

STATEMENT OF

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Introduction. Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished committee members: thank you for your vote of confidence and the opportunity to lead United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM). It is a privilege to join this incredible team. Since assuming command, I have been continuously impressed with the Command's strong foundation of partnerships and interagency collaboration. I have also had several opportunities to engage my regional counterparts, including in Venezuela, where I met with the interim president and senior military leaders, and in Ecuador, where I sat down with President Naboa. It was a particular honor to welcome Western Hemisphere Chiefs of Defense to Washington, DC, during the first week of my command, who provided firsthand insight into opportunities for regional cooperation. As the Americas Counter Cartel Conference in Miami made clear, we are united in our shared commitment to enlist priority hemispheric partners to expand burden sharing to counter, degrade, and destroy narco-terrorist networks and strengthen border security in the Western Hemisphere. This is a momentous time in our nation's history, and USSOUTHCOM is the perfect command to lead the way forward, together with our regional partners and allies, we work to transform our security partnerships into force multipliers for hemispheric defense.

This transformation aligns with the priorities in the 2026 National Defense Strategy (NDS), which require USSOUTHCOM to reexamine and evolve its requirements, including authorities, command and control (C2), and tailor-made forces that are purpose built to defend the homeland at range, speed, and scale. In my first six weeks, I have begun this reexamination, and I look forward to discussing my recommendations and vision for the Command in the year ahead to move the great foundation that it has built forward. Today I am honored to highlight the priorities, activities, and investments of USSOUTHCOM's #1 mission to defend the homeland.

Countering Foreign Terrorist Organizations. Thirteen Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) are conducting campaigns of terror, violence, and corruption in our area of responsibility (AOR). They produce and move illicit drugs through the hemisphere and across our borders, including the cocaine that poisons our communities and kills thousands of Americans every year. These vast, agile, illicit enterprises generate hundreds of billions of dollars in revenue by trafficking in drugs, humans, weapons, and contraband; destabilize the region by terrorizing populations and undermining governance; and pose a direct threat to the security and sovereignty of the United States and to every nation in the hemisphere.

Last year, in support of the President's directive to counter narco-terrorists, the Department directed additional U.S. military forces to the USSOUTHCOM AOR as part of Operation SOUTHERN SPEAR (OSS). **Joint Task Force (JTF) Southern Spear** continues to conduct decisive operations to detect, disrupt, and dismantle narco-terrorist networks. As a result, narco-terrorists are responding to sustained pressure by shifting to new methods and conveyances. In support of the President's directives, the U.S. Coast Guard's Maritime Security Response Team (MSRT), accompanied by U.S. Marine Corps Special Purpose Forces, continue to support maritime interdiction operations (MIO) to target the shadow oil fleet that is enabling U.S. adversaries across the globe.

In Haiti, FTO-driven violence and instability continue to overwhelm and undermine Haitian security forces, and displace Haitian citizens, risking a maritime mass migration event. Haitian FTOs also present additional security concerns to U.S. government facilities and personnel, with recent gunfire aimed at the U.S. Embassy compound and U.S. Marine security personnel. In response, over the past year, a USSOUTHCOM supporting task force provided resources, essential supplies, and capabilities at the request of the Haitian government and in

support of the Kenyan-led Multinational Security Support mission, and the future Gang Suppression Force. At the request of the Department of State (DoS) and in coordination with the Haitian government, USSOUTHCOM has also deployed U.S. Marine Corps teams to provide additional security at the U.S. Embassy.

Across the region, **Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S)** continues to leverage established partnerships across its interagency and international coalition to rapidly fuse intelligence from the air and maritime domains. This fusion enables military targeting solutions for at-sea and shore-based forces against FTOs in ports, clandestine airfields, and maritime distribution networks. The task force facilitates rapid information sharing with partner nations and supports their operations with assets like the Ship Special Mission (SSM), ISR, and communications solutions to extend their reach and contributions to the security of the Western Hemisphere.

The **Embassy Intelligence Fusion Cell (EIFC)** in Bogota is another example of how we work hand-in-hand with partners to stop FTOs from moving drugs to the Homeland by looking to affect the supply chain as close to the source as possible. By committing airborne ISR and fostering a holistic intelligence sharing effort, we provide timely, critical information on cocaine labs, production and departure zones, and top FTO leaders to enable Colombian security forces to take action. These efforts have resulted in hundreds of labs destroyed, dozens of FTO leaders and enablers neutralized, and hundreds of tons of cocaine never making it to U.S. streets.

Through persistent engagements and forward deployed elements, **Special Operations Forces (SOF)** units directly support regional security forces conducting operations against

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army (FARC) offshoots, National Liberation Army (ELN), and other FTOs in the region. SOF’s unique authorities for training and building partner capability are essential to supporting the 2025 National Security Strategy (NSS) goals for the Western Hemisphere. We also leverage other authorities like Sec. 284, Sec. 321, and Sec. 331 that enable our partners to join us in the FTO fight. Last year, USSOUTHCOM provided critical intelligence support to our Ecuadorian partners to locate and apprehend “Fito,” the leader of a violent FTO and Ecuador’s most wanted fugitive. This year, USSOUTHCOM is also aggressively accelerating initiatives to provide advanced unit-level training to partner nation law enforcement and military personnel to develop tactical leadership and specialized skills for sustained counternarcotics and counter-FTO operations. Our concerted efforts will enhance the efficacy of future combined counter-FTO operations and strengthen essential partnerships across the Department, other interagency elements, Allies, and regional partners.

To enable these and other efforts, I am focusing on ensuring USSOUTHCOM has the right C2 structure, capabilities, organizational construct, and forces to lead the hemispheric counter FTO campaign at speed and scale, aligned and synchronized with U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) counter cartel and border security efforts. This calls for a single, integrated approach across GCC boundaries focused on the point of production through the point of delivery to deter FTOs by applying systematic friction on their networks. In coordination with USNORTHCOM’s efforts in Mexico, I also intend to shift greater focus to helping develop our regional partners’ ability to degrade narco-terrorist organizations across the hemisphere. Finally, I fully intend to capitalize on next generation capabilities like unmanned platforms, AI integration, and commercial tools to better enable us—and our partners—to counter FTO threats together. These capabilities along with a renewal of FISA Section 702, the number one source of

intelligence collection along the southern border, and support from our defense intelligence and national intelligence enterprise will help enable mission success. I look forward to the continued support of this Committee as we defend the homeland from FTOs and dangerous drugs and enable our partners to do more with us to protect our hemisphere.

Secure Key Terrain. As the NDS makes clear, the United States will no longer cede access to or influence over key terrain in the Western Hemisphere. With varying degrees of influence, ownership and/or operational control, Chinese investment in critical infrastructure, key ports, and port facilities grant Beijing a foothold in the region and raise concerns of potential dual-use infrastructure that could facilitate intelligence gathering, cyber vulnerability, or logistical denial during global contingencies. As of late 2025, Chinese entities have a presence in or are seeking access to, at least 12 space sites in South America and the Caribbean, which could enable China to monitor satellites in the Western Hemisphere, collect on U.S. military assets, and intercept sensitive information. Fortunately, this trend is reversing in Panama. During the past year, Panama reduced its reliance on **China** as an economic and security partner, simultaneously increasing its already strong ties to the U.S. to strengthen Canal infrastructure and security. Most recently, the Government of Panama enforced a Panama Supreme Court decision that determined a China-affiliated entity could no longer operate two key ports in the Canal. However, Beijing continues to seek opportunities to shape the environment to its strategic advantage using all tools of national power, including economic engagement, strategic investments in critical minerals, and increasing military linkages. Ensuring unfettered U.S. access to the Panama Canal is a top priority of USSOUTHCOM.

Russia also continues to project maritime power in the Western Hemisphere by deploying a variety of naval vessels, from submarines to destroyers and collection vessels, to

Nicaragua and other countries in the region. Nicolas Maduro's arrest created uncertainty for the future of **Iran's** long-standing partnership with Venezuela. However, the threat posed by Iran's networks in the Western Hemisphere remains.

Theater Posture. At the direction of the Secretary of War, USSOUTHCOM expanded access in strategically important locations and leveraged our existing theater posture in new ways over the past year. Enhanced regional access enables current priority missions and supports Joint Force efforts to protect critical infrastructure and lines of communication, monitor and expose threatening naval or undersea activities, secure the Panama Canal, and ultimately deny adversaries the ability to position forces and other capabilities in the hemisphere.

Working by, with, and through Panama's security forces, USSOUTHCOM established the **Joint Security Cooperation Group–Panama (JSCG–P)** to improve warfighting readiness and interoperability. JSCG–P provides opportunities for increased joint training exercises and rotational U.S. military presence at Panama Pacifico International Airport, Naval Base Noel Rodriguez, and Aeronaval Base Cristóbal Colón, where construction is underway on a new multi-use facility at the newly reestablished Combined Jungle Operations Training Center (CJOTC). CJOTC is building trust, cooperation, and interoperability between U.S. and Panamanian forces through offerings like the Combined Jungle Operations Training Course, which was piloted in August 2025 and has undergone multiple iterations to strengthen the interoperability and readiness of U.S. and Panamanian forces to operate effectively within inhospitable jungle terrain, as well as enable partner burden-sharing.

As the United States' oldest overseas military installation, **Naval Station Guantanamo Bay (NSGB)** is a critical foothold that provides the Joint Force with regional access, the ability

to project forces during contingencies, and forward presence that supports emergent missions. USSOUTHCOM continues to conduct safe, humane, and transparent detention operations at **Joint Task Force Guantanamo (JTF-GTMO)**. An operation which has now lasted 24 years—coupled with additional operational demands this past year—is challenged by the Naval Station’s deteriorating infrastructure, which we must address to meet evolving mission demands. Last year, USSOUTHCOM established **Joint Task Force–Southern Guard (JTF–SG)** on NSGB to support DHS-led illegal alien removal operations. In partnership with USNORTHCOM, United States Transportation Command and DHS, JTF–SG has seamlessly integrated the Joint Force to support reception and temporary holding of illegal aliens who are under DHS custody at NSGB. The men and women of JTF–SG have provided humane care, security, and medical support to hundreds of illegal aliens from dozens of countries who await removal to their countries of origin or other appropriate destinations.

In El Salvador, **Comalapa Cooperative Security Location (CSL)** has enabled increased flow of forces into the AOR over the past year. We also leveraged Comalapa to support the U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet’s Hybrid Fleet Campaign and Fleet Experimentation Event (FLEX). This multifunctional event showcased the U.S. military’s ability to accelerate and operationalize technology through cooperation with partner nations and private industry.

JTF Bravo’s forward-deployed presence at Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras continued to provide valuable forward presence that enables rapid response to a crisis. Last year, the JTF Bravo team, in cooperation with the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit and the DoS’s Disaster Assistance Response Team, provided immediate lifesaving assistance – including the delivery of food, water and equipment in response to the devastation of Hurricane Melissa in Jamaica.

Mil-to-Mil Engagements. USSOUTHCOM's approach has always encouraged and empowered allies and regional partners to contribute to our shared security. We are now evolving this approach to partner for purpose, focusing on enabling our partners and allies to move forward with us to counter shared security threats. USSOUTHCOM uses the full spectrum of enabling capabilities to achieve this, including robust security cooperation and assistance; productive joint exercises; targeted cooperation in cyber, space and technology; logistics and engineering; professional military education through International Military Education and Training (IMET); and the enduring relationships of the State Partnership Program (SPP). Through these efforts, we are fostering a hemisphere of resilient partners who actively contribute to our collective security and prioritize partnering with the United States in all sectors.

Across the region, we are leveraging targeted **security cooperation** to advance U.S. interests across the region. We are especially grateful for the support of Congress and the Department to our security cooperation efforts, including the additional \$75 million we received in special appropriations under Section 8066 in FY 2025. These funds have been essential to expanding cooperation and interoperability among our partners, funding land and maritime domain exercises, additional engineering assessments, and Building Partnership Capacity (BPC) initiatives for over 10 partner nations. Through these efforts, we are fostering a hemisphere of resilient partners who actively contribute to our collective security and prioritize partnering with the United States in all sectors.

We continue to work closely with partners like the **United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)** in Panama and beyond to support U.S. access to strategically important locations. USACE is actively engaged in projects throughout the Caribbean and Central and South America. Current highlights include major port projects in Guatemala and Peru to deter

and counter Chinese infrastructure investments, technical assistance for excavation and exploration of rare earth elements in the Dominican Republic, and ongoing efforts to support the Panama Canal Authority with technical expertise to ensure unrestricted transits for U.S. vessels. USACE is also facilitating construction of a multi-use facility featuring billeting and administrative space at Aeronaval Base Cristóbal Colón, which will support future PANAMAX exercises and facilitate U.S. presence on the Caribbean side of the Panama Canal.

Our ability to project, employ, and sustain forces to secure key terrain depends on a **robust and resilient logistics enterprise**. The dispersed geography, partner nation dependencies, and limited infrastructure across the USSOUTHCOM AOR create sustainment vulnerabilities that demand deliberate, coordinated efforts to mitigate. To address these challenges, USSOUTHCOM has implemented a series of security cooperation programs designed to enhance the organic readiness capacity of partner nations employing U.S. defense articles. For instance, an FY 2026 initiative in Panama will strengthen maritime domain awareness through investments in Near Coastal Patrol Vessels and interceptor vessels, complemented by a Technical Assistance and Advisory Team to develop curriculum, formal education, and lifecycle management capabilities. These efforts not only bolster Panama's maritime security but also serve as a model for targeted investments across the region, enabling burden-sharing and ensuring allies and partners maintain fully mission-capable U.S. defense articles to counter shared threats.

Through close cooperation in the **space and cyber** domains, we bolster partner defenses against malicious intrusions and enable their own sovereign capabilities with secure, superior, and interoperable American systems. These efforts also demonstrate the clear superiority of the American defense ecosystem by deploying cutting-edge innovation directly to the theater. In

2025, USSOUTHCOM executed multiple missions, including deploying Joint Combatant-Command Cyber Assessment Teams (JCCATs), Defend Forward Operations (DFOs), and post-DFO JCCAT support across the hemisphere; along with executing cyber tracks in the PANAMAX–Alpha and UNITAS exercises. Additionally, cyber-focused engagements provided technical expertise and incident response assistance to partners, while subject matter expert engagements strengthened collective cyber threat intelligence sharing.

Over the past year, USSOUTHCOM also supported space-focused regional engagements that range from subject matter expert exchanges, partner nation visits to NASA, and regional space seminars to major joint exercises such as RESOLUTE SENTINEL. We are increasing space domain awareness by assisting our partners with the acquisition of fixed and mobile telescopes that will help close existing space surveillance gaps. These telescopes and other commercial space-based initiatives are force multipliers in countering FTOs, as they enable technologies used to monitor, detect, and interdict narco-traffickers. The establishment of United States Space Forces Southern will further contribute to our efforts to integrate space capabilities in support of regional security and deterrence in the region.

The generational partnerships and trust built through the **SPP and IMET** remain our largest advantage over our adversaries. USSOUTHCOM’s 24 State Partnerships are currently aligned to 30 nations in the Western Hemisphere. Under the DoS Title 22 IMET program, 27 countries within the USSOUTHCOM AOR are funded to have students attend premier DoW schools in the U.S. The return on investment in this training program is clear, with multiple IMET graduates going on to serve as Ministers of Defense and Chiefs of Defense in the AOR.

The trust and relationships built through SPP and IMET extend far beyond the engagements themselves and pay lasting dividends for our shared security.

Conclusion. The threats in our hemisphere are real and urgent. Our adversaries do not care about the lines drawn in the Unified Command Plan (UCP) and neither do we. Alongside other DoW elements, other Departments and Agencies, and allies and partners, USSOUTHCOM stands vigilant and is actively defending our homeland and locking in U.S. strategic advantage across the Western Hemisphere. Our ongoing actions will ensure a more secure and prosperous future for our nation and all those who call this region home. We look forward to driving-on in this endeavor and value the continued partnership with this Committee in helping us meet today's challenges and evolving to meet future requirements.