualties resulting from U.S. military operations?**

The primary challenges for combatant commands in mitigating, investigating and responding to allegations of civilian casualties resulting from U.S. military operations is the necessary time, resources, and access to fully uncover the actions that took place during those operations and determine the accuracy of those events. Most significant is the amount of time necessary to gain the accurate information for a full understanding of the event.

**Transnational Criminal Organizations**

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.

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

Transnational criminal organizations, and the threats they pose to the United States, are continually evolving as the organizations explore opportunities to make money by whatever illicit means they can. Transnational criminal organizations are becoming increasingly more sophisticated. The evolving nature of the threats from transnational criminal organizations requires constant attention and reevaluation to ensure that we are using all of our available resources and to counter their efforts and dismantle their organizations.

**44. 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?**

The Department provides a range of unique authorities and capabilities to support a broader strategy to counter and degrade transnational criminal organizations. If confirmed I look forward to working with our law enforcement partners and further assessing this relationship.

**45. What is your understanding of the total amount of cocaine that was moved through the SOUTHCOM AOR from September through December of 2025?**

In my current capacity, I cannot provide an informed answer on the specifics of cocaine movement trends during that period. If confirmed, I intend to gain a greater understanding of how we measure cocaine movement and the effectiveness of our interdiction and other efforts.

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

Countering transnational criminal organizations is a complex mission. If confirmed, I commit to working with Congress to ensure SOUTHCOM has the right tools, authorities, and resources to execute our assigned missions and key tasks in the National Security Strategy (NSS) and forthcoming National Defense Strategy (NDS).

**Northern Triangle**

**Economic instability, violence, including gross human rights violations, and corruption continue to be a major source of insecurity in much of the region, including the Northern Triangle countries of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador.**

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

I understand that the Northern Triangle faces significant challenges related to illicit substances, human trafficking, irregular migration, corruption, and humanitarian crisis to occur in Central America. If confirmed, I intend to assess how SOUTHCOM can advance US foreign policy goals using a whole-of-government approach.

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

From what I understand, SOUTHCOM regional activities are designed to directly complement and reinforce broader U.S. government's strategy and plans for the region. Like all GCCs, SOUTHCOM conducts security cooperation across the AOR to build partner nation capacity to professionally and effectively secure their own borders and territory, ultimately contributing to U.S. homeland security.

**49. 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?**

Generally speaking, corruption among government and military leaders is a significant concern anywhere it exists, as it weakens public institutions, undermines the local population's trust in the government, and impacts regional stability and security. If confirmed, I look forward to understanding the specifics of these problems in the Northern Triangle countries.

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

The appropriate role for U.S. Southern Command in supporting civilian-led stabilization is, by definition, a supporting role to stabilization initiatives led by the Department of State and other civilian-led agencies. The Department contributes to stabilization efforts by building partner nation security forces' capacity; intelligence and information sharing; and training partner militaries in professional norms, accountability and civilian control.

**Mexico and Cooperation with U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM)**

**51. In your view, what priority areas should SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM seek to work most closely together to ensure a fully coordinated effort with respect security challenges in the shared region?**

If confirmed, I will work directly with my fellow combatant commanders to address security challenges and coordinate efforts across our AORs.

## **Haiti**

**Between September 2023 and March of 2024, the Department of Defense notified Congress that the Multinational Stability Support (MSS) mission to Haiti had been designated as an operation for which support may be provided under 10 U.S.C. § 331 (section 331) and that the Department had authorized support up to \$300 million to provide logistics support, supplies, and services (LSSS) to security forces of specified friendly foreign countries participating in the MSS mission. On March 10, 2024, in response to deteriorating security conditions in Haiti, and at the request of the Department of State, DOD conducted an operation to assess and augment security at the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince and evacuate non-essential personnel and continue to assist with Embassy security.**

**52. What is your assessment of SOUTHCOM's role in providing LSSS support to the MSS mission?**

While I can't speak to the specific metrics, I understand that SOUTHCOM's role in providing LSSS to the Kenyan-led MSS mission in Haiti has been critical to continued mission and enables the transition to the United Nations supported Gang Suppression Force – an example of burden shifting from the U.S. to the international community. To date, our support viability has included sorties to deliver cargo and sustain personnel. I expect SOUTHCOM will continue this mission until we are relieved of the responsibilities with the MSS's transition to a U.N. support entity.

**53. In your view, what are the impacts to regional security of the current instability in Haiti?**

As I understand it, extreme levels of criminality, violence, and insecurity have required SOUTHCOM to allocate resources to protect the U.S. Embassy from increasing instability and gang violence.

**54. What is your assessment to the impact, if any, to SOUTHCOM of DOD's decision to allocate \$200 million in 10 U.S.C. § 331 funds to the MSS?**

I understand the command's authorized funding is provided under 10 U.S.C. § 331. I will assess further, if confirmed.

**55. In what ways, if any, will the resource requirements for this mission impact SOUTHCOM's ability to execute its previously planned operations in the AOR?**

If confirmed, I will assess the situation as the operational and security environment evolves.

## **Colombia**

**U.S. security cooperation programs and security assistance to Colombia over the past several years has facilitated the marginalization of the FARC and other drug trafficking organizations. Three years ago, Colombia's election of President Gustavo Petro, a former guerrilla fighter, raised questions about the future of the U.S.-Colombia bilateral relationship. Colombia has been an important security partner of the United States, including jointly training security forces of third countries in the region. More recently, however, the United States revoked Colombia's certification as a U.S. partner in the fight against drug trafficking.**

### **56. What is your assessment of the current security situation in Colombia?**

As I understand it, Colombia-based designated terrorist organizations remain the principal threat to Colombia's sovereignty and security. Colombia is facing an upcoming presidential election in May, and I would expect the security environment is likely to remain contested in rural areas, where terrorist organizations typically exert control over local populations.

### **57. What is your assessment of the strength of the current U.S.-Colombian security relationship?**

As I understand it, the military-to-military relationship between the armed forces of Colombia and the U.S. remains strong and collaboration is ongoing. An engaged and effective Colombian military, aligned with U.S. strategic objectives, is a cornerstone for regional security.

### **58. How should U.S. security cooperation programs and activities be adjusted to assist Colombia in becoming more effective in the fight against drug trafficking in Colombia?**

As I understand it, U.S. and Colombia have a longstanding partnership, and the United States has benefited from Colombia in training partners in the region. Working with other stakeholders, I commit to exploring options to adjust security cooperation programs and activities.

### **59. How do you define U.S. national security interests in Colombia? What means of U.S. security assistance are appropriate for the Colombian government, given the challenges it faces?**

U.S. national security interests in Colombia are focused on Colombia's ability to effectively control its borders and counter transnational criminal and terrorist organizations operating within them, as well as expanding cooperation with extra-

hemispheric actors seeking to gain inroads there. Title 10 security cooperation efforts and Title 22 security assistance programs like International Military Education and Training (IMET) allow Colombia to continue to increase its capacity and deepen its ties to the U.S. through doctrinal alignment and interoperability.

**60. In your assessment, is it in the U.S. national security interest to maintain a close security relationship with Colombia?**

Yes. There is more work to be done to counter the growing capabilities of designated terrorist groups that affect both Colombian and U.S. security. We should continue encouraging and championing Colombia's meaningful contributions to both regional and international security.

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

My understanding is that Colombia has become a key exporter of security to the region, and the Colombian military now trains through both the U.S. Colombia Action Plan and partner militaries throughout the region. This directly aligns with the NSS's "enlist and expand" goals.

**Venezuela**

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

The Venezuelan regime's uncertain stability and precarious economic state is likely to remain a driver for outbound migration throughout the hemisphere. Our partners and allies in the region, like the U.S., do not want a conflict, as it would have a destabilizing effect on the region. The lack of economic opportunities, combined with endemic corruption among Venezuelan security services, offers FTOs ample opportunities to exploit the highly permissive environment to engage in drug trafficking, human smuggling, illegal mining, and other illicit activities. If confirmed, I will continue to monitor this issue closely.

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

My understanding is that the lack of economic opportunities, combined with endemic corruption among Venezuelan security services, offers FTOs ample opportunities to exploit the highly permissive environment to engage in drug trafficking, human smuggling, illegal mining, and other illicit activities.

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

Pending confirmation, I will assess Venezuelan relations with China, Cuba, Iran and Russia and will provide further analysis in my 90-day assessment.

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

Given the current situation and having not received any classified intelligence assessments at this time, I am unaware of the extent of the Venezuelan government or military forces' involvement in the drug trade.

**66. In your view, what posture should SOUTHCOM take in the ongoing and recently increasing territorial tensions between Venezuela and Guyana?**

The U.S. has expressed unwavering support for Guyana's sovereignty and supports a peaceful resolution to the border dispute between Venezuela and Guyana. If confirmed, I will continue to monitor this issue closely.

**67. How do you believe the recent build-up of U.S. naval forces in the Caribbean will impact tensions between the United States and Venezuela?**

The recent buildup of U.S. forces in the region supports the U.S. government's objectives, including the interdiction of stateless "dark fleets" transporting sanctioned Venezuelan oil. The continued presence of U.S. forces also provides the President with a range of military options to ensure Venezuela no longer poses a threat to U.S. national security.

**68. What is your assessment of how other countries in the region view a potential conflict between the United States and Venezuela?**

The United States and the Department have made clear we are pursuing a strategy of peace through strength. Our partners and allies in the region, like the U.S., do not want a conflict, as it would have a destabilizing effect on the region.

A socio-economic crisis in Venezuela probably would lead to an uptick in illegal migration. Regional leaders are probably concerned that as instability rises in the region, illicit activities will also increase, as instability creates a permissive environment.

**69. What is your assessment of the impact of a potential conflict between the United States and Venezuela on regional stability in the SOUTHCOM AOR?**

The United States and the Department have made clear we are pursuing a strategy of peace through strength. Our partners and allies in the region, like the U.S., do not want enduring conflicts, as it would have a destabilizing effect on the region.

### **Cuba**

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

Cuba supports authoritarian governments with intelligence and security support, particularly advisors skilled in suppressing political opposition and employing tactics to control the people as a means to maintain power. Cuba has also continued to deepen its military cooperation with China and Russia.

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

It is my understanding that the Department'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.

### **Panama**

**The Panama Canal remains vital to the United States for securing economic trade routes, maintaining U.S. presence in Latin America, and supplying troops to the Indo-Pacific, should conflict break out.**

#### **72. In your view, what are the biggest potential challenges to U.S. access to the Panama Canal?**

U.S. access to the Panama Canal remains critical to the economic security and prosperity of the United States and our ability to globally project forces to respond to strategic challenges. Pending confirmation, I will conduct a comprehensive assessment of the biggest challenges associated with U.S. access to the Panama Canal. Generally speaking, secured access will require proactive diplomacy, infrastructure investment, and enduring presence of U.S. forces to ensure the canal remains a reliable conduit for U.S. commerce and military operations.

#### **73. What is your assessment of SOUTHCOM's role in the defense of the Panama Canal? In your view, are additional steps necessary to ensure the safety and security of the Canal? How would you prioritize protection of this critical maritime choke point?**

As a key strategic asset in the Western Hemisphere, I assess protection of the Panama Canal as one of the highest priorities and requirements for SOUTHCOM. This mission ensures adherence to the Panama Canal neutrality treaty of 1979 and other defense agreements with the Government of Panama and is critical to both U.S. national and economic security, but also for global commerce. If confirmed, I will work in coordination with other U.S. government agencies and the Government of Panama to enable an enduring U.S. force presence and access in Panama.

### **Detainee Matters**

**74. 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?**

If confirmed, I expect to continue to oversee the safe, humane and legal care and custody of detainees at JTF-GTMO and to provide trial logistics support to the Office of Military Commissions.

**75. 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)?**

Yes, the standards for detainee treatment outlined in the referenced regulations serve to prohibit cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment of persons under custody or control of the United States Government.

**76. 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?**

The CMO position, managed by ASW for Health Affairs, has allowed for increased visibility of potential health concerns and provided for essential liaison with the Defense Health Agency to ensure timely care for detainees in Department custody.

**77. It is the committee's understanding that many of the 15 detainees still at GTMO have been designated for transfer.**

In my current role, I have not been privy to this data. Pending confirmation, I would be happy to look into confirming this for you.

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

Although I understand that SOUTHCOM does not participate directly in this process, I would continue to provide all requested and relevant intelligence, medical and behavioral/disciplinary documentation to the board for its review and consideration. SOUTHCOM does not participate directly in the PRB.

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

If confirmed, I will provide oversight of the process and my team will continue to provide the same level of support to this process as the lead coordinator across multiple commands to execute the transfer as directed.

**SOUTHCOM's Support to Immigration Enforcement**

**SOUTHCOM, through the establishment of Joint Task Force Southern Guard, has deployed hundreds of DOD personnel to support DHS in the detention of approximately 700 migrants at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay since February 2025.**

**80. What role do you expect to play, if confirmed, with respect to the operation, management, and oversight of the detention support to DHS at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and the policies applicable to the migrant population?**

If confirmed, I will continue to support SOUTHCOM's role in supporting DHS's migrant-holding mission at Naval Station Guantanamo Bay (NSGB). I will continue to work with DHS and others on the guidance and procedures for the detention of the migrants at NSGB.

**81. Do you agree, if confirmed, to comply with the applicable notification requirements of section 1053 of the FY26 NDAA?**

Yes.

**82. In your view, what are the limitations to the support the Department of Defense can provide to the Department of Homeland Security in immigration enforcement and the detention of migrants on Department of Defense installations?**

At this point, I'm not familiar with the specific limitations outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding between the two Departments, along with executive orders that direct support to DHS. But I will ensure, if confirmed, to look into this and provide an update. I will ensure JTF-SG has the resources, authorities, and support necessary to accomplish their assigned mission.

## **SOUTHCOM Force Requirements**

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

**83. 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?**

My understanding is that with the absence of assigned forces, other means for building defensive capabilities in the region, such as security cooperation, are significant to the success of our mission. If confirmed, I commit to advocating strongly for SOUTHCOM's requirements and ensuring the SOUTHCOM team has the resources they need to conduct its missions, including partnering and engagement efforts.

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

I believe risks to U.S. national interests, especially in terms of the priority missions outlined in the NSS, are significant. It is critical we apply the right balance of resources to achieve the Department's objectives for the region, reduce threats to the U.S. homeland from within, and reenergize the U.S. presence in the Western Hemisphere.

## **Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation**

**The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) housed at Fort Benning, Georgia has the mission of contributing to theater cooperation activities through the education and training of students in the Western Hemisphere from Canada to Chile.**

**85. What is the relationship between SOUTHCOM and WHINSEC?**

The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation is a subordinate of the U.S. Army Training & Transformation Command (formerly known as TRADOC). WHINSEC's direct support responsibilities to SOUTHCOM are formalized and reviewed annually through the SOUTHCOM Commander's permanent position on the WHINSEC Board of Visitors. WHINSEC's campaign support plan is nested within SOUTHCOM campaign plans that focuses on education and training.

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

I believe that WHINSEC promotes U.S. national security interests in the Western Hemisphere. The relationships and loyalty built during the formation of future leaders

endures for decades and permeates the institutional culture of our partner nations' defense and security forces.

**87. 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?**

If confirmed, I look forward to learning more about the institution and its efforts to increase institutional capacity.

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

Yes.

**Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief**

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

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) programs complement critical security cooperation efforts in the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility. The U.S. military plays an essential role in support of partner nations' ability to respond to natural disasters and humanitarian crisis by providing planning support, logistics, training, and when directed, time-limited response capabilities. These efforts save lives, strengthen civilian institutions, and build resilience while reinforcing interoperability, and civil-military coordination with regional partners.

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

Humanitarian Assistance programs enable SOUTHCOM to build capacity of partner nation civil entities to meet the basic humanitarian needs, including efforts to prepare for and mitigate risks from disasters. In my view, SOUTHCOM's sustained engagement, joint exercises, and targeted humanitarian assistance programs help partner nations strengthen planning, coordination and response capabilities – particularly in regions prone to natural disasters. These engagements improve interoperability, reinforce civilian-led response frameworks, and ensure that partner militaries can effectively support civil authorities during crises. This cooperation improves disaster response outcomes and strengthens long-term partnerships and regional resilience.

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

If confirmed, I will work across the Department and with Congress to ensure SOUTHCOM can deliver for partners in need.

### **Sexual Assault Prevention and Response**

**Despite significant efforts by the Department and military services over the past decade to enhance their prevention of, and response to, sexual assaults, including measures to care for victims and hold assailants accountable, the current data continues to show increasing prevalence of sexual assault and unwanted sexual conduct, primarily for female service members aged 17 to 24. These findings echo reports this year of increases in the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault at the Military Service Academies.**

**92. Do you believe the policies, programs, and resources that the Department of Defense has put in place to prevent and respond to sexual assault, and to protect service members who report sexual assault from retaliation, are working? If not, what else must be done?**

The health and safety of every Service member is a command responsibility, and no one should have to fear sexual assault or sexual harassment as part of their service to this country. Further, no one should have to fear retaliation for reporting these crimes. I understand that reducing the prevalence of sexual assault is a priority, and if confirmed I will prioritize prevention efforts that aim to reduce sexual assault and ensure Service members have access to the robust resources and programs in the Department to prevent and respond to sexual assault. If confirmed, I will ensure that victims of sexual assault receive support promptly and that alleged offenders are held appropriately accountable, consistent with all applicable legal and regulatory authorities.

**93. If confirmed, what specific role would you establish for yourself in preventing sexual harassment within SOUTHCOM, including within its civilian workforce?**

If confirmed, I understand that as the Commander, I am responsible for the health and welfare of the entirety of the SOUTHCOM team. I will ensure a culture of respect for service members and the civilian workforce exists based on the principals of good order and discipline and leader accountability. I will use all available resources and programs to reduce barriers for individuals reporting sexual harassment and foster prevention of additional harmful behaviors.

### **Relations with Congress**

**94. 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?**

If confirmed, I will prioritize maintaining a transparent, collaborative, and mutually beneficial relationship with Congress, particularly the congressional defense committees. My goal will be to foster trust and collaboration, ensuring Congress remains a key partner in advancing U.S. national security interests in the Western Hemisphere.

**Congressional Oversight**

**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.**

**95. 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.**

Yes.

**96. 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.**

Yes.

**97. 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.**

Yes.

**98. 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.**

Yes.

**99. 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.**

Yes.

**100. 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.**

Yes.

**101. 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.**

Yes.