

Stenographic Transcript  
Before the

COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

NOMINATIONS

Thursday, January 15, 2026

Washington, D.C.

ALDERSON COURT REPORTING  
1029 VERMONT AVE, NW  
10TH FLOOR  
WASHINGTON, DC 20005  
(202) 289-2260

1 TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATIONS OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL  
2 FRANCIS L. DONOVAN, USMC, TO BE GENERAL AND COMMANDER,  
3 UNITED STATES SOUTHERN COMMAND; AND LIEUTENANT GENERAL  
4 JOSHUA M. RUDD, USA, TO BE GENERAL AND DIRECTOR, NATIONAL  
5 SECURITY AGENCY/CHIEF, CENTRAL SECURITY SERVICE/COMMANDER,  
6 UNITED STATES CYBER COMMAND

7  
8 Thursday, January 15, 2026

9  
10 U.S. Senate

11 Committee on Armed Services

12 Washington, D.C.

13  
14 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m.,  
15 in Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Roger  
16 Wicker, chairman of the committee, presiding.

17 Committee Members Present: Senators Wicker, Fischer,  
18 Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Sullivan, Scott, Tuberville,  
19 Schmitt, Banks, Sheehy, Reed, Shaheen, Gillibrand,  
20 Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King, Warren, Duckworth, Rosen,  
21 Kelly, and Slotkin.

22

23

24

25

1           OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER WICKER, U.S. SENATOR  
2 FROM MISSISSIPPI

3           Chairman Wicker: The Committee will come to order.  
4 The Committee meets today to consider two nominations. We  
5 will speak with Lieutenant General Joshua Rudd, who has  
6 been nominated to be Commander of the United States Cyber  
7 Command, Director of the National Security Agency, and  
8 Commander of the Central Security Service. We will also  
9 consider the nomination of Lieutenant General Frank  
10 Donovan, to be the Commander of the United States Southern  
11 Command. I welcome our nominees and their families, and I  
12 would like to extend my gratitude for their continued  
13 willingness to serve our nation.

14           If confirmed, Lieutenant General Rudd will assume  
15 command of an organization that has been without a Senate-  
16 confirmed leader since April of last year. U.S. Cyber  
17 Command is our first and last line of defense in the cyber  
18 domain. It is largely invisible to the American people.  
19 But every day, men and women of Cyber Command defend the  
20 U.S. from attacks by our adversaries. This is not a  
21 theoretical threat. This is an ongoing fight, occurring  
22 right now, even as we speak.

23           Our adversaries intend to move against us in the cyber  
24 domain, and they are investing in technology that makes  
25 their aggression increasingly difficult to detect, to



1 defend against, and to deter. We see this challenge  
2 manifesting in the homeland, where our critical  
3 infrastructure remains vulnerable to sophisticated attacks.  
4 We see it globally, where there is still a great deal of  
5 work to do to posture Cyber Command for a fight in the  
6 Indo-Pacific. This is vital work, as General Caine made  
7 clear in public following the events in Venezuela. Our  
8 American cyber operators perform their job excellently and  
9 kept their fellow servicemembers safe.

10 I look forward to hearing from Lieutenant General Rudd  
11 about how his experiences will inform his plans for Cyber  
12 Command as he takes the helm during this critical time.

13 Lieutenant General Donovan has been nominated to serve  
14 as the Commander of U.S. Southern Command. His nomination  
15 comes as the region experiences a dramatic increase in  
16 operational tempo. The threats we face here are  
17 significant and close to home. South American cartels  
18 traffic drugs that kill more than 100,000 Americans  
19 annually. These networks are not only criminal enterprises  
20 but are sophisticated, well-armed actors that undermine  
21 regional stability, fuel violence, and directly harm public  
22 safety in American communities.

23 Three of our greatest adversaries -- Russia, China,  
24 and Iran -- are coordinating to counter U.S. commercial,  
25 political, and security interests in South America. They



1 are doing so under our noses. Together, they exploit  
2 corruption and they partner with authoritarian regimes in  
3 the Western Hemisphere, hoping to gain strategic economic  
4 success, intelligence footholds, and political leverage  
5 close to U.S. territory.

6 Across South America, the Chinese influence threatens  
7 U.S. interests by controlling critical infrastructure,  
8 telecommunications systems, and ports. China has used  
9 large-scale purchases of critical materials, such as  
10 copper, oil, and lithium, to deepen economic dependence and  
11 to limit U.S. access. China has also successfully  
12 persuaded multiple countries in the region to switch  
13 diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to the People's Republic  
14 of China. This would chip away at Taiwan's international  
15 standing.

16 Most troubling, China has expanded defense cooperation  
17 with arms sales, police training, and space and cyber  
18 partnerships, all to the detriment of our country.

19 Similarly, Russia has deepened security relations with  
20 authoritarian regimes in Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba.  
21 Putin is selling arms, providing military advisors, and  
22 expanding intelligence operation, all in exchange for  
23 permission to deploy Russian military aircraft and naval  
24 vessels in the region. Moscow has exploited local  
25 corruption to access the global financial system to evade



1 U.S. sanctions and to sustain its brutal campaign against  
2 the Ukrainian people.

3 Iran has long used Hezbollah and affiliated networks  
4 in parts of South Africa to help with fundraising, with  
5 money laundering, and with illicit trafficking. These  
6 moves help fuel their terrorism operations around the  
7 world.

8 So we have a lot to talk about today. It is clear our  
9 adversaries in South America represent a direct threat to  
10 our interests. It is time we restore U.S. primacy in our  
11 own neighborhood. I fully support the ongoing efforts of  
12 the Trump administration to pursue tougher counter-drug  
13 strategies. I commend our troops for carrying out an  
14 almost perfectly executed operation to capture Venezuelan  
15 President Nicolás Maduro and Cilia Flores, and to bring  
16 them to the United States to face justice for  
17 narcoterrorism and drug trafficking charges.

18 These actions send a clear signal to Russia, China,  
19 and Iran, and to the authoritarian regimes in South  
20 America, who give them a foothold in our hemisphere. The  
21 United States is ready, willing, and capable of protecting  
22 our interests, especially those closest to home.

23 And so I look forward to hearing from Lieutenant  
24 General Donovan about his plans to lead Southern Command  
25 and restoring American deterrence and ensuring we have the



1 right blend of military and economic effects across South  
2 America and the Caribbean.

3 With that I turn to my colleague, Ranking Member Reed.

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25



1           STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM RHODE  
2 ISLAND

3           Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and  
4 let me welcome General Donovan and General Rudd. Thank  
5 you, gentlemen, for your distinguished service to the  
6 nation. I also want to thank you for stepping forward to  
7 assume these very critical jobs at a very, very difficult  
8 moment. Also let me extend my appreciation to your  
9 families, who have been with you every step of the way, and  
10 will continue to support you in these difficult tasks.

11           I think we have to start first, though, with  
12 addressing the unusual conditions around your nominations.  
13 General Donovan, your predecessor, Admiral Alvin Holsey,  
14 served as Commander of SOUTHCOM for less than 1 year before  
15 his unexpected resignation last fall, amid the U.S.  
16 military buildup in the region. General Rudd, your  
17 predecessor, General Timothy Haugh, served as Commander of  
18 CYBERCOM for less than 2 years, before he was fired by  
19 President Trump for no apparent reason other than the  
20 reported urgings of a right-wing conspiracy theorist.

21           Indeed, in less than 1 year in office, President Trump  
22 and Secretary Hegseth have fired or pushed into early  
23 retirement more than dozen three- and four-star generals  
24 and admirals, in addition to hundreds, if not thousands, of  
25 military servicemembers who have been pushed out for

1 dubious reasons.

2 I would like to take a moment at this time to salute  
3 Admiral Holsey and General Haugh, who each served this  
4 nation honorably for three and a half decades and led their  
5 fellow sailors, soldiers, airmen, marines, and guardians  
6 with dedication and skill.

7 General Donovan, if confirmed as Commander of U.S.  
8 Southern Command, you will immediately be placed in a  
9 challenging situation. Over the past 6 months, the Trump  
10 administration has surged massive military force into the  
11 SOUTHCOM area of responsibility, including the USS Gerald  
12 R. Ford carrier strike group, the Iwo Jima amphibious ready  
13 group, the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit, attacks  
14 submarines, P-8 Poseidon aircraft, Aegis destroyers, and  
15 fleets of fighter aircraft, among many other platforms.

16 The administration claimed for months that the force  
17 was intended for its narco-trafficking boat strike campaign,  
18 which has killed 125 people in the Caribbean and Pacific.  
19 However, as my colleagues and I warned from the beginning,  
20 it appeared that the buildup was intended eventually for  
21 some expedition into Venezuela. That buildup culminated  
22 with the military raid in Caracas 2 weeks ago. The  
23 operation itself was perfectly executed, and a true  
24 testament to American military capability. Every American  
25 should be proud of our servicemembers and glad that Nicolás

1 Maduro, a brutal dictator who destroyed his country, is  
2 gone.

3 But military capability is not the same as strategic  
4 wisdom. The aftermath of this operation is still very  
5 uncertain and could have enormous impacts on the region and  
6 the United States. It is unclear if military attacks on  
7 narcotrafficking boats will continue or if the sole focus  
8 will now be on interdicting tankers carrying Venezuelan  
9 oil. There is also no clear answer on how long this  
10 enormous buildup of U.S. military assets will remain in the  
11 Caribbean.

12 Finally, I have seen no credible contingency plan for  
13 the possible collapse of the Venezuelan government and the  
14 violence and potential American military involvement that  
15 would follow such a collapse. General Donovan, if  
16 confirmed, you will lead American forces in this tenuous  
17 environment. I am interested in how you plan to approach  
18 the immediate issues facing SOUTHCOM.

19 In addition, SOUTHCOM has long faced resource  
20 constraints while contending with growing strategic  
21 competition from China and Russia, nations that have gained  
22 influence through investments in strategic locations  
23 throughout South America. SOUTHCOM now has an enormous set  
24 of resources, but they do not seem to be postured for  
25 threats from near-peer competitors. I would like to know



1 how you would intend to manage this influx of assets,  
2 whether you believe they remain available, and if you  
3 believe they should be postured to counter narcotrafficking  
4 or the growing influence from China and Russia in the  
5 region.

6 General Rudd, you are nominated to be Commander of  
7 Cyber Command and Director of the National Security Agency.  
8 I would note that the Committee has waited 9 months for  
9 your nomination and this hearing. The men and women of  
10 CYBERCOM and the NSA are the finest in the world at what  
11 they do, and I want to commend them for their commitment  
12 and performance, despite this uncertainty.

13 General, you have led a distinguished career as a  
14 Special Forces officer, and I thank you for that. However,  
15 your background does not include expertise in cyber  
16 operations or signals intelligence, areas that are  
17 essential to this dual command. If confirmed, you would  
18 lead at a critical moment as we evolve the cyber force  
19 under CYBERCOM 2.0, while entering a window of  
20 vulnerability with China. I would like to know what  
21 exposure you have had to cyber tools or signals  
22 intelligence during your time at SOCOM and INDOPACOM that  
23 have prepared you to lead the agency.

24 Finally, over the last decade there has been a  
25 recurring debate over whether to sustain the dual hat



1 arrangement whereby the commander of CYBERCOM also serves  
2 as the Director of the NSA. Independent expert panels and  
3 this Committee generally have concluded that the dual hat  
4 arrangement should be sustained. I would welcome your  
5 thoughts on this issue.

6 Again, gentleman, thank you for your service, your  
7 willingness to step forward. Throughout your careers you  
8 have demonstrated the character and the courage that is  
9 essential to leading, and I know you will continue to  
10 demonstrate that character and courage.

11 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Reed. Now,  
13 Lieutenant General Rudd, your opening statement, sir.

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25



1           STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL JOSHUA M. RUDD, USA,  
2 TO BE GENERAL AND DIRECTOR, NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY/CHIEF,  
3 CENTRAL SECURITY SERVICE/COMMANDER, UNITED STATES CYBER  
4 COMMAND

5           General Rudd: Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed,  
6 and distinguished members of the Committee, I am deeply  
7 honored and humbled to appear before you today as the  
8 nominee for Commander, U.S. Cyber Command, Director of the  
9 National Security Agency, Chief, Central Security service.  
10 I want to thank President Trump, Secretary Hegseth, the  
11 Chairman, and the Chief of Staff of the Army for the  
12 nomination and their trust in me to lead this critical role  
13 in our national security apparatus. I am also honored to  
14 be alongside my friend and fellow warrior leader,  
15 Lieutenant General Frank Donovan.

16           I am the grandson of members of the Greatest  
17 Generation. Both of my grandfathers served during World  
18 War II. I was raised by a single mother, who I know is  
19 watching today from South Carolina. My mother instilled  
20 the values of faith, family, strength, courage, and hard  
21 work, and it was an upbringing that planted the seeds which  
22 have led to a life of service and the relentless pursuit of  
23 excellence in everything that I do.

24           I commissioned in the Army through ROTC at Furman  
25 University, where I met my lovely bride Ansley. She has

1 been with me and supported me in this adventure since the  
2 beginning. Ansley, I am eternally grateful for your love,  
3 strength, and support over the last three and a half  
4 decades. You are, and always have been, the rock upon  
5 which our family finds stability and resilience.

6 Our two daughters, Hayden and Hollis, are also here  
7 with us today. Hayden is a Congressional Fellow with the  
8 Senate Committee for Commerce, Science, and Transportation,  
9 and Hollis is here from Texas, where she is a business  
10 professional working for a company that provides support to  
11 our servicemembers, families, and veterans. Thank you both  
12 for all the sacrifices you have made over the course of  
13 your upbringing. You both inspire me to continue to serve  
14 and defend our American way of life.

15 I would also like to recognize the selfless men and  
16 women I have served with throughout my career, both  
17 uniformed and civilian, and of course, an incredible Non-  
18 Commissioned Officer Corps. Most importantly, I would like  
19 to remember the many who have made the ultimate sacrifice  
20 for our great nation.

21 My journey as an Army officer started as a logistician,  
22 and as a captain I transitioned to Special Forces. When  
23 people learn of this, many remark, "What an unlikely  
24 beginning to a career such as yours." Unconventional.  
25 Yes, unconventional in many ways. However, it is this



1 nontraditional path that has led to a rich experience as a  
2 joint warfighter at the forefront of our nation's most  
3 challenging problems. This includes command of joint,  
4 combined, and interagency teams at various echelons, in  
5 peacetime and in conflict, preventing attacks against our  
6 homeland, and delivering effects against our nation's  
7 adversaries in all domains.

8 For decades, I have had the opportunity to be a  
9 leader, consumer, enabler, generator, and integrator of the  
10 intelligence and operational capabilities of NSA and Cyber  
11 Command. For the past 6 years, I have served in a variety  
12 of positions in the Indo-Pacific, where we are focused on  
13 defense of the homeland, deterring adversaries, and  
14 strengthening alliances and partnerships in the region. We  
15 do this through delivering combat credible capabilities in  
16 all domains, and this certainly includes the cyber domain.  
17 If confirmed, I am prepared to lead these organizations as  
18 an integrated and essential team to rapidly deliver options  
19 and solutions to our nation's toughest security challenges,  
20 at this critical time in our history.

21 Thank you for the privilege of appearing before you  
22 today. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you,  
23 and I look forward to your questions today.

24 [The prepared statement of General Rudd follows:]

25

1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Lieutenant  
2 General. Now, Lieutenant General Donovan, you are  
3 recognized for your opening statement.

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25



1           STATEMENT OF LIEUTENANT GENERAL FRANCIS L. DONOVAN,  
2 USMC, TO BE GENERAL AND COMMANDER, UNITED STATES SOUTHERN  
3 COMMAND

4           General Donovan: Good morning, Chairman Wicker,  
5 Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished members of this  
6 Committee. It is a true honor to appear before you today  
7 as the nominee to be the next Commander of U.S. Southern  
8 Command. I am grateful to the President, Secretary, the  
9 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Commandant  
10 of the Marine Corps for their trust and confidence in me  
11 for this nomination. I am privileged to be alongside  
12 Lieutenant General Josh Rudd, a friend and teammate for  
13 many years.

14           I will start by recognizing Admiral Alvin Holsey and  
15 his wife Doctor Stephanie Holsey, for their 37 years of  
16 selfless service. I also want to recognize Lieutenant  
17 General Evan Pettus, who is currently leading U.S. Southern  
18 Command.

19           Joining me today is Kim, my wife and best friend for  
20 over 32 years. We met on the island of Crete in 1992,  
21 where we were both assigned to a small naval installation.  
22 Service to our nation is in Kim's blood. She was raised in  
23 a Navy family where her father, a career Navy Chaplain,  
24 served across the globe, including tours in Korea and  
25 Vietnam, during which he was awarded a Purple Heart. A

1 former Naval Officer, Kim's path of service makes her a  
2 passionate advocate for our military servicemembers and  
3 their families.

4 Also with us today is our daughter, Sergeant Margaret  
5 Donovan, serving at the Marine Corps' Special Operations  
6 Command. Our son, First Lieutenant Brendan Donovan, an  
7 Infantry Officer serving on the West Coast, could not be  
8 here today. He is attending a training course to become a  
9 Reconnaissance Marine. Also not with us today is our  
10 daughter-in-law, First Lieutenant Holly Beske, who is in  
11 her final weeks of flight school. Kim and I are incredibly  
12 proud of Maggie, Brendan, and Holly as they have not sought  
13 the easier way, but the path less traveled by the Few and  
14 the Proud.

15 I will take this opportunity to thank my parents,  
16 Frank and Martha Donovan, for their example of faith,  
17 family, and service. Enlisting at 17, my father served for  
18 40 years in the Navy, retiring as a Vice Admiral. He and  
19 my mother raised 8 children and had 29 grandchildren.  
20 Their legacy of service lives on today with 23 of our  
21 family members having served or currently serving in the  
22 U.S. military.

23 In addition to my parents' example, I have been  
24 profoundly impacted by the dedication, professionalism,  
25 courage, and grit of the Joint Service members I have



1 served with in every clime and place -- in peace and at  
2 war. Their selfless example, and more specifically, the  
3 actions and examples of the noncommissioned officers and  
4 the senior enlisted leaders I have served alongside, have  
5 shaped my approach to leadership, duty, and responsibility.

6 Over the past 37 years, I have operated in every  
7 geographic combatant command and had the honor to lead  
8 Marine Corps, Navy, Joint, and Special Operations forces  
9 across the spectrum of armed conflict, from clandestine  
10 operations to high-intensity combat on land, air, and sea.  
11 Most of these operations were conducted shoulder-to-  
12 shoulder with allies and partners.

13 Serving as the Vice Commander of U.S. Special  
14 Operations Command, I have developed budgeting, resourcing,  
15 and audit skills, challenged and accelerated my vision of  
16 autonomous warfare, and developed close interagency and  
17 diplomatic relationships. It is with this foundation that  
18 I approach U.S. Southern Command.

19 If confirmed, I am fully committed to leading a  
20 warfighting headquarters capable of joint operations at  
21 range, speed, and scale. I will collaborate closely with  
22 regional allies and partners, fellow combatant commanders,  
23 and the Joint Staff to protect America's vital national  
24 interests, deter war, and if necessary, win them quickly  
25 and decisively.

1           If confirmed, I will provide the Secretary and  
2 President candid and clear military advice, and I commit to  
3 remaining fully transparent with this Committee.

4           I look forward to your questions today. Thank you.

5           [The prepared statement of General Donovan follows:]

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25



1 Chairman Wicker: And thank you, General. I  
2 appreciate your testimony on the part of both of you.

3 I will now ask you both a series of standard questions  
4 this Committee poses to all military nominees. And we have  
5 found it is best if we just have a simple yes or no as your  
6 response.

7 To exercise its legislative and oversight  
8 responsibilities, it is important that this Committee and  
9 other appropriate committees of the Congress be able to  
10 receive testimony, briefings, and other communications of  
11 information. Have you adhered to applicable laws and  
12 regulations governing conflicts of interest?

13 General Donovan: Yes.

14 General Rudd: Yes.

15 Chairman Wicker: Do you agree, when asked, to give  
16 your personal views, even if those views differ from the  
17 Administration in power?

18 General Donovan: Yes.

19 General Rudd: Yes.

20 Chairman Wicker: Have you assumed any duties or  
21 undertaken any actions which would appear to presume the  
22 outcomes of the nomination process?

23 General Donovan: No.

24 General Rudd: No.

25 Chairman Wicker: Will you ensure your staff complies



1 with deadlines established for requested communications,  
2 including questions for the record in hearings?

3 General Donovan: Yes.

4 General Rudd: Yes.

5 Chairman Wicker: Will you cooperate in providing  
6 witnesses and briefers in response to congressional  
7 requests?

8 General Donovan: Yes.

9 General Rudd: Yes.

10 Chairman Wicker: Will those witnesses be protected  
11 from reprisal for their testimony or briefings?

12 General Donovan: Yes.

13 General Rudd: Yes.

14 Chairman Wicker: Did you agree, if confirmed, to  
15 appear and testify, upon request, for this Committee?

16 General Donovan: Yes.

17 General Rudd: Yes.

18 Chairman Wicker: Do you agree to provide documents,  
19 including copies of electronic forms of communication, in a  
20 timely manner when requested by a duly constituted  
21 committee, or to consult with the committee regarding the  
22 basis for any good faith delay or denial in providing such  
23 documents?

24 General Donovan: Yes.

25 General Rudd: Yes.



1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. And now we  
2 will recognize each member of the Committee who chooses to  
3 question you for some 5 minutes.

4 Let me begin by a quick yes-or-no question that we  
5 have been asking for some time now of nominees. And I ask  
6 this because we are having some problems with  
7 implementation of last year's reconciliation bill. Do you  
8 commit, General Donovan, to follow the Congress' spending  
9 recommendations of defense reconciliation unequivocally?

10 General Donovan: Yes.

11 Chairman Wicker: And General Rudd?

12 General Rudd: Yes, Senator.

13 Chairman Wicker: All right. And then let me turn to  
14 you first, General Donovan. We know what has happened in  
15 Venezuela. We referred to that in our opening statements  
16 from the dais. We know the Maduro regime was corrupt. It  
17 was an illegitimate narco government dictatorship. He has  
18 been removed now. So where does that leave you and  
19 SOUTHCOM, should you be confirmed, to limit the adversarial  
20 powers so close to home and to reduce the supply of drugs,  
21 and what strategic options are now open to you since we  
22 have a Venezuelan government that is cooperating with us,  
23 to an extent?

24 General Donovan: Senator, in my current role as Vice  
25 Commander of U.S. Special Operations I am not connected to



1 any current planning operations or future planning in  
2 Southern Command. If confirmed, however, I will be fully  
3 involved in that process, and my responsibility would be to  
4 provide the planning and staff processes at SOUTHCOM  
5 headquarters to create the best military options to present  
6 to the Secretary.

7 Chairman Wicker: Well, okay, but do you have any  
8 ideas about to what extent or in what way you will be  
9 involved?

10 General Donovan: Senator, again, if confirmed, my  
11 responsibility is that everything that happens in Southern  
12 Command is my responsibility inside the AOR. So with that  
13 I would be responsible for developing the planning process  
14 that includes not only the core staff at the headquarters  
15 but all the subordinate commands, the interagency and other  
16 plays, including allies and partners, again to create those  
17 best plans, best military advice to provide the Chairman  
18 and the Secretary.

19 Chairman Wicker: Okay. Well, perhaps you could  
20 expound on this on the record as to what strategic options  
21 you will have. I appreciate that.

22 General Rudd, let's talk dual hat. We spoke about  
23 that in our opening statements up here, and here at this  
24 dual hat responsibility at a critical time. What are your  
25 views about the unique advantages and what national



1 security impact would you expect to see if somehow changes  
2 were made to this dual hat arrangement?

3 General Rudd: Chairman, I think what I have seen from  
4 the perspective of USINDOPACOM and really throughout my  
5 career since that arrangement has been in place is the  
6 effects of unity of command and unity of effort across two  
7 different organizations that I believe and understand, and  
8 what I have seen from, again, a consumer of those  
9 capabilities, is an effectiveness that fosters integration  
10 and speed. And I think that the current strategic  
11 environment that we are in definitely requires speed,  
12 agility, integration of all of our capabilities, not just  
13 of those two organizations but across the Joint Force and  
14 across all domains.

15 And I know there is recently an independent study that  
16 looked at that, continues to look at that. I think, if  
17 confirmed, my responsibility is to remain objective about  
18 that relationship, assess continuously if that is the most  
19 effective way to lead those two organizations.

20 Chairman Wicker: I think you will find there is a  
21 great deal of support up here on this Committee for that  
22 dual hat responsibility.

23 Let me see if I can get one more question. Last  
24 year's Working Families Tax Relief bill provided \$1 billion  
25 for offensive cyber operations, reflecting recognition of



1 the strategic importance of these capabilities. Based on  
2 what you have seen -- you have not taken office in this  
3 position yet -- but do you think Cyber Command, based on  
4 legislation that has been passed and money that has been  
5 allocated, is optimized to support the Commander of  
6 INDOPACOM?

7 General Rudd: Chairman, USINDOPACOM has an incredible  
8 relationship with U.S. Cyber Command, and we work  
9 tirelessly to ensure that those capabilities of U.S. Cyber  
10 Command are fully integrated into all domains, both  
11 kinetic, non-kinetic integration of capabilities. And that  
12 is something that we exercise every day, and we certainly  
13 look at ways to improve in every one of our exercises.

14 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. Senator Reed.

15 Senator Reed: Well, thank you very much, Mr.  
16 Chairman, and gentleman, let me thank you for your  
17 extraordinary service. You have both been at the tip of  
18 the spear for three decades or more. Thank you very, very  
19 much.

20 General Donovan, the 2025 NSS, the Security Strategy,  
21 calls on the military to readjust its global military  
22 presence to address urgent threats in our hemisphere. Is  
23 SOUTHCOM, in your view, resourced for such a significant  
24 shift of foreign policy?

25 General Donovan: Ranking Member Reed, my view, how I



1 think about that again, not confirmed, but if confirmed, if  
2 I was in Southern Command, I would look at the assets that  
3 are currently deployed in theater for the current task at  
4 hand, lay that on top of the great work that Southern  
5 Command is known for, which is security cooperation, and in  
6 that, is that enough to address what we believe in the  
7 United States with the Western Hemisphere as a priority  
8 region now. Is that enough to achieve the objectives in  
9 the NSS? I can't speak on that until I am in position, if  
10 confirmed, Senator, to understand the challenges and  
11 opportunities of maintaining a current posture, but also  
12 being very aware that there are global requirements for the  
13 Joint Force. And I pledge, if confirmed, to continue to  
14 work with the Joint Staff to ensure that SOUTHCOM would  
15 have the assets and resources it needs to achieve the  
16 objectives, as envisions in the NSS, Senator.

17 Chairman Wicker: Can I interject? It is okay were  
18 you two gentlemen to tell us how you feel. We realize that  
19 you have not been confirmed yet. But so far we really have  
20 not received any answers about how you feel about the  
21 responsibilities you are about to take in. It is okay to  
22 tell us, and actually it would be helpful.

23 Senator Reed: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, very much.  
24 Please, go ahead, General Donovan.

25 General Donovan: Ranking Member Reed, I will tell you



1 that understanding the layout of resources now, not in  
2 theater, not understanding what is on hand and what is  
3 going to remain in theater, is how I answer that question.

4 Senator Reed: So you do not have any indication of  
5 how long these forces will spend in the Caribbean region?  
6 You have no indication from either the Chairman --

7 General Donovan: No, Senator, I do not.

8 Senator Reed: Thank you. You just said, in response  
9 to Chairman Wicker, that everything that happens in my AOR  
10 is my responsibility. There is likely, at least it seems  
11 this way, that there will be continued boat strikes by  
12 military personnel against these high-speed boats, small  
13 boats. There are quite controversial, from a legal  
14 standpoint and also from an operational standpoint.

15 Will you review every one of these strikes, in fact,  
16 look back at the previous strikes, with the advice of  
17 counsel, your JAG, to ensure that they have all been  
18 conducted legally?

19 General Donovan: Ranking Member Reed, my  
20 responsibility tool will be to execute a planning process  
21 that brings the whole of the staff together at each one of  
22 these operations, to include legal advisors, to understand  
23 the mission at hand, organize the force appropriately, and  
24 then execute the mission as required. So yes, I have that  
25 responsibility and will continue to lead the staff to



1 ensure that all those operations are executed within the  
2 laws of armed conflict.

3         Senator Reed: Thank you. General Rudd, in your  
4 Advanced Policy Questions you indicated, quote, "The  
5 command and control model must balance tactical agility  
6 with strategic oversight," which I can agree with. But we  
7 have a problem sometimes of paralysis by analysis. I think  
8 that is what you were referring to. But we also have  
9 problems sometimes with sacrificing due diligence and  
10 scientific inquiry for speed. It is a great balance. Can  
11 you indicate how you propose to make that balance?

12         General Rudd: Ranking Member, the word that really  
13 jumps out at me in your question is "speed," and again, I  
14 think if we think about the strategic environment that we  
15 currently face, the element of speed is absolutely  
16 essential, and making sure that this organizations, both of  
17 those organizations, are able to deliver options and  
18 effects quickly in support of the combatant commanders  
19 and/or decision-makers.

20         So certainly there has to be due diligence and  
21 responsibility in the execution of duties at a rapid pace,  
22 always something that a commander assesses in terms of  
23 risk, deep analysis, consultation with the experts.  
24 Especially in this regard, CYBERCOM and NSA both have  
25 unbelievably talented and deeply technical expertise in



1 their capabilities and responsibilities, and I think that  
2 is a constant balance, certainly a responsibility for every  
3 combatant commander. And Ranking Member, if confirmed, I  
4 pledge to continue to do that due diligence and ensure that  
5 we move --

6 Senator Reed: Thank you. I would just like to make  
7 one more comment. One way to accelerate is to anticipate,  
8 and that requires getting together with all of your staffs  
9 and looking ahead at the latest intelligence, as you well  
10 know, and what the treat will be, not next week or the  
11 following week but into the future. But thank you very  
12 much, sir.

13 General Rudd: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Reed. Senator  
15 Fischer.

16 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank  
17 both of you today for the service that you have already  
18 given to this country and your willingness to step forward  
19 in these new positions. My thanks also to your families  
20 for their service and sacrifice that they have done for  
21 many, many years, as well, to this country.

22 General Rudd, how has your experience as a consumer of  
23 intelligence and operational capabilities of NSA and  
24 CYBERCOM informed your understanding of the value of cyber  
25 effects to help shape that battle space?



1           General Rudd:  Senator, the reliance upon signals  
2 intelligence and cyber capabilities are absolutely  
3 indispensable to our warfighters.  In my role at INDOPACOM  
4 we look at it every day.  We operationalize it, we  
5 integrate it, and we factor it into every one of our  
6 decisions.  And it enhances the way that we are able to  
7 collectively, across the Joint Force and in all domain,  
8 generate the options that continue to deliver deterrence.  
9 And if you go further back in my background, certainly that  
10 holds true, different theaters, different problem sets, but  
11 that has been a continuous theme throughout my career.

12           Senator Fischer:  And when you talk about the Joint  
13 Force, how would you prioritize deepening CYBERCOM's  
14 relationships with the other combatant commands?  And from  
15 what you understand now in the position you are nominated  
16 for, do you believe that it has the resources that you  
17 would need in order to accomplish that?

18           General Rudd:  Senator, the relationships across the  
19 combatant commands are indispensable.  And again, we foster  
20 it every day through our operations, we enhance it through  
21 our exercises and experimentation, and there is constant  
22 communication.  And I think it certainly the underpinning  
23 of how we deliver the unbelievable capability that we have  
24 to bring to bear on these problem sets most effectively.  
25 And certainly if confirmed, that is something that I would



1 prioritize, is continuing to build and enhance those  
2 relationships, Senator.

3 Senator Fischer: General Rudd, when we look at the  
4 tools with AI, and how they are continuing to evolve, I  
5 expect we are going to see it more integrated in both  
6 CYBERCOM as well as our adversaries are going to be  
7 integrating AI into their weapons and the tools that they  
8 use. And although we will not be able to into much detail  
9 in this setting we are in now, we have already seen some  
10 public reports about adversaries using AI to target U.S.  
11 companies.

12 You are in INDOPACOM, and INDOPACOM has been an early  
13 adopter of AI technologies. So what have been the impacts  
14 of that adoption, and what lessons from that experience do  
15 you expect to carry forward to CYBERCOM if you are  
16 confirmed to that position?

17 General Rudd: Yes, Senator. As you highlight, we  
18 really have put a concentrated effort at USINDOPACOM, and I  
19 know CYBERCOM is, as well. I also, what I understand is  
20 this Committee has been very supportive of making sure that  
21 both CYBERCOM and the rest of the Joint Force has  
22 resourcing and prioritization of that critical capability.

23 Senator Fischer: As you have seen the option of those  
24 capabilities in PACOM, has it been easy? Has it been  
25 seamless? Are there bumps in the road? Tell me about the



1 adoption of them, what you anticipate to see in CYBERCOM.

2 General Rudd: Yes, Senator. I think the adoption of  
3 technology and capabilities varies based on individual  
4 user, but really, it is about leadership and  
5 prioritization. And in the case of AI, I think it is a  
6 capability that has to be understood, has to be broadly  
7 transmitted across the workforce. Leaders have to  
8 prioritize it, and certainly we are. Again, I am confident  
9 that CYBERCOM is doing it the same way that INDOPACOM is.  
10 We are learning a lot, we are learning fast, and we will  
11 continue to do that.

12 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

13 General Rudd: And if confirmed, Senator, that is what  
14 I bring to SOUTHCOM.

15 Senator Fischer: Thank you. And then a quick  
16 question to General Donovan. We talked about the mil-to-  
17 mil relationships and the strength of those relationships  
18 that are in SOUTHCOM right now. Can you give me a quick  
19 example on what you would do to try to deepen those  
20 relationships?

21 General Donovan: Senator, I would build on, if  
22 confirmed, build on the great work that Southern Command  
23 has always been known for, and look for ways to expand  
24 those to increase regional security and partners that can  
25 help carry the burden, Senator.



1 Senator Fischer: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

2 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Senator  
3 Shaheen.

4 Senator Shaheen: Good morning. Congratulations to  
5 both of you on your nominations, and thank you to you and  
6 your families for your willingness to continue to serve.

7 Lieutenant General Donovan, historically USAID  
8 programs and State Department-funded support have been  
9 critical in SOUTHCOM because, as we know on this Committee,  
10 we have most often, in the past, had a low force presence  
11 in the region, and we have used soft power to combat  
12 Chinese and Russian and other adversarial influences there.

13 In fiscal year 2024, USAID provided \$1.3 billion in  
14 humanitarian assistance in SOUTHCOM's area of  
15 responsibility. In fiscal year 2025, that number dropped  
16 to only \$127.5 million. So as you think about this  
17 challenge, how do you address the need for soft power in  
18 the region without having the previous available support to  
19 do that?

20 General Donovan: Senator, thank you for that, and I  
21 have been thinking quite a bit about that, because  
22 throughout my 37 years of service always have been assured,  
23 and many locations aligned with, supporting, at time, but  
24 always working closely with the Chief of Mission, the  
25 elements of the Department of State. So it is ingrained in



1 what we do, both as Marines and as a soft leader.

2 I am concerned about any drops in any of the tools  
3 that would be available to a combatant commander to address  
4 a range of issues, and the idea of soft power, to ensuring  
5 that, if confirmed, on the ground, I can take a look at the  
6 requirements, specifically if made a priority effort in the  
7 NSS, it needs to be matched by a priority effort in all the  
8 resources available, specifically with those allies and  
9 partners to be used in ways we have used so successfully in  
10 the past.

11 So I pledge to look into any decrements, Senator, and  
12 find ways to cover gaps and ask for more resources.

13 Senator Shaheen: Well, thank you. As you are  
14 thinking down the road, what does success look like in  
15 SOUTHCOM, in the next, say, 3 to 5 years?

16 General Rudd: Success looks at a safe and secure  
17 homeland, and SOUTHCOM's connection to NORTHCOM to provide  
18 that buffer that protects our homeland. But at the same  
19 time, regional partners build so they can handle regional  
20 problems and share those burdens, Senator.

21 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. Lieutenant General Rudd,  
22 CYBERCOM, as we discussed when you came to see me, plays a  
23 critical role in disrupting foreign adversarial cyber  
24 threats to the United States. Traditionally, the CYBERCOM  
25 commander sits on the Interagency Election Security Group

1 in coordination with the Department of Homeland Security  
2 and other interagency partners. Now, the Office of the  
3 Director of National Intelligence's annual threat  
4 assessments from 2023, 2024, and 2025, all said that Russia  
5 and China both view election interference as opportunities  
6 to advance their malign influence operations and to sow  
7 domestic discord.

8 So with elections coming up this year, as you can  
9 imagine election security is critical in America. So if  
10 confirmed, how will you priority CYBERCOM's work with the  
11 Interagency Election Security Group?

12 General Rudd: Senator, any foreign attempt to  
13 undermine the American process of democracy, and at the  
14 center of that is our electoral process, as you all know  
15 far better than I do, has got to be safeguarded. It is  
16 absolutely a fundamental priority for the nation, and as  
17 you described, there is an interagency process and members  
18 that do that. I would hope that, if confirmed, my  
19 experience with interagency collaboration and integration  
20 will play a useful role in that. And certain, again, I do  
21 not know what role CYBERCOM is currently planned to do in  
22 the future elections. I know it has had a critical role in  
23 the past. And if confirmed, I would continue to prioritize  
24 that, as directed.

25 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. Lieutenant General



1 Donovan, when we visited in my office, one of the things we  
2 talked about is the challenge of the expanded operations in  
3 SOUTHCOM and what that means for the mission requirements,  
4 for personnel, for the foundation to support that expanded  
5 mission. Can you talk a little bit about how you view that  
6 and what you think we need to do in order to ensure that we  
7 have the support that is needed for the buildup there?

8 General Donovan: Senator, thank you, and thank you  
9 for that conversation in the office. You are going to hear  
10 from a Marine and a Special Operations leader that it is  
11 all about logistics, and the logistics foundation is to  
12 maintain the capabilities you have so you can offer  
13 additional mission sets in the future.

14 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Scott.

16 Senator Scott: Well, first off, congratulations on  
17 your nominations. Thank you for your service. Thank you  
18 for your families who have supported you through all of  
19 this.

20 I am from Florida. In Florida we have a big Cuban  
21 population, Venezuelan population, Nicaraguan. What  
22 happened with Maduro unbelievably energized our state. For  
23 the first time, they are optimistic that they are going to  
24 see democracy and freedom throughout Latin America, not  
25 just in Venezuela but in Cuba, in Nicaragua, and hopefully



1 they will get a new president in Colombia. So I want to  
2 thank President Trump for the decisive action he took, but  
3 I really want to thank the military, because it was  
4 flawless. What you guys accomplished, we were able to get  
5 a classified briefing, and what Raising Caine did, and how  
6 explained the action, was unbelievable. So  
7 congratulations, all of you, and hopefully any service men  
8 or women you talk to, just tell them I think on behalf of  
9 everybody up here, thank you for what they did.

10 General Donovan, as the nominee to lead SOUTHCOM, what  
11 do you think our enemies learned from the President's  
12 decisive action and our military success in Venezuela?  
13 What do you think dictators like Putin and Xi thought when  
14 they saw the flawless execution by our military?

15 General Donovan: Senator, thank you for the time in  
16 your office. Obviously, I have not seen any of the details  
17 or intel analysis of what they are thinking, from an intel  
18 perspective. But, Senator, I have to believe they would be  
19 very wary of the U.S. military, the precision execution,  
20 at-range speed and scale was phenomenal, and it is what we  
21 bring to the fight across the globe. So I hope they are  
22 paying attention, Senator.

23 Senator Scott: General Donovan, what do you believe  
24 the Communist regime in Cuba, do you believe they are a  
25 threat to the United States national security?



1           General Donovan:  Senator, I think that regime has  
2 always been a threat to U.S. national security, and if  
3 confirmed, I intend to get to SOUTHCOM headquarters to  
4 determine the status of that threat and provide military  
5 options, if asked.

6           Senator Scott:  When we met we talked about Homestead.  
7 Can you talk about the importance of Homestead, from a  
8 position standpoint, and from a power projection  
9 standpoint, and what you think we should be doing with  
10 Homestead, going forward?

11          General Donovan:  Senator, first of all, Homestead is  
12 a key location for us in USSOCOM, for a number of reasons.  
13 But as I look at, again, if confirmed, and the opportunity  
14 to lead SOUTHCOM, you need as many options on the table as  
15 possible.  And if you look at Homestead, where it is  
16 located, could that be a location for high-wing, long-  
17 endurance UAS platforms?  Could it be additional ISR  
18 platforms, autonomous systems that could really increase  
19 our domain awareness across the whole theater?  I think  
20 Homestead is in a key location.  We want as many options on  
21 the table, Senator.

22          Senator Scott:  Well again, congratulations to both of  
23 you.  You are well qualified to do this, and I am sure you  
24 are both going to do a great job.

25          Chairman Wicker:  Senator Scott, you publicly gave



1 President Maduro some advice several days before the action  
2 of the United States, and I am just guessing that he wishes  
3 at this point that he had listened more carefully.

4 Senator Hirono.

5 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you  
6 both, you and your families, for your service.

7 I want to make clear about what is happening right now  
8 from my perspective. The Trump regime is executing a  
9 diversion campaign from the real challenges that face the  
10 people of our country. The military operation in Venezuela  
11 is yet another example of how the U.S. military can  
12 successfully execute a complicated, a complex operation.  
13 That is not an issue. That is not a subject of debate.

14 What is up for debate are the decisions surrounding  
15 this operation, its legality, whether it was worth risking  
16 American lives, and if there is a plan for what happens  
17 next. Recent polling shows that the majority of Americans  
18 are concerned that the U.S. will become too involved in  
19 Venezuela. We need to be focusing on hard questions about  
20 the future of Venezuela and the scope of the U.S.  
21 engagement moving forward.

22 But while the Trump administration, Trump regime, pats  
23 itself on the back, they are refusing to tell the American  
24 people and Congress about what comes next. Instead,  
25 President Trump boasted the U.S. will be running Venezuela

1 for years, but it is not clear who will do that running.  
2 This regime is writing the script as they go along, but  
3 this is not a Saturday Night Life skit. This is real life.

4 In the midst of an affordability crisis in our own  
5 country, this regime is focused on running Venezuela and  
6 debating which country to take over next. We are being  
7 asked to celebrate a foreign intervention that lacked a  
8 legal underpinning, as far as I am concerned, or a clear  
9 exit strategy.

10 Congress, the American people, and our allies and  
11 partners are left with more questions than answers. We  
12 need a President who respect the Constitution rather than  
13 relying on politicized legal opinions and his morality, as  
14 he puts it. Without accountability, a long-term strategy  
15 and transparency of the Trump regime is failing the  
16 American people.

17 Let me get to my questions. I ask the initial two  
18 questions of all nominees before any of the committees on  
19 which I sit, so I will ask the two initial questions that  
20 go to fitness to serve. And we will start with General  
21 Donovan.

22 Since you became a legal adult, have you ever made  
23 unwanted requests for sexual favors or committed any verbal  
24 or physical harassment or assault of a sexual nature?

25 General Donovan: No, Senator.



1 Senator Hirono: General Rudd?

2 General Rudd: No, Senator.

3 Senator Hirono: Have you ever faced discipline or  
4 entered into a settlement relating to this kind of conduct?

5 General Donovan: No, Senator.

6 General Rudd: No, Senator.

7 Senator Hirono: For General Donovan, SOUTHCOM has  
8 traditionally focused on security cooperation, counter-drug  
9 and disaster response, not high intensity combat. I am  
10 concerned that the nomination of general with your  
11 background signals the intention to expand high intensity  
12 or special operations in the region, without the right  
13 resources and institutional experience. For example,  
14 Watchdog reports say that SOUTHCOM civilian harm mitigation  
15 staff has been reduced from four personnel to a single  
16 contractor.

17 General Donovan, if confirmed, will you commit to  
18 fully implementing civilian harm mitigation policies, which  
19 is a very important, I would say, part of your assessment,  
20 before you engage in any operations? Would you agree?

21 General Donovan: Yes, Senator, I commit to that.

22 Senator Hirono: And will you request the resources  
23 that you need in order to do the assessment that I just  
24 referred to? And this is just one example of the resources  
25 that I have concerns about regarding SOUTHCOM.



1           General Donovan:  Yes, Senator.

2           Senator Hirono:  For General Rudd, you have unique  
3 insight into the threats posed by China from your position  
4 at INDOPACOM, and I thank you for your service in  
5 INDOPACOM.  But countering China's cyber threats demands  
6 strong technical leadership at the top.  CYBERCOM's  
7 advantage has also been intelligence sharing with allies.  
8 It is very concerning that President Trump has withdrawn  
9 the U.S. from many international organizations focused on  
10 cyber coordination and deterrence.

11           The cyber domain remains a vulnerable area that  
12 demands deep technical expertise and international  
13 coordination.  Without this access to the kind of  
14 international coordination that Trump has taken us out of,  
15 without the kind of expertise that I would expect someone  
16 who will be taking over CYBERCOM to have, how will you  
17 address these challenges?

18           General Rudd:  Senator, as you know very well, at  
19 INDOPACOM allies and partners are absolutely critical to  
20 our approach.  That will continue, and that is a critical  
21 part of all of our combatant commands.  Senator, if  
22 confirmed, I would continue to take it and deepen those  
23 relationships.  And to the point about the technical  
24 aspects of the job, I am confident that the incredible  
25 talent at CYBERCOM and NSA will provide great advice, and I



1 am confident that if confirmed, I can continue to lead and  
2 enable those two organizations to provide the best support  
3 to our combatant commanders and the Joint Force writ later.

4 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Hirono. Senator  
5 Tuberville.

6 Senator Tuberville: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good  
7 morning. Thanks for your service, guys. Thanks for having  
8 your families here, and some of their, obviously, service.

9 Lieutenant Donovan, General, I appreciate you may not  
10 have the opportunity to spend a significant amount of time  
11 at your new headquarters, but I have been there several  
12 times. It strikes me that while the current facility is  
13 not good for Southern Command's previous focus, theater  
14 security cooperation, I think the next commander will need  
15 to evolve the facilities and staff to operate as a more  
16 traditional command, especially given President Trump's  
17 stated desire to focus more on our own hemisphere.

18 What are your thoughts on that statement, and will you  
19 agree to evaluate your situation in terms of your  
20 headquarters once you get to Miami?

21 General Donovan: Senator, thank you for that. I have  
22 been thinking a lot about that. I am going to have to  
23 credit the SOUTHCOM team that have done great work, as you  
24 mentioned, Senator, on the security cooperation. They are  
25 known for that, allies and partners, building that



1 partnership capacity and capability. The NSS directs us to  
2 enhance that, now into kind of full spectrum capabilities  
3 to offer the best military solutions or advice to the  
4 Secretary and the President. So the assessment will  
5 include all those things you mentioned, Senator, and we  
6 will do that very quickly.

7 Senator Tuberville: Thank you. Being a football  
8 coach for 30 years, I dealt with a lot of young people, and  
9 I saw the influx of drugs in our country really increase  
10 the last 10 or 15 years. But now that are taking forcible  
11 action in your command, in our state of Alabama I have seen  
12 and heard from our law enforcement officers that we have  
13 seen a decline in drugs. And I just want to make that  
14 statement, because if we do not do something, if we do not  
15 take a serious response to what they are doing in coming  
16 through the Caribbean, we are going to lose this  
17 generation. Because our streets are filled with drugs, and  
18 if we are closing our eyes to that then shame on us.

19 But I would hope that what you understand, you have  
20 got a family, you have seen your family grow up, and you  
21 have seen the streets. But I think moving to Miami and  
22 moving to Southern Command is going to be an eye-opening  
23 experience for you, in terms of kind of a different world  
24 from what a lot of us are in.

25 General Rudd, the NSA is likely our most powerful



1 intelligence agency. CYBERCOM's importance is becoming  
2 increasingly more important as it has become part of almost  
3 every operation we undertake. It is time to reevaluate  
4 that dual hat.

5 You know, I have heard some good arguments on both  
6 sides. What are your thoughts? And I know our Chairman  
7 has brought that up. What are your thoughts on the dual  
8 role?

9 General Rudd: Senator, again, from my experience of  
10 where I see that applied throughout my career, I think  
11 there is demonstration of effectiveness as well as  
12 efficiency. I would characterize effectiveness should  
13 always trump efficiency. But again, the principles of  
14 unity of command and then the ability for that individual  
15 to continue to harness and integrate the incredible  
16 capabilities of both of those organizations, I think is a  
17 component that enables that organization, both of those, to  
18 provide great support to our warfighters.

19 And again, Senator, if I am confirmed for this, I  
20 think my role is to be objective about that. As that comes  
21 up, or if it continues to come up as a topic, I will be  
22 objective. I will seek great insight from not only the two  
23 organizations but the customer as well, if you will, how  
24 does it work best, and provide my best advice.

25 Senator Tuberville: Yeah. There is more than one way



1 to skin a cat, you know, and we have got a lot of people  
2 doing dual roles. But this is going to be a very important  
3 position, both of these, obviously. My son is in cyber in  
4 the Defense Department, and it is the things I hear about  
5 what is coming up and the possibilities over the years in  
6 front of us, with this generation.

7 You know, I have got full confidence in you, but, you  
8 know, when we get you possibly back, after you are  
9 confirmed, we would love to get a good evaluation of what  
10 you think for the future of both of these commands.

11 Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Tuberville. And  
13 General Rudd, if you could move the microphone a little  
14 closer. Thank you so much.

15 Senator Blumenthal is next.

16 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank  
17 you both for being here and thank you for your very lengthy  
18 and distinguished records of service, and thank you to your  
19 families not only for their support but to your children,  
20 General Donovan, for their service in the Marine Corps.

21 General Donovan, the United States continues to have a  
22 massive military presence in the Caribbean, after the  
23 rendition of Nicolás Maduro. The purpose of having that  
24 presence there was supposedly to extricate him so as to  
25 bring him to justice. Now that it has been accomplished,



1 what is the purpose of maintaining that continuing massive  
2 presence in the Caribbean?

3 General Donovan: Senator, thank you for the time in  
4 your office and also sharing the stories of your children  
5 that have served honorably in this nation, so thank you for  
6 that.

7 Senator, from my perspective, how I think about that  
8 problem set or the opportunities of the buildup in the  
9 Caribbean or South America right now with those assets, I  
10 put the hat on, if confirmed, responsibly sustaining those  
11 assets over time. I know there will be a global demand, as  
12 they are, for those very high priority assets, like a  
13 carrier strike group or an amphibious ready group and a  
14 Marine Expeditionary Unit. They are needed all around the  
15 globe, and there is not enough of them.

16 So my number one thought, Senator, is to understand,  
17 again, can we sustain and maintain, if they stay, and if  
18 they are moved out for other reasons, how do we actually  
19 replace the capability, or move in different directions  
20 with that both hard and soft power approach to achieve the  
21 objectives outlined in the NSS, Senator.

22 Senator Blumenthal: It is not secret, General, that  
23 Americans are concerned that there may be the use of those  
24 assets either to once again put troops on the ground in  
25 Venezuela, albeit they were only briefly in the last time,



1 or in Cuba, or another country in SOUTHCOM. Are you aware  
2 of any plans to begin any strike using those assets or  
3 others?

4 General Donovan: Senator, I am not. In my current  
5 position in the Pentagon, working for U.S. Special  
6 Operations, I am not privy to those plans. But I commit to  
7 you, if confirmed, I will be fully involved in any future  
8 planning, Senator.

9 Senator Blumenthal: I am very concerned about the  
10 legal basis for both the strikes on boats that have killed  
11 more than 100 people, more than 20 of those boats that  
12 allegedly were carrying narcotics. I have reviewed both of  
13 the Office of Legal Counsel opinions. I find them totally  
14 lacking, in fact, almost a sham. One has been made public  
15 in redacted form, the other not at all. Would you support  
16 making those office of legal opinions public, as I believe  
17 the American people have a right and deserve to see them?

18 General Donovan: Senator, I understand the  
19 seriousness of that question. But I would have to defer to  
20 both policy and legal advisors at the Secretary's level to  
21 answer that question, Senator.

22 Senator Blumenthal: You and I talked a bit, in my  
23 office, about the energetic attempts by Russia and China to  
24 exploit the turmoil and confusion ongoing in SOUTHCOM. Can  
25 you share with this Committee a bit about your perspective

1 on Russia and China as threats to the United States in that  
2 area?

3 General Donovan: Senator, again, if confirmed, I  
4 intend to dive very deep into that topic set. But how I  
5 think about it, in my current position, is that I believe  
6 both of those actors would be wary of military competition,  
7 because they would be extended from their source of  
8 strength and power. I think what we look at is the future,  
9 potentially, is more on how do we align those soft aspects  
10 of power to be complemented by, when required, those harder  
11 aspects of military power to counter those threats, because  
12 they are right now currently, both of those threats are  
13 well engrained throughout the SOUTHCOM AOR, and we have to  
14 find ways to counter them even more successfully but use  
15 the advantage of the assets and capabilities in place now.  
16 But I do believe that most of the response or counter will  
17 come from the economic side, and using other levers to  
18 counter those intrusions, I should say, Senator.

19 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you very much. Thank you  
20 to both of you. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

21 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. Senator  
22 Rounds.

23 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me  
24 begin just by saying to both General Rudd and to General  
25 Donovan, thank you for your service to our nation. You

1 have both spent much of your career operating at the top of  
2 the spear and combatting in the gray space between peace  
3 and conflict. As you are considered for new roles with  
4 additional authority and responsibility, I appreciate your  
5 continuing willingness to serve our nation in this  
6 exceptionally complex threat environment, and I want to  
7 extend that same thank-you to your families for their  
8 service and their sacrifice, as well.

9 As I discussed with both of you in my office, I have  
10 heard from 56 senior DoD officials in hearings over the  
11 past 3 years, including the Secretary of Defense, the  
12 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, every service chief, and nine  
13 combatant commanders that vacating or sharing the 3.1 to  
14 3.45 GHz band of the electromagnetic spectrum would have an  
15 extremely detrimental impact on our warfighting  
16 capabilities, including homeland defense missions, force  
17 protection for our troops overseas, and strategic  
18 communications.

19 General Rudd and General Donovan, if confirmed, will  
20 you advocate for and defend the Department's equities that  
21 operate on or use those bands of the spectrum, including  
22 the radars that will make President Trump's Golden Dome  
23 function appropriately? A yes or a no would be  
24 appropriate.

25 General Donovan: Yes, Senator.



1           General Rudd:  Yes, Senator.

2           Senator Rounds:  Thank you.  Let me go to General Rudd  
3 specifically.  Senator Wicker asked you about the  
4 importance of the dual hat leadership arrangement, but I  
5 wanted to kind of follow up on that a little bit with you.  
6 As you understand it, how important would the dual hat be  
7 during a conflict with a near-peer adversary during which  
8 time CYBERCOM would be providing cyber fires to other  
9 commands such as INDOPACOM?

10          General Rudd:  Yes, Senator.  As we discussed in your  
11 office and then as I alluded to earlier and spoken about,  
12 the unity of effort that comes out of that current  
13 construct I think is really important to enabling the  
14 support of both those organizations to the warfighter, to  
15 continue at speed and provide agility.  Increasingly, we  
16 are looking at how we effectively integrate those  
17 capabilities across the other joint capabilities in both  
18 kinetic, non-kinetic scenarios, and look at that.  We do it  
19 on a daily basis, not kinetically, but certainly employ  
20 those on a daily basis.

21          So I think what we see at USINDOPACOM, it is a very  
22 effective construct.  But again, Senator, I think my role,  
23 if confirmed, is to continue to be objective about that.  
24 As it comes up for review and evaluation, it is to  
25 continuously assess that.



1           Senator Rounds: Yeah, and I think he has proven to be  
2 very, very productive in terms of both the speed and  
3 efficiency of making those deliveries of services back to  
4 that combatant command when you are sharing what might be  
5 an asset from one side of the coin to the other side of the  
6 coin, between these two entities. And so I appreciate your  
7 recognition of that in your current position, as well.

8           General Donovan, Section 1505 of the fiscal year 2024  
9 NDAA authorized cyber activity against Mexican  
10 transnational criminal organizations. In your professional  
11 military opinion, would providing similar authorities to  
12 the commander of SOUTHCOM provide more options to the  
13 commander, and ultimately enhance U.S. security in the  
14 region?

15           I think this is one that kind of goes unnoticed once  
16 in a while, but those authorizations to allow us to get in  
17 and to actually follow up and follow these transnational  
18 criminal organizations is going to be extremely effective  
19 in allowing our opportunities to limit their ability to  
20 bring drugs and so forth into our country. But we have  
21 never really talked about it in the rest of SOUTHCOM. I  
22 would like your thoughts.

23           General Donovan: Senator, we discussed this in your  
24 office and it really hit home, that the fact that that  
25 authority applied to Mexican potential target sets. You



1 know, the belief is that should be extended across the  
2 entire AOR, and that connects both NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM,  
3 where we have that unity of effort and then unity of  
4 approach, but also unity of sharing, unity of the  
5 collaboration that is going to be required to protect the  
6 homeland.

7 Senator Rounds: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator. And Senator  
9 Kaine.

10 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to  
11 the witnesses. Congratulations for your nominations. I  
12 enjoyed our visits.

13 General Donovan, as a former missionary in Honduras  
14 and the lead Democrat on the Americas Subcommittee of the  
15 Foreign Relations Committee I am going to focus my  
16 questions to you. Based on our office discussion the other  
17 day, and I appreciated both of our discussions, I  
18 understand that you were not involved, and have not been  
19 involved in any of the planning around either Operation  
20 Southern Spear, the boat strike operation, or Operation  
21 Absolute Resolve, the Maduro extraction. Am I correct in  
22 that?

23 General Donovan: Senator, that is correct.

24 Senator Kaine: And would it also be the case, since  
25 we have officials from Greenland and Denmark visiting us



1 today, you have not been involved in any planning about any  
2 military operations with regard to Greenland. Is that  
3 correct?

4 General Donovan: That is correct, Senator.

5 Senator Kaine: Thank you. This is the first public  
6 hearing that we have had since the operations began on  
7 September 2, where we can talk in public, in the Armed  
8 Services Committee, rather than a classified setting, about  
9 this set of operations. And so I am going to put some  
10 comments on the record that really, you know, are not  
11 directed at you since you just clarified you have not been  
12 involved in planning.

13 First, a factual matter. Some of my colleagues have  
14 talked about the boat strikes as strikes against  
15 narcotraffickers or narcotics boats. We used to say, when  
16 I was trying case, "Your Honor, that assumes a fact not in  
17 evidence," that the boats had narcotics on them.

18 I know more than I am allowed to say at this hearing,  
19 but I would encourage all of my colleagues to get the  
20 briefing that I got about these strikes and ask the  
21 question in each instance, "Was there any narcotics on this  
22 boat? Was there any evidence of narcotics?" Also ask the  
23 question, "Is the presence of narcotics even a criteria  
24 that is used in the targeting of these boats?" And I would  
25 encourage all of my colleagues to get the briefing that I



1 got, because I think it might surprise you.

2 The second thing, from a matter of law, General  
3 Donovan, this operation, Southern Spear and Absolute  
4 Resolve, in my 13 years in the Senate, has been the  
5 operation that has raised the most questions about its  
6 legality. Again, what I know from reading legal opinions I  
7 only know in classified, and I am not allowed to really  
8 discuss them. But many of us have questions about  
9 legality, but it is not just us.

10 The news widely reported the premature retirement of  
11 your predecessor as being partly motivated by his concerns  
12 about the legality of these operations, and he is not the  
13 only one. I am going to read the title of a news article  
14 that came out a while ago at NBC News on November 19th,  
15 "Top military lawyer raised legal concerns about boat  
16 strikes," and it talks about senior military lawyer for  
17 SOUTHCOM objecting to the legality of the boat strikes.

18 The concerns about legality have also been raised by  
19 allies, and that should be important to us. It has been  
20 widely reported that the United Kingdom and other allies  
21 are not sharing full intel with the United States in the  
22 AOR because they are concerned that the U.S. is using that  
23 intel to carry out unlawful operations. And other nations  
24 in the region or in NATO that have been allies of ours have  
25 also raised questions about the legality of these

1 operations. The questions will not go away, and they cause  
2 us grave concern.

3 And second, there is some deep concern about the  
4 mission itself. The National Security Strategy released by  
5 the Trump administration on the first Thursday in December  
6 had something I liked. They put the Western Hemisphere as  
7 a high priority, and I think that means more budgetary  
8 resources coming to SOUTHCOM. And you have done a lot of  
9 budget work on Special Forces, and that is great.

10 But the document talks about a new Monroe Doctrine.  
11 As somebody who lived in Latin America, you do not know how  
12 badly that lands in the Americas. For our allies in the  
13 Americas, the Monroe Doctrine was about American dominance,  
14 not American partnership. It was about the right of  
15 America to intervene in the politics of any nation,  
16 including invasions, often the deposing of governments,  
17 often. That is what the Monroe Doctrine was, and that is  
18 what the Monroe Doctrine means to people in that region.

19 And as I explained to you when we were together, and I  
20 really appreciated our discussion, no self-respecting  
21 nation is going to allow itself to be dominated. The  
22 Chinese come into the region offering partnership, and I  
23 think we all know how hollow that offer is. It has often  
24 got all kinds of razor blades in the apple. But an offer  
25 of partnership will always be chosen over an acceptance of



1 dominance, and I just hope in your role, as you get there  
2 and get the lay of the land and then carry forward, you  
3 have done a lot of work with allies in your previous work,  
4 of course, and in the interagency. You know how important  
5 allies are. Let's not turn a face of a bully to allies,  
6 because if we do we will chase them, even faster, into the  
7 hands of adversaries who are willing to invest an awful lot  
8 more than we are.

9 So those would be, you know, free advice worth what  
10 you paid for it, but I look forward to working together  
11 should you be confirmed, and I believe you will be, on a  
12 most important part of the world where the United States  
13 has such upside opportunity if we do not blow it.

14 I yield back.

15 Chairman Wicker: Senator Kaine, you have been to the  
16 same briefings I have. Let me just say in response to one  
17 statement that you made, that there is absolutely no doubt  
18 in my mind that these boats that have been interdicted have  
19 been drug-smuggling boats.

20 Senator Sheehy, you are recognized.

21 Senator Sheehy: Good morning, Generals.  
22 Congratulations on the appointment. Thanks to your  
23 families for their continued service.

24 General Donovan, I am going to start with you. As  
25 General Caine alluded to, we have had a complex history



1 with our southern region, going back 200-plus years. But I  
2 think what is most poignant for what the issues you are  
3 going to be addressing as you enter this new position is we  
4 have had roughly a 50-year war on drugs that has had  
5 various degrees of effectiveness, whether it was Colombia  
6 in the '80s, Central America later, of course, Venezuela  
7 now. I would be curious to hear your thoughts. The new  
8 tools we have, many of which General Rudd will be bringing  
9 to the table and integrating, and tactics we have learned  
10 the last 20 years, as well as whole-of-government policies  
11 we can implement.

12 Although you are not in the seat yet, as you take this  
13 seat, one of the core priorities of your job will be to  
14 help enhance our ability to counter the flow of drugs into  
15 our country, that is killing tens to hundreds of thousands  
16 of Americans, how do you see bringing your resources to  
17 bear in Southern Command in cooperation with the  
18 interagency network to make our counter-drug efforts more  
19 effective?

20 General Donovan: Senator, thank you, and thanks for  
21 the time in the office call. Senator, you know, how I look  
22 at that, again, if confirmed and in place in Southern  
23 Command, working directly, we talk about Southern Command  
24 but really linking Southern Command and North Command to  
25 make sure that we are aligned and synchronized much better.



1 Because any flow of drugs and other nefarious activities  
2 that originate in Southern Command generally flows north.  
3 So the two commands align to use all of those capabilities,  
4 like cyber, in a very synchronized fashion, is I believe  
5 what is going to provide, and I will be responsible to  
6 provide, those best military options alongside the close  
7 combatant commanders, NORTHCOM, and I would even say  
8 INDOPACOM, because of the western side of the continent,  
9 working with the Joint Staff for a collaborated effort for  
10 the best solutions, which would then, in turn, end up being  
11 that best military advice to provide the Secretary.

12 Senator Sheehy: And one particular issue that I think  
13 is becoming increasingly important, to go to Senator  
14 Kaine's point, you know, our partnership with our South  
15 American allies. I, myself, did a deployment down there in  
16 my days, back in our organizations, countering narcotics,  
17 and I think those partnerships, everything we did was with  
18 partnership, integrated together with the special  
19 operations teams of our host nations.

20 But particularly predatory Chinese fishing activities.  
21 It sounds obscure up here but it is incredibly important to  
22 the economies and the subsistence of those countries.  
23 China's global ghost fishing fleet is literally strip  
24 fishing entire fisheries all over the world, but especially  
25 in South America, where they are incredibly important to



1 those economies.

2 So I want to go to General Rudd, but I would ask, if  
3 you would not mind, giving me a written answer on that at  
4 some point, just to how you think you can address, as  
5 Southern Command Commander, the issue of illegal Chinese  
6 fishing.

7 And General Rudd, it sounds like you are about to be  
8 our country's chief nerd. Normally at NSA and CYBERCOM we  
9 find very technically experienced cyber intel pros, and now  
10 we are taking a knuckle-dragger like me and putting him in  
11 charge of all that. So I would love for you to explain to  
12 the panel why your background as an operator and door-  
13 kicker and consumer of that information makes you uniquely  
14 qualified to, I think, help transform our cyber/NSA  
15 paradigm to be more operationalized.

16 General Rudd: Senator, I think, you know, the  
17 question starts with the current strategic environment that  
18 we are in, that is very complex. A host of threats from a  
19 number of actors. And the requirement to be able to  
20 integrate capabilities across the Joint Force and move  
21 fast, be able to scale these capabilities, be able to  
22 increase relationships, not only within the Department but  
23 across our allies, partners, and then increasingly, with  
24 the commercial industry. As we talk about the technologies  
25 needed for this I think it is really important. So speed



1 is a component in everything that we do.

2 And you know, as we talked, Senator, where I sit right  
3 now I bring a deep, mission-driven understanding of the  
4 challenges that I just described briefly, integrating the  
5 capabilities across the Joint Force and all domains. So  
6 that understanding, that perspective, from the joint  
7 warfighter, principally in INDOPACOM in the recent history,  
8 but throughout my career in a number of theaters. And then  
9 as most people are familiar with today, there is an  
10 increasing relationship in what we call the soft space  
11 cyber triad, those interdependence between those commands,  
12 those capabilities, to deliver what our nation needs.

13 But if you go back before we were really in tune to  
14 and focused on space as a domain, and SPACECOM, Space  
15 Force, and what they bring to this nation, soft and cyber  
16 are inextricably linked at the hip throughout their  
17 operations. I have been, again, the beneficiary of it. I  
18 have had the privilege to lead and command those types of  
19 organizations, at the other end than what, if confirmed, I  
20 would bring in this one, at the organization level.

21 Senator Sheehy: Thanks, General. I yield back.

22 Chairman Wicker: General Rudd, I think Senator Sheehy  
23 meant his question as a compliment, don't you? You don't  
24 have to answer. Senator King.

25 Senator King: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.



1 General Donovan, I wanted to follow up on Senator  
2 Blumenthal's questions because I did not really discern a  
3 clear answer. Yesterday, several votes changed on the War  
4 Powers Resolution with regard to Venezuela, based upon  
5 explicit assurances in writing from the Administration  
6 there would be no troops on the ground in Venezuela. So  
7 that raises the question, what is the mission? What is the  
8 purpose of this gigantic armada that is now in the  
9 Caribbean adjacent to Venezuela?

10 It seems like we are hearing -- a very famous New  
11 Englander said once, "Your actions speak so loudly that I  
12 can't hear your words." We are getting words about no  
13 intention of further action in Venezuela, but the actions  
14 are six destroyers, a nuclear submarine, an aircraft  
15 carrier, thousands of troops. What is the mission of that  
16 group in the Caribbean?

17 General Donovan: Senator, from my current position,  
18 again, I am not part of any of the planning. But I will  
19 pledge to you, Senator, that if confirmed, and in the  
20 SOUTHCOM headquarters, working with the supporting  
21 commanders, understand the tasks that come down and are  
22 given to the command, we will execute a very precise  
23 planning process that will provide the --

24 Senator King: So you do not know what the plan is  
25 now? You do not know why all those ships and aircraft and



1 soldiers are in the --

2 General Donovan: Senator, I do not.

3 Senator King: Another question about what is going  
4 on. Have you seen the video of the second strike on the  
5 boat, on September 2nd?

6 General Donovan: Senator, I have not.

7 Senator King: Well, I would commend it to you,  
8 because it raises serious issues. I would commend to you  
9 Section 18.3.2.1 of the War Manual of the United States  
10 Government, which says, as an example of an illegal order,  
11 "Orders to fire upon the shipwrecked would be clearly  
12 illegal." I would urge you to look at that video in light  
13 of that admonition and the clear rules in the Manual of War  
14 that it is not legal to fire upon shipwrecked individuals.

15 General Rudd, one of the problems, I believe, in our  
16 cyber policy over the years is a lack of a deterrent  
17 capability. Our adversaries continue to attack us in  
18 cyberspace, going back to the Sony hack and up to Salt  
19 Typhoon, Volt Typhoon, and there is never a response. Do  
20 you believe, as a matter of policy, that CYBERCOM and NSA  
21 should develop an offensive cyber declaratory deterrent  
22 policy?

23 General Rudd: Senator, I do not know if it is my  
24 role, if confirmed, to declare policy. I think what I can  
25 pledge to you, if confirmed, we would develop the



1 capabilities --

2 Senator King: I do not believe it is your role to  
3 declare policy, but it is your role to provide the best  
4 advice to the President on policy. And my question is, do  
5 you believe that we should develop and have a publicly  
6 declared deterrent policy in cyberspace?

7 General Rudd: Senator, I do not know that that is my  
8 role to have that opinion. I think my role is to develop  
9 the options that would deliver deterrence, that if decided  
10 to be declared or not, would be the most credible, capable  
11 --

12 Senator King: Well, I am confused, because you are  
13 nominated to be the top cyber officer in the United States  
14 government, and you do not have any opinion on cyber policy  
15 or what is important? Are you simply a lever-puller? I  
16 mean, I really do not understand, because this is a  
17 critical area of defense. It is a vector of attack on this  
18 country that is going on as we sit here today. And you do  
19 not have any opinion about how we should structure our  
20 response to these attacks?

21 General Rudd: Senator, I think it would be most  
22 appropriate if, once confirmed, if confirmed, I take the  
23 time to make an assessment, get the inputs of those  
24 organizations, and provide the best military advice to the  
25 Department and work with this Committee.



1           Senator King: Well, I am sorry, General. I find that  
2 a very disappointing response. You have been nominated to  
3 this position for some time now. You are aware of the  
4 responsibilities. And this is one of the most fundamental  
5 questions in cyber, and your unwillingness to even discuss  
6 it.

7           Remember, at the very beginning of this hearing you  
8 responded to the Chairman's question that you would give us  
9 your personal views, even though they may be inconsistent  
10 with those of the Administration. And I am disturbed  
11 either way, either you are not responding as you committed  
12 to the Chairman or you do not know. And either one of  
13 those bothers me, because someone appointed to this  
14 position should have some familiarity and analysis and  
15 thinking about the position of this country in cyber, which  
16 is really probably the most direct threat that we face  
17 today. So I am disappointed in that response.

18           Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19           Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, Senator.  
20 Senator Cotton.

21           Senator Cotton: Gentlemen, thank you for your  
22 lifetime of service to our nation, and thanks to your  
23 family for putting up with your lifetime of service, and to  
24 some members of your family who are also wearing a uniform.  
25 We appreciate what you have done for our country.

1 Congratulations on your nominations, as well.

2 I apologize. I had to step out for a few other  
3 commitments, and I cannot get back and be here for fewer  
4 than 2 minutes without hearing the Democrats talk about  
5 illegal orders, which has been much in the news as of late.  
6 So I asked General Guillot, NORTHCOM commander -- I am not  
7 quite sure how it is pronounced, but that is the Arkansas  
8 pronunciation, whatever it is -- if, in his vast and  
9 storied career, he had ever received an illegal order. And  
10 he said no.

11 So General Donovan, I would like to ask you, have you  
12 ever received an illegal order?

13 General Donovan: No, Senator.

14 Senator Cotton: And you are a pretty high-speed  
15 marine, as I understand it. You have been out on the front  
16 a lot in your lifetime. So from the time you were  
17 Lieutenant Donovan to the time now, where you have got  
18 three stars and you are about to add a fourth, no one has  
19 ever given you an illegal order.

20 General Donovan: No, Senator.

21 Senator Cotton: General Rudd, you are a pretty high-  
22 speed soldier. I see a lot of impressive badges on your  
23 uniform. I think it is Jumpmaster, Military Freefall  
24 Jumpmaster, more commonly known as HALO. I even see Scuba,  
25 very rare in the Army, a Ranger tab, Combat Infantryman

1 Badge. In all of your vast military experience have you  
2 ever received an illegal order?

3 General Rudd: No, Senator.

4 Senator Cotton: Not even from Lieutenant Rudd, as  
5 quartermaster, all the way up to three-star general, and  
6 now about to be four-star general, no one has ever given  
7 you an illegal order?

8 General Rudd: No, Senator.

9 Senator Cotton: Well, it seems to me that our  
10 military does a very good job of training our troops, from  
11 the time they enlist as privates, from the time they  
12 commission as lieutenants, all the way up to your level and  
13 to the commander-in-chief, not to issue illegal orders. Or  
14 especially at your level, when you have lawyers hanging  
15 around you all the time, to seek their counsel, as anyone  
16 would, I bet, as some of the politicians on this dais  
17 understandably seek legal counsel in affairs related to  
18 their job.

19 So I am glad to hear from so many of our military's  
20 senior leaders that our military has done such a good job  
21 of ensuring that our troops do not receive an illegal  
22 order.

23 General Donovan, I would like to return to a topic  
24 that I also know has been addressed, and this is the  
25 presence of such a large number of forces in the SOUTHCOM



1 area of responsibility, and whether that drains forces from  
2 other regions, like PACOM and CENTCOM. Although I have to  
3 say I think the people asking those questions would not  
4 like those forces to be employed in PACOM or CENTCOM  
5 either. It is more of a gotcha question.

6 But understanding, General Donovan, that any combatant  
7 commander, and any combatant command's answer for how many  
8 forces he needs is always going to be, "More, please."  
9 Could you explain a little bit about how, if confirmed, you  
10 will manage the needs of maintaining security with the  
11 proper force posture in your area of responsibility, along  
12 with those others around the world, especially in the old  
13 world at EUCOM, CENTCOM, and PACOM.

14 General Donovan: Senator, I am very aware, after 3  
15 years at the Pentagon, the push-pull between each of the  
16 geographic commands and spreading out, in many ways, our  
17 very high-demand, low-density assets, the carrier strike  
18 group, nuclear submarine, Marine amphibious unit. So I am  
19 very aware of the natural tensions that are there, but I  
20 pledge, if confirmed, to work with the Joint Staff to  
21 ensure that SOUTHCOM's needs are registered and met, and if  
22 we do lose assets, what are the other capabilities we can  
23 bring to bear, from other hard-powered type assets,  
24 physical assets, to increased resourcing for some of the  
25 softer powered, to counter the PRC malign influence in the



1 region.

2 Senator Cotton: Thank you again, gentlemen, for your  
3 lifetime of service.

4 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Cotton. Senator  
5 Warren.

6 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So Nicolás  
7 Maduro was a terrible leader. There is no question about  
8 that. It does not change the fact that President Trump's  
9 military action to attack another country and seize Maduro  
10 was unconstitutional and threatens to drag Americans into a  
11 war they never voted for. What does the President mean  
12 when he says the United States will, quote, "run" Venezuela  
13 for years? When he says, quote, "Venezuela now has the  
14 United States of America, the most powerful military in the  
15 world, by far, to protect them, and protect them we will."  
16 It sounds like another forever war.

17 Lieutenant General Donovan, you are nominated to lead  
18 Southern Command, which would make you the commander  
19 responsible for any future military actions in Venezuela.  
20 You will not make policy decisions, but servicemembers will  
21 count on you to ensure that they are not asked to engage in  
22 military operations that are not legal. According to press  
23 reports, your predecessor had serious concerns about  
24 illegal orders. That was not the case with these strikes.

25 General Donovan, is it sedition for someone in the

1 military to question whether an order is legal?

2 General Donovan: Senator, in my 37 years of  
3 experience I have received many orders over time, and when  
4 I ever had faced a situation where I needed to seek clarity  
5 I asked our headquarters to clarify the task, and I come  
6 back and work on that with legal advisors, to core staff,  
7 subordinate staff, senior enlisted leaders, and then  
8 present my thoughts to higher headquarters for their  
9 consideration.

10 Senator Warren: So I think what you are telling me is  
11 you have questioned whether an order is legal. Is that  
12 right?

13 General Donovan: Senator, I did not -- what I  
14 believe, I am focused on here is that the legality of the  
15 order -- we face orders. We carry out missions. And so in  
16 that planning process we look at all aspects of each  
17 mission, each task, each order, to ensure that we are  
18 structuring the command, the force, the unit, to achieve  
19 the objective.

20 Senator Warren: I appreciate that, General, but the  
21 question I am trying to ask is, is it sedition for someone  
22 in the military to question whether an order is legal, and  
23 I thought I just heard you say that you had actually  
24 questioned orders and whether they were legal, and you  
25 sought advice. So I will ask it one more time. Is it



1 sedition to question whether an order is legal?

2 General Donovan: Senator, I would not use the term  
3 "sedition." I use the term basically our good order and  
4 discipline, how we approach any situation where we have to  
5 accomplish a mission and provide the best capability for  
6 the task at hand.

7 Senator Warren: I am sorry. I still cannot  
8 understand your answer here. I am just asking a very  
9 straightforward question. You tell me you have questioned  
10 orders in the past about their legality. Is that right?

11 General Donovan: Senator, I have questioned orders  
12 when either, one, I did not understand, I was not equipped  
13 to carry them out, and I needed clarity before I can  
14 actually execute those orders.

15 Senator Warren: But you have never questioned whether  
16 an order was legal. You have never wondered whether or not  
17 an order is legal and sought additional counsel on that?

18 General Donovan: Senator, in our planning processes I  
19 always have a legal advisor at my side. It is part of the  
20 planning process. So I always have leveraged those legal  
21 advisors to give me the best answer. In the end, I am  
22 responsible for the final decision to carry out or not  
23 carry out the order.

24 Senator Warren: Okay. We will stop playing dodgeball  
25 here. You know, I thought that was going to be the easy



1 question leading to harder questions.

2 Back in 2016, Secretary Hegseth was very clear that  
3 servicemembers have a duty not to follow illegal orders.  
4 Since then, he has repeatedly made clear his contempt for  
5 legal review, including by sidelining military legal  
6 advisors, the people who are supposed to help you stay on  
7 the right side of the law. And what I wanted to know is  
8 how you look at those issues.

9 So let me try a different version of the question.  
10 General Donovan, if your legal advisor tells you that an  
11 order is illegal, will you refuse to carry out that order?

12 General Donovan: Senator, the legal advisor is one of  
13 many staff members that would provide their advice as we  
14 look at the scenario, the situation at hand. I will take  
15 that very seriously if my legal advisor says that is an  
16 illegal order, and I will seek clarification from higher  
17 headquarters.

18 Senator Warren: Okay. And if somebody higher says  
19 no, what are you going to do at that point?

20 General Donovan: Senator, then I make a decision  
21 using 37 years of experience, to carry out that order or  
22 not.

23 Senator Warren: Okay. But your intention is not to  
24 carry out an illegal order. Is that right?

25 General Donovan: I will never carry out an illegal



1 order, Senator.

2 Senator Warren: I appreciate that. That is what I  
3 want to hear. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator. Senator  
5 Sullivan.

6 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I just  
7 want to comment. You know, my friend and colleague,  
8 Senator Warner, or Warren -- sorry -- who I have a lot of  
9 respect for, but I cannot help but think these charges of  
10 an unconstitutional operation against Maduro are kind of  
11 partisan simply because President Trump, as commander-in-  
12 chief, ordered it. I cannot remember any Democrat saying  
13 that the Obama ordering of killing bin Laden -- it is kind  
14 of an analogous raid, right, in and out, Special Ops,  
15 dangerous, successful -- I did not hear any Democrats  
16 screaming unconstitutional on that one. Actually, that was  
17 a great op by President Obama, and it took a lot of guts to  
18 make the call, just like it took a lot of guts with  
19 President Trump to make this call on Maduro. Similarly,  
20 with George H. W. Bush, in the invasion of Panama to take  
21 down another drug kingpin, not a lot of Democrats saying  
22 that was unconstitutional. That was an invasion, forces on  
23 the ground. OLC, Department of Justice said it was legal.

24 So this unconstitutional Maduro thing, I think it is  
25 just partisan, to be perfectly honest. I mean, we all know

1 it is partisan. But I am digressing here.

2 Gentlemen, thank you for your years of service,  
3 decades of service. I really appreciated our meetings in  
4 my office last week. I think both of you are highly  
5 qualified. I think you need to get confirmed soon. I hope  
6 it becomes a very strong, bipartisan endeavor for the U.S.  
7 Senate to confirm both of you.

8 So let me follow up on a couple of questions that we  
9 talked about in my office. General Donovan, very quickly,  
10 the National Security Strategy -- and I think we are going  
11 to be getting the National Defense Strategy here from the  
12 Trump administration soon -- is going to have an emphasis,  
13 like the National Security Strategy, on the Western  
14 Hemisphere. I think that makes a lot of sense. I think  
15 the President and his team are reviving what many of us  
16 thought was obvious, but we need to do that.

17 You and I talked about the issue of SOUTHCOM as a  
18 combatant command that, let's just say, is not as built up  
19 as the traditional combatant commands where there has been  
20 a lot of activity over the course of decades, and in  
21 particular I am talking about CENTCOM, INDOPACOM. So if  
22 confirmed, and you should be soon, what are you going to do  
23 in terms of, hey, we have a new National Security Strategy  
24 that is very focused on ops in the Western Hemisphere, with  
25 SOUTHCOM as a critical component of that. But let's face

1 it, SOUTHCOM has kind of been an under-resourced,  
2 understaffed combatant command. How do you address that,  
3 because it is a big difference between what we are asking  
4 and what you are going to be needing to do.

5 General Donovan: Senator, again, thank you for that  
6 conversation. Again, if confirmed, the first step is to do  
7 an analysis of the capabilities of the SOUTHCOM  
8 headquarters and really build on the strength that over the  
9 years and decades it has been known for that security  
10 cooperation approach, not very well funded, and at times,  
11 for all the right reasons. The concern now is, as we have  
12 additional physical assets in place, is the headquarters  
13 staffed and structured to maintain and sustain logistics  
14 and supply and all the basic underpinnings of military  
15 capability.

16 But as we look forward into operations, as we build  
17 those military options to provide to the Secretary based on  
18 what we believe the National Security Strategy highlights,  
19 are we, headquarters, capable of bringing those  
20 capabilities together? And I believe we are going to get  
21 there. Senator, if confirmed, that will be my drive.

22 Senator Sullivan: Well, let this Committee know what  
23 you need, because I think that is going to be important.  
24 If you are seeing a lack of resources or staff positions  
25 and you need legislative authority on that, that will be



1 important to come back to this Committee. We want to be  
2 supportive, and I think that is in an bipartisan way.

3 General Rudd, I want to compliment you on your decades  
4 of service, as well. You know, NSA has a big Alaska hub  
5 now, so I want to get both of you to commit to coming to  
6 Alaska once you are confirmed. Can I get that -- the most  
7 strategic place in the world, according to General Billy  
8 Mitchell, father of the U.S. Air Force. General?

9 General Rudd: Senator, if confirmed, I look forward  
10 to coming to Alaska --

11 Senator Sullivan: General?

12 General Rudd: -- and seeing NSA Alaska.

13 General Donovan: Senator, if confirmed, yes.

14 Senator Sullivan: Great. Next question. You know,  
15 we talked about this idea of offense a little bit.  
16 Actually, Senator Warren and I -- you and I talked about  
17 this, General Rudd -- had legislation after we were briefed  
18 last year on the aggressiveness with which our adversaries  
19 undertook cyber operations against us. And there was a  
20 sense that, especially during our election, right --  
21 Chinese, Russians, Iranians, trying to undermine American  
22 elections. These dictators would never stand for election  
23 -- let me ask my question very quickly.

24 For dictators that try to undermine U.S. elections  
25 through cyber ops, don't you think it is important not just



1 to be on defense, not allow them to do it, but let's go on  
2 a little bit of offense, right. The Russians and the  
3 Chinese people might want to know that their leaders are  
4 some of the richest people in the world. They are corrupt.  
5 They are billionaires. How did they get all that money?  
6 They stole it from their people. Can't we let them know  
7 that? Can't we go on offense? Isn't offense a good  
8 defense, to have them not conduct cyber ops against us?

9 General Rudd: Senator, I think we need to have the  
10 capability to do both.

11 Senator Sullivan: So is that a yes?

12 General Rudd: Senator, again, the decision to employ  
13 those offensively is not necessarily that of the U.S. Cyber  
14 Command. It is under the direction, but certainly we have  
15 to bring the fight to the enemy.

16 Senator Sullivan: Great. Well, if you need those  
17 authorities come back to this Committee, because I think  
18 that is another big bipartisan issue on the Armed Services  
19 Committee. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 Chairman Wicker: Thank you. Senator Kelly.

21 Senator Kelly: On a couple of the topics that Senator  
22 Sullivan was speaking about I want to associate myself with  
23 his remarks, specifically for General Rudd here, and we  
24 spoke about this in my office. The offensive cyber, using  
25 messaging bots, and Russians, Chinese, North Koreans,



1   Iranians attacking us, specifically before elections, and  
2   the amount of incoming without a response from the U.S.  
3   government I find rather disturbing. And we have talked  
4   about this a little bit on this Committee but also on the  
5   Intelligence Committee. And we do need to have a better  
6   plan, and there needs to be some form of deterrence. Like  
7   we just cannot sit here and take it, which is what I have  
8   seen after being here for 5 years in the United States  
9   Senate. So I would like to see another plan, as well. If  
10  you need authorities, please come to us.

11         And then on the other front I will get to in a second,  
12  which is the National Security Strategy. But for General  
13  Donovan, and for both of you, thank you for your service.  
14  Thank you for being here. This is an important hearing.

15         General Donovan, Senator King brought up the September  
16  2nd strike. I just want to encourage you to get as much  
17  information you can about that. Take a look at the video.  
18  Think about the decision-making process that went into all  
19  of those operations. Think about who was in the room. And  
20  then make your own evaluation, is that how you would have  
21  expected that day to go, or do you think you need to make  
22  some changes as the future Commander of SOUTHCOM?

23         I just want to encourage you to do that, because we  
24  have a lot of concerns. I think there are some concerns on  
25  the other side of the aisle, as well. But we have got a

1 lot of concerns. I do, personally, you know, about these  
2 kinds of operations, which I have been involved in before.  
3 So please do that.

4 On the National Security Strategy front, do you think,  
5 as the next Commander of SOUTHCOM, do you think we need a  
6 battle group in the Caribbean, permanently, full-time?

7 General Donovan: Senator, if confirmed, look at the  
8 task at hand to determine whether we need that capability  
9 in place, a carrier strike group, or even an ARG/MEU full-  
10 time. So until I get on the ground there and look at the  
11 tasks that I am not aware of right now, I could not  
12 determine whether we need one or not need one, Senator.  
13 But that is my intention, once confirmed and in the  
14 planning process, to address the tasks that are in place  
15 and we envision through the NSS.

16 Senator Kelly: But do you expect, because of this  
17 pivot to the Western Hemisphere, that SOUTHCOM this year is  
18 going to have to be much different than SOUTHCOM last year?

19 General Donovan: Senator, yes, I do.

20 Senator Kelly: So you expect to need more staff, and  
21 obviously with your experience at INDOPACOM you --  
22 actually, that was General Rudd. But you certainly  
23 understand the push and pull here. We are going to have to  
24 take resources from somewhere else, which needs to be a  
25 consideration. But your job is SOUTHCOM, and I get that.

1 And if we are going to be consistent with the National  
2 Security Strategy which, by the way, I do not agree with,  
3 there will need to be some changes on SOUTHCOM. I want you  
4 to be thoughtful about that.

5 And then finally, I just want to ask you a question,  
6 we talked a little bit in my office about. It was reported  
7 that your predecessor reported in the press -- I was not  
8 able to verify that this actually happened -- but where  
9 Admiral Holsey was told that he should carry out orders and  
10 not ask any questions. You have got a lot of experience,  
11 decades. I cannot imagine that is the posture you would  
12 take if anybody in senior leadership above you told you not  
13 to ask any questions. I think it is important for people  
14 to understand, as our leadership, we put people in these  
15 senior roles, that they are going to have a collaborative  
16 approach with their leadership. I do not know if you want  
17 to comment on that.

18 General Donovan: Senator, that is how I have led my  
19 life, from second lieutenant to lieutenant general, asking  
20 the hard questions. Because the soldiers, sailors, the  
21 Joint Force members that we lead, we owe that to them to  
22 ask the hard questions. I will not stop doing that,  
23 Senator.

24 Senator Kelly: So you are not going to put up with  
25 somebody above you telling you not to ask any questions?

1           General Donovan:   Senator, I will continue to perform  
2 and lead like I have for 37 years.

3           Senator Kelly:   All right.   Thank you, General.

4           Chairman Wicker:   Thank you very much.   Senator  
5 Schmitt.

6           Senator Schmitt:   Thank you, Mr. Chairman.   General  
7 Donovan, General Rudd, congratulations on your nominations  
8 and for your service to our great country.

9           For most of our nation's history, America's strategy  
10 recognizes a simple truth -- the security of the United  
11 States begins in the Western Hemisphere.   When we neglect  
12 our own neighborhood as we have for much of the last three  
13 decades, threats do not remain extract or distant.   They  
14 arrive at our border, in our communities, and in the lives  
15 of the people that we represent.

16           We are now living with those consequences.  
17 Transnational criminal organizations move people,  
18 narcotics, weapons, and money across the hemisphere with  
19 increasing sophistication and close collaboration with  
20 state actors.   Fentanyl and cocaine kill tens of thousands  
21 of Americans each year.   Violent networks, like Tren de  
22 Aragua, now operate openly inside U.S. cities.   This is not  
23 a theoretical problem.   It is a direct assault on the  
24 safety and sovereignty of the American people.

25           At the same time, hostile state actors are expanding



1 their footprint in our hemisphere, partnering with criminal  
2 regimes, exploiting corruption, and operating with a sense  
3 of impunity that would have been unthinkable a generation  
4 ago. This is a strategic failure that we can no longer  
5 afford to abide by. The United States cannot accept  
6 insecurity at home because we are unwilling to assert  
7 leadership abroad, especially in our own hemisphere.

8 President Trump has made clear that protecting the  
9 American people comes first and that securing the homeland  
10 requires securing our own hemisphere. And I would point  
11 out that this is actually a throwback to something that has  
12 served the United States very well, that I think many  
13 people have forgotten, and they seem shocked that we are  
14 talking about it all again, whether it is the Monroe  
15 Doctrine or just understanding that we have important  
16 interests in our own hemisphere.

17 So General Donovan, we talked about this in my office.  
18 You are going to have a very, very important job, and I  
19 think the Security Strategy that has been laid out is spot  
20 on. We need our European allies to step up in a much more  
21 meaningful way for the defense of their own continent. We  
22 have very important interests here at home and in our  
23 hemisphere and in the Indo-Pacific.

24 So I want to ask you, as the next Commander of  
25 SOUTHCOM, you will sit at the very center of that mission,



1 and I want to explore how you assess the threats that we  
2 pose. The first one, in this limited time that we have, on  
3 narcoterrorism. I guess, let me ask you this. Where in  
4 Latin America do transnational criminal organizations pose  
5 the greatest strategic threat to the U.S. right now? What  
6 would be your assessment of that?

7 General Donovan: Senator, again, thanks for the time  
8 in your office. If confirmed, once confirmed, if  
9 confirmed, and I end up in the SOUTHCOM headquarters, I  
10 really have to do a deep dive to fully give a better answer  
11 than I can right now. My thought is there is a number of  
12 different pathways that these nefarious actors, these  
13 criminal organizations can reach the shores of the United  
14 States of America. And what I pledge, Senator, is to  
15 obviously look deeply into this, but also work  
16 collaboratively, both the other geographic commands in  
17 question here or tied to is NORTHCOM and INDOPACOM, to  
18 ensure that we are actually providing the Chairman and the  
19 Secretary with not only the best military advice of one  
20 COCOM but how do we address those synchronized threats in a  
21 more holistic way, Senator.

22 Senator Schmitt: You mentioned NORTHCOM. I wanted to  
23 ask you about that, because, of course, Mexico currently is  
24 outside of the statutory AOR. But there is obviously this  
25 interconnectedness of what is happening in South America



1 into Mexico, into the United States. In recognition of  
2 this interconnectedness, the Department of War has proposed  
3 changes to the Unified Command Plan that would consolidate  
4 North Command and South Command under a single America's  
5 Focus Command. Given that strategic shift, and I know it  
6 is early and I am not trying to box you into anything, and  
7 you should take the time to do your own assessment, but  
8 currently, how do you assess the alignment of missions  
9 between NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM, currently?

10 General Donovan: Senator, knowing that USNORTHCOM is  
11 doing incredible work on the border and also dual hats as  
12 NORAD, a lot on their plate at this point. My focus has  
13 been -- and I have supported them over the years, through  
14 both SOF and the Marine Corps mission sets -- my focus  
15 obviously, if confirmed, is SOUTHCOM, and how is SOUTHCOM a  
16 better partner to NORTHCOM, in whatever decisions are made.  
17 I hope to be part of that decision-making process, or at  
18 least give advice in that, or counsel or guidance, once I  
19 understand the capabilities of SOUTHCOM. But until that  
20 point, my response would be to link very tightly with  
21 NORTHCOM so we have that unity of effort.

22 Senator Schmitt: And I think -- I have 30 seconds, so  
23 I will just -- we will have many conversations about this,  
24 moving forward, but I am very concerned about the CCP's  
25 footprint in our hemisphere. Certainly that was the case

1 in Venezuela. You would not have to go too far. A year  
2 ago we were talking about the concern of the CCP  
3 effectively controlling both ends of the Panama Canal with  
4 those ports, and that leads right into this Greenland  
5 discussion. I am not going to get into that now.

6 But I would say that I am fully supportive of you, but  
7 let's continue the conversation about where China is at.  
8 This is a real threat. We simply cannot have our greatest  
9 competition, adversary, setting up shop in our own  
10 hemisphere. It is unacceptable.

11 So thank you. Thanks for your service.

12 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Schmitt. Senator  
13 Slotkin.

14 Senator Slotkin: Yes. Thank you for being here.  
15 Thank you to both of you for the time yesterday, or a  
16 couple of days ago, in my little hideaway.

17 General Rudd, we talked about this, but as a former  
18 CIA officer who worked alongside NSA, my whole career I  
19 proudly participated in operations targeting foreign  
20 terrorist organizations, foreign adversaries. You know, I  
21 think one of the things I am concerned about, especially in  
22 the last couple of weeks, is any possibility that NSA might  
23 be used inappropriately against American citizens. And,  
24 you know, you know that NSA is governed by the National  
25 Security Act of 1947, and Executive Order 120003, and even



1 by FISA law that this body passed as recently as 2024.

2 And I think this is pretty relevant. We have the  
3 Secretary of Homeland Security, Stephen Miller, the Vice  
4 President of the United States labeling people in  
5 Minneapolis as domestic terrorists, and talking about  
6 American citizens as if they are the enemy.

7 So, you know, you are going to be in charge of this  
8 incredibly important organization, necessary organization,  
9 but you are also going to be the guy in the room should  
10 there ever be a suggestion that we target American citizens  
11 with NSA capabilities. So can you answer for me, if the  
12 Secretary of Defense or the President of the United States  
13 asks you to put NSA or military intel personnel, people or  
14 tools or assets targeted at American citizens who do not  
15 have a link to a foreign terrorist organization, will you  
16 reject that?

17 General Rudd: Senator, thanks again for the time the  
18 other day, and I appreciate the opportunity to discuss this  
19 very important issue. Senator, if confirmed, I will  
20 execute my responsibilities in accordance with the  
21 Constitution and all applicable laws.

22 Senator Slotkin: So you know -- I mean, we talked  
23 about this -- there is just a ton of law saying that we  
24 cannot wiretap, using a layman's term, American citizens,  
25 communications, just for expressing their freedom of



1 speech, right, that they have to have a foreign nexus with  
2 a terrorist organization or a foreign power. We could not  
3 be more clear, and as a CIA officer, coming in years and  
4 years after Watergate, like that was drilled into us, that  
5 we never turn the intelligence community against the  
6 American people.

7 So thank you for answering that clearly, because you  
8 are going to be the guy in the room, right. We talked  
9 about how tough these positions are.

10 Separate from Minneapolis, the President signed an  
11 executive order in September, asking the Attorney General  
12 to come up with a new list of domestic terrorist  
13 organizations, and said once you come up with the list I  
14 want you to use the full weight of the Federal Government  
15 to go after those domestic terrorist groups. And he  
16 defined domestic terrorist groups in a very broad way,  
17 including groups that are anti-Christian, have anti-  
18 American views, I mean, not just violent, which of course  
19 we all understand -- violence is not legal -- but in these  
20 very broad terms. She has now started that process. The  
21 Attorney General, in November, made some announcements  
22 about that.

23 Can you just help me understand, will NSA be a part,  
24 or should they be a part of that interagency team targeting  
25 domestic terrorist -- so-called domestic terrorist



1 organizations?

2 General Rudd: Senator, I do not know if NSA is or is  
3 not part of that interagency currently. But again,  
4 consistent with the last question you just asked, it is our  
5 highest duty to uphold our oath to the Constitution and  
6 ensure that, if confirmed in these roles, we execute those  
7 consistent with that oath.

8 Senator Slotkin: Well, since the organization you are  
9 about to take over, if confirmed, has been without a leader  
10 since the previous leader was fired, I just ask that you do  
11 that, looking under the rug, and making sure that we are  
12 never making American citizens question whether their  
13 intelligence community is targeting them.

14 Let me just ask, lastly, General Donovan, I have  
15 asked, I think, 14 different military nominees. Again, we  
16 hope you will not be asked to do something that is illegal,  
17 but given that your predecessor was removed or left very  
18 early allegedly for questions about concerns over the  
19 legality of operations, if you are asked to do something  
20 illegal or unconstitutional, will you reject that order,  
21 push back? You do not have to do it publicly, but push  
22 back and protect those who serve under you?

23 General Donovan: Senator, yes, I will. That is my  
24 constitutional responsibility.

25 Senator Slotkin: Thank you. I yield back.



1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. Senator Banks,  
2 you are recognized.

3 Senator Banks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and  
4 congratulations to both of you on your nominations to very  
5 important posts in our United States military.

6 General Donovan, Communist China was a main supporter  
7 of the Maduro regime and has a growing presence throughout  
8 Latin America. How is China, at large, supporting threats  
9 to the United States specifically in our hemisphere?

10 General Donovan: Senator, again, how I look at that  
11 question again, and obviously I am not in position yet and  
12 if confirmed, this is a priority, but just normal study in  
13 life, you look where China is infusing themselves into key  
14 locations in South America, specifically lines of  
15 communication, ports, airfields, roads, tunnels, the Panama  
16 Canal, everywhere they can gain influence, they can gain  
17 access and placement to not only increase their  
18 capabilities or their desires but to counter ours,  
19 specifically in time of conflict.

20 Senator Banks: Can you talk more about how the Maduro  
21 regime specifically worked with Communist China to expand  
22 their influence in the Western Hemisphere?

23 General Donovan: Senator, I do not have any  
24 additional details on that, but I pledge that if confirmed,  
25 I need to dig in deep into that because I believe we will



1 see similar patterns throughout the region.

2 Senator Banks: Going forward, though, what actions  
3 would you like to see from the new government in Venezuela  
4 that would tell us that they are decisively rejecting  
5 malign Chinese influence in our hemisphere?

6 General Donovan: Senator, you know, not privy or  
7 involved in any decisions right now and discussions, I  
8 believe most of those you are referencing would be policy  
9 or diplomatic. If confirmed, my task is to create military  
10 options and solutions to backstop any of the options that  
11 were selected by the President.

12 Senator Banks: Okay, I get that. How does countering  
13 Chinese activity in our hemisphere support INDOPACOM's  
14 mission to deter China in the Pacific, as laid out in the  
15 National Security Strategy?

16 General Donovan: Senator, just geographically, if you  
17 look at the links between INDOPACOM or the Pacific and  
18 South America, specifically South and Central America, it  
19 is clear there are direct links. And if you hear Admiral  
20 Paparo talk about the Indo-Pacific, yes, there is a line  
21 between two geographic combatant commands, but our threats,  
22 our enemies do not care about our lines. And it highlights  
23 the importance that we work and we are a global  
24 perspective, in this specifically NORTHCOM, SOUTHCOM, and  
25 INDOPACOM, and leveraging the other functional combatant



1 commands like CYBERCOM to ensure that we are providing  
2 truly best synchronized military options.

3 Senator Banks: So specific to the role that you  
4 have been nominated to, how can we, the members of this  
5 Committee, support SOUTHCOM as you try to keep our  
6 hemisphere free of control of Communist China?

7 General Donovan: Senator, how I look at that question  
8 and how I have been considering in my mind what levers of  
9 action or power or influence we could take, building on  
10 what SOUTHCOM is, again, very good at, which is building  
11 partnership capacities, but through a new look in the NSS,  
12 what other tools do we have to bring to bear. If I think  
13 of the Economic Defense Unit, the Office of Strategic  
14 Capital, are there other elements of American, you know, I  
15 would say power, but American influence we could apply on  
16 top of military, on top of diplomatic, to really come up  
17 with creative and more innovative solutions to help counter  
18 even more aggressively, Senator.

19 Senator Banks: Look, I fully support President Trump.  
20 I believe he is absolutely right to go after illegal oil  
21 tankers from Venezuela, Iran, and elsewhere. General, can  
22 you talk about what more you all are doing to track and  
23 seize oil tankers, and what you will, when you are  
24 confirmed to this important role?

25 General Donovan: Senator, in my current role as SOCOM



1 Vice Commander I am not tied to any of those planning  
2 processes. If confirmed, obviously I will be not only tied  
3 to them but leading the military options for the planning  
4 process. I am just very proud of the U.S. military that  
5 can project power anywhere on the globe to address those  
6 capabilities, those threats that PRC has.

7 Senator Banks: And many of these tankers were already  
8 sanctioned by the United States for their illegal activity.  
9 What is the impact on the Venezuelan, Cuban, and Iranian  
10 regimes when our forces in SOUTHCOM prevent these tankers  
11 from getting oil to their market, wherever it is going?

12 General Donovan: Senator, at this time I have not dug  
13 into that topic. I pledge to you that I will. But I do  
14 not know the intel assessments at this stage. It will  
15 become a priority, if confirmed.

16 Senator Banks: Okay. Thank you. I yield back.

17 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. Senator  
18 Duckworth.

19 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do  
20 echo my colleagues' concern that President Trump is  
21 marching us towards another forever war in Venezuela and  
22 throwing around threats to do the same elsewhere, from  
23 Greenland to Colombia to Iran.

24 After 23 years of service in the Army myself, the  
25 lessons that I learned as a young lieutenant about



1 professionalism and code of conduct and ethics of military  
2 officers remains with me to this day. I know firsthand the  
3 costs and blood that servicemembers and their families  
4 suffer when an administration like this one uses military  
5 force based on a flimsy pretext. This Administration has  
6 come up with very questionable legal justifications for  
7 what they are doing. They have untethered to any real  
8 national security threat with no realistic planning about  
9 what comes next.

10 The Administration says that it is all about  
11 warfighters, but we all know that it is fast to betray our  
12 warfighters. As we saw with the hearing on domestic  
13 appointments that I secured in December, President Trump is  
14 comfortable thrusting servicemembers into legally  
15 unprecedented situations and leaving them out there to dry  
16 without legal protection.

17 In SOUTHCOM, this Administration's leaders have  
18 created questionable legal justifications for the use of  
19 military force. They have thrown military commanders under  
20 the bus instead of admitting that they likely ordered a war  
21 crime and sidelined critical legal advisors. In fact, the  
22 very real reason that we are here today is because the  
23 former Commander of SOUTHCOM, Admiral Holsey, was asked by  
24 SecDef Hegseth to step down after he expressed concerns  
25 over the, and I quote, "murky legality of the boat strike



1 campaign," end quote, according to The Wall Street Journal.

2 General Donovan, I am concerned about how this  
3 Administration, what they might ask you to do in this role,  
4 given what they asked your predecessor to do. And I want  
5 to understand how you would navigate that in a way that  
6 would safeguard your oath to the American people and to  
7 uphold the Constitution by protecting responsible American  
8 use of force and protecting the servicemembers under your  
9 command. If ordered by the Secretary to shoot unarmed  
10 civilians, with no observable weapons, who are not  
11 presenting any hostile acts of hostile intent, would you  
12 relay that order down to your chain of command?

13 General Donovan: No, Senator.

14 Senator Duckworth: Thank you. Let's do another  
15 example. If ordered by the Secretary of Defense to shoot  
16 harassing fire into a city or a village indiscriminately,  
17 where we are not actively engaged in hostilities, would you  
18 issue that order to your subordinates?

19 General Donovan: Senator, I believe the hypothetical  
20 aspect of that question, I have to identify that that is a  
21 very significant, serious question I take to heart, for the  
22 fact that the detail and the planning process to get to a  
23 point where one of those very hard decisions has to be  
24 made, that is a significant effort, a commander-led process  
25 and planning, to ensure that all aspects of the operation



1 are taken into consideration, to include the legal advice  
2 of the legal counsel on that planning staff. My  
3 responsibility is to lead that planning staff. I do not  
4 believe that situation you described, Senator, would be  
5 something that would happen out of the blue. The  
6 conditions had been set. The leaders had been given the  
7 authority, the rules of engagement, to understand the  
8 rules. And I cannot commit or comment on a situation that  
9 I did not plan, participate in, to get to that point, the  
10 point of decision that you are referencing, Senator.

11 Senator Duckworth: I think this is a pretty  
12 straightforward answer. Let me try a more straightforward  
13 answer. Do you agree that it would be a crime in  
14 international law, under the Geneva Convention, for the  
15 United States military to conduct violence towards persons  
16 who are taking no active part in hostilities or have laid  
17 down their arms?

18 General Donovan: Senator, again, I would like to  
19 really better understand the situation that is being laid  
20 out here and the staff planning process that got there to  
21 that position before we would have to make that very hard  
22 decision.

23 Senator Duckworth: Okay. Well, I am really troubled  
24 by that answer because the specific examples I cited are  
25 not hypothetical. President Trump pardoned a former Army



1 office, Clint Lorance, who was convicted of murder by a  
2 jury of his peers for taking these very actions against  
3 noncombatants. In 2012, Lorance ordered his soldiers to  
4 fire upon three unarmed Afghan men, killing two and  
5 wounding a third. Lorance was known to act with impunity.  
6 He pointed his weapon at a young child, ordered soldiers to  
7 fire from a tower in the general direction of villagers,  
8 and lied about receiving hostile fire, and even instructed  
9 one of his soldiers to falsify a report after the murders.  
10 And this is a man that SecDef Hegseth calls a good guy.

11 These are the types of disturbing, lawless actions  
12 that the SecDef and the President regularly glorify. Trump  
13 has bandied the term "hero" to describe the likes of Eddie  
14 Gallagher, who posed with the body of a deceased teenager  
15 and who his fellow veterans said was, quote, "okay with  
16 killing anything that moved," end quote.

17 Let's be clear. President Trump is creating a climate  
18 in our military where lawlessness is rewarded, not  
19 punished, a climate where it is even realistic for me to  
20 ask you what would you do if the President or Secretary  
21 ordered actions that amount to war crimes. And it disturbs  
22 me that you could not answer those last two questions.

23 Thank you.

24 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Duckworth.  
25 Senator Rosen, you are our final questioner.

1           Senator Rosen: Thank you, Senator Wicker. No  
2 pressure there for the final questioner. But thank you,  
3 Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed. Thank you to both of  
4 you for your willingness to serve, for your service through  
5 all of these years, to your families who served along with  
6 you, and for taking the time to speak with me.

7           There are so many serious, important things to talk  
8 about. I am going to switch over a little bit to cyber  
9 workforce for a bit, because if we are not prepared with  
10 our workforce and with our assets in this cyberspace then  
11 we will not be able to meet the challenges of the future.

12           One of the most important aspects of maintaining a  
13 robust cyber defense posture is ensuring that our workforce  
14 is prepared, capable of adapting to an ever-evolving and  
15 quickly evolving cyber threat landscape.

16           General Rudd, as you know, cyber domain is incredibly  
17 dynamic. Developing a workforce with the necessary skills  
18 and expertise to achieve mastery is critical. We are not  
19 there yet. In your responses to the Advanced Policy  
20 Questions you mentioned investing in people as one of your  
21 lines of effort if you are confirmed. Can you elaborate  
22 more on what you think CYBERCOM could or should be doing in  
23 workforce development talent management space for cyber,  
24 especially when you consider the needs across uniformed,  
25 civilian, and contract workforces? I am especially

1 interested in your thoughts on the long-term shaping of the  
2 workforce and what more you think you might need to develop  
3 this. Because too often we allow the near-term pressures,  
4 and they are great, to drive out our longer-term objectives  
5 and views.

6 General Rudd: Senator, I could not agree more with  
7 you in terms of how you describe the strategic environment  
8 which we need to develop and build and continue to enhance  
9 the cyber workforce. You know, as we talked, it is about  
10 the people first. We have got to attract, train, retain  
11 the most talented and the best. And I appreciate what I  
12 understand of this Committee, in particular, providing the  
13 resources and the direction to help enable to do that.

14 I think we also talked a little bit about the  
15 Department's plan and CYBERCOM's efforts under CYBERCOM 2.0  
16 and how that will put us on a trajectory, and has, to  
17 building and enhancing, really, the supreme workforce that  
18 is already there. We have got to expand it, we have got to  
19 do it quickly, we have got to do it at scale, and we have  
20 got to think about creative ways to do this beyond just the  
21 agreements with the services.

22 I think this is one area where, if confirmed, I would  
23 want to take a very quick, deep assessment into it and then  
24 come back with any other further recommendations, Senator.

25 Senator Rosen: Well, thank you, because General Rudd,



1 in fiscal year 2025 NDAA it included a provision that I  
2 helped champion to have the Department establish a cyber  
3 intelligence capability to provide foundational scientific  
4 and technical intelligence to CYBERCOM and the rest of the  
5 Joint Force. So what is your understanding of the  
6 Department's current approach to standing this up,  
7 including the lessons learned from recently completed cyber  
8 intelligence pilot with the Defense Intelligence Agency?  
9 How will you prioritize this, and really, what are your  
10 thoughts on the evolution of the threats in cyberspace, how  
11 quickly they evolve?

12 General Rudd: Yes, Senator. Several of the Committee  
13 members have alluded to, or outright said, that cyber is  
14 the domain that, we are active right now. Some could say  
15 we are at war right now in that domain. I do not think  
16 that is an unfair characterization. So I think everything  
17 that we can do to move as quickly as possible to enhance  
18 our posture, our capabilities, and our workforce in there,  
19 give them the best tools that they can, deepen and thicken  
20 the relationships not only within the Department but across  
21 industry, academia, for us to maintain the advantage of the  
22 world-class cyber force that we have.

23 Senator Rosen: Yeah, I think it is critically  
24 important. I am going to ask my last question, quickly, on  
25 the Maduro capture, to General Donovan. The President



1 ordered Operation Absolute Resolve in Venezuela on January  
2 3rd, to capture President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, but  
3 intentionally did not notify Congress. In fact, in the  
4 briefings to Congress in the months prior, where the  
5 Administration officials were asked if there was a plan to  
6 remove Maduro, the answer was repeatedly no.

7 So how would you define the rules of engagement for  
8 counternarcotic operations in SOUTHCOM, and what entity do  
9 you think has the final authority to approve these rules?

10 General Donovan: Senator, I asked to come back and  
11 meet with you again after, if confirmed, and have time in  
12 SOUTHCOM to understand the structure of the headquarters,  
13 the missions at hand, the missions envisioned in the  
14 future, tied to the NSS and current operations, and come  
15 back and discuss it with you.

16 Senator Rosen: Okay. I will look forward to that  
17 briefing. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much, gentlemen, for  
19 your testimony today. This concludes today's hearing. For  
20 the information of members, questions for the record will  
21 be due to the Committee within 2 business days of the  
22 conclusion of the hearing. We are now adjourned.

23 [Whereupon, at 11:44 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]  
24  
25