

Senate Armed Services Committee
Advance Questions for VADM Alvin Holsey, USN
Nominee to be Commander, United States Southern Command

Duties and Qualifications

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

Title 10 of the United States Code and the 2022 Unified Command Plan (UCP) outlines SOUTHCOM's missions, responsibilities, and geographic area of responsibility (AOR). SOUTHCOM is a unified Combatant Command responsible for contingency planning, operations, and security cooperation for Central and South America and the Caribbean. As one of the six Geographic Combatant Commands (GCC), SOUTHCOM's specific tasks include defending the Panama Canal, integrating and synchronizing campaign activities, including in the gray-zone, and building partner capacity in support of whole of government efforts.

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

As the Military Deputy Commander at SOUTHCOM, I am keenly familiar with the day-to-day operations, activities, challenges and opportunities in the region. My 36 years of service in multiple operational and joint assignments have prepared me time and again for more challenging roles. As a career naval aviator, I have deployed multiple times and conducted a host of operational engagements with Allies and Partner nations around the globe. My key joint and staff tours included working as an operations officer on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, J3, Joint Operations Directorate, serving as the Head Air Combat Placement Officer at Navy Personnel Command and as force operations officer at Commander Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet. I understand what it means to lead and serve our nation's sons and daughters. I commanded Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron Light Three Seven and the Navy's first hybrid electric propulsion warship, USS Makin Island.

As a flag officer, I served as deputy director for operations, National Military Command Center and commanded Carrier Strike Group One embarked aboard USS Carl Vinson. I also had the privilege to serve as the inaugural commander of the International Maritime Security Construct / Coalition Task Force Sentinel rapidly setting up an expeditionary headquarters to ensure freedom of navigation, international law, free flow of commerce and stability of maritime commons throughout the Middle East. Prior to reporting to SOUTHCOM, I served as deputy Chief of Naval Personnel / Commander, Navy Personnel Command attacking some of the most pressing manpower challenges in our Navy. If confirmed, I will serve the men and women of U.S. Southern Command with absolute conviction and draw upon my years of experience in building warfighting teams to defend the homeland and ensure the safety and security of the American people.

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

As the current Deputy Commander of SOUTHCOM, I have a great appreciation for SOUTHCOM's mission. This region requires persistent engagement with partner nations' leaders, ambassadors and country teams to truly understand cultures, security challenges and opportunities. If confirmed, I will review our campaign plans to ensure we can deliver at the point of need. Additionally, I will work with interagency, intergovernmental, allies and partners, academia, civil society, and the private sector to increase collaboration and work towards shared goals.

Relationships

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

The Secretary of Defense

The Commander reports directly to the Secretary of Defense and is responsible to the President and the Secretary of Defense for performing the military missions assigned to the Command and for exercising command authority over the forces assigned by the Secretary of Defense. The Commander is directly responsible to the Secretary of Defense for the ability of the Command to carry out its mission. Additionally, the Commander looks to the Secretary to provide sufficient authority and forces to carry out assigned missions. The Commander also develops mission statements and concepts of operations based on the direction of the President and Secretary of Defense through the Chairman.

The Deputy Secretary of Defense

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

The Under Secretaries of Defense

The Commander does not have a direct command relationship with the Under Secretaries of Defense. However, the Commander should communicate regularly with the appropriate Under Secretaries on strategic and regional security issues to ensure alignment.

The Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The Chairman is the principal military advisor to the President, National Security Council, Homeland Security Council, and Secretary of Defense. The Chairman serves as the global integrator across combatant commands and is the communication link between the Secretary of Defense or the President to the Combatant Commander. This requires timely and consistent engagement with the Commander, U.S. Southern Command on operations and activities in the AOR. The Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff performs duties assigned by the CJCS and performs the Chairman's duties in his absence. The SOUTHCOM Commander communicates with the Vice Chairman as required to enable the performance of his duties and responsibilities.

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs is the principal advisor to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy and the Secretary of Defense on all matters of international security strategy and DOD policy in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Russia and Eurasia. The Commander does not have a direct command relationship with the Assistant Secretary. However, the Commander be in regular communication and coordination with the Assistant Secretary on issues of mutual concern and interest is critical to mission success.

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Global Security

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Global Security provides policy and planning oversight to Department of Defense homeland defense and mission assurance, defense support to civil authorities, Arctic and Global Resilience, and, perhaps most important to SOUTHCOM and Western Hemisphere Affairs. As the Assistant Secretary's responsibility also includes the areas of cyber, space, countering weapons of mass destruction, and homeland defense, it is significant to SOUTHCOM's mission to deter threats in all domains. The Commander does not have a direct command relationship with the Assistant Secretary. However, the Commander must be in regular communication and coordination with the Assistant Secretary is critical to mission success.

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

The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (SO/LIC) advocates for Special Operations and Irregular Warfare within the Department of Defense so that our forces and activities are properly resourced and employed, including those conducted within the U.S. Southern Command AOR such as counterterrorism, global competition, information operations, counterdrug operations, detention operations, civil affairs operations, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts. The Commander does not have a direct command relationship with the Assistant Secretary. However, the Commander must be in

regular coordination with the Assistant Secretary on issues of mutual concern and interest is critical to mission success.

The Service Secretaries and Service Chiefs

The Service Secretaries and Service Chiefs are responsible for organizing, training, and equipping their forces. They execute administrative control and support of forces assigned to SOUTHCOM through the Service Component Commands. The Commander coordinates regularly with the Service Secretaries and Chiefs to ensure the Services understand operational requirements and provide highly trained forces to support specific roles and missions. The Commander also highlights future capability requirements to help the Services better plan, program, design, and develop a lethal Joint Force.

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

The Commander must maintain frequent engagements and open lines of communication with all Combatant Commanders to better understand and synchronize efforts against global threats. This enables unity of effort and highlights the importance of supported/supporting relationships. The relationship with the NORTHCOM Commander is particularly important to ensure the southern approaches to the homeland are secure, and to counter threats throughout the Western Hemisphere.

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

The Commander's engagement with Chiefs of Mission is critical to understanding challenges in a host country. Our operations, activities, and investments in the AOR are executed by, with, and through the country teams and Chiefs of Mission. Although there is no formal relationship with the Chiefs of Mission, regular communication is required to ensure unity of effort across a host of activities to include security cooperation programs addressing partner nations objectives. SOUTHCOM also benefits from having a Civilian Deputy to the Commander, a senior State Department official, who provides counsel, foreign policy advice and regular touchpoints with Chiefs of Mission and the Department of State. Also, Senior Defense Officials in country provide daily coordination with the embassies to ensure alignment and support for our theater objectives.

National Defense Strategy and Global Posture Review

The 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) continues the shift to prioritizing the strategic competition with near-peer rivals and setting China as the pacing challenge. Implementing the NDS will require the Secretary of Defense and combatant commanders to carry out missions efficiently and make hard choices – including in AORs such as SOUTHCOM which prior commanders have identified as an “economy of force”

combatant command.

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

SOUTHCOM's essential missions are to deter aggression, defeat threats, rapidly respond to crises, and build regional capacity, working with allies, partner nations, and U.S. government team members to enhance security and defend the U.S. homeland and national interests.

Partnerships remain our best deterrence to countering shared threats in this AOR. That means we must sustain the U.S. role as the trusted security partner. We must continue along with our Allies, partners, law enforcement and USG interagency to counter malign actors, Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCO) and Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO), support counter narcotics operations, and build partner capacity to face transboundary challenges. We must be prepared to assist with humanitarian assistance and disaster relief when needed. Our work must leverage the strong partner nations we have and work in concert with them and with a regional focus. We must move forward with vigor and continue to put Integrated Deterrence in action to see return on investment in the region while ensuring the safety and security of the American people.

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

Per the 2022 National Defense Strategy, China remains a long-term strategic competitor and is seen as a pacing challenge, while Russia remains a more acute threat who seeks to undermine democracy. In the SOUTHCOM AOR, I assess that China, Russia, Iran, and non-state actors such as TCOs and VEOs will continue to undermine regional stability and security through corruption, deliberate dis- and misinformation efforts and offering economic incentives with malign intentions.

If confirmed, I intend to continue efforts started by previous commanders to strengthen security partnerships through security cooperation, foreign military sales and financing, training, exercises & operations, education, intel-sharing, cyber, space, etc. I will seek to enhance democratic values by supporting initiatives that highlight the importance of the Rule of Law, Human Rights, Professional Military Training, Non-Commission Officer programs and Women Peace and Security (WPS). I would also support regional resiliency initiatives and look to expand economic security by reinforcing opportunities through the Departments of State, Treasury, Commerce and others to utilize all elements of national power across the region. SOUTHCOM must continue engagement with our allies and partners to improve interoperability to better support the joint force. Our operations, activities, and investments in this region must continue to illuminate malign activity and counter the efforts of China, Russia, Iran, TCOs and VEOs.

The Secretary of Defense's Global Posture Review looked at the Department's

posture in the SOUTHCOM AOR in support of national security objectives, including humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and counterdrug missions.

7. If confirmed, what role would you expect to play in supporting the Department's posture to support U.S. government efforts on the range of transnational challenges and add to defense partnership activities in the SOUTHCOM AOR?

Currently, SOUTHCOM contributes to the DOD's posture by improving regional security and stability through supporting multiple initiatives aimed at countering transnational threats such as drug and weapons trafficking, organized crime, and human trafficking. SOUTHCOM works closely with partner nations and our Allies in the region (e.g., Great Britain, Canada, the Netherlands, and France) to conduct combined operations, enhance interoperability, and share intelligence. SOUTHCOM disrupts transnational threats, thus enhancing overall regional security. SOUTHCOM will continue to support the Department's posture by countering malign influence from external actors such as China, Russia, and Iran, who seek to expand their influence in Latin America and the Caribbean. If confirmed, I will promote cooperation with other U.S. government agencies (e.g., DOS, USAID, and DHS) and multinational organizations. SOUTHCOM will help protect U.S. interests, promote stability and resiliency, and resist coercion and influence by working with our Allies and partner nations.

8. What do you believe are the priority challenges in SOUTHCOM's ability to implement the 2022 NDS?

SOUTHCOM's ability to implement the 2022 NDS is shaped by our ability to balance strategic priorities, overcome resource constraints, and address complex regional challenges. The global focus of the NDS on great power competition, particularly toward China and Russia, means that SOUTHCOM must balance its efforts between campaigning against global adversaries and address entities undermining regional security such as TCOs and VEOs. Through integrated deterrence, enhancing regional partnerships, and countering transnational threats, SOUTHCOM aims to support the intent of the NDS in promoting security, stability, and prosperity in the Western Hemisphere.

Major Challenges, Problems, Priorities

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

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

I think the major challenges will continue to be to PRC, Russian, and Iranian influence in the region. Their relationships with countries that do not share our democratic ways and have no respect for rule of law is concerning. Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua continue to build these relationships to counter sanctions, deepen security cooperation, gain economic advantage, and to undermine U.S. influence in the region. I remain concerned with TCOs and Violent Extremist Organizations as well. These entities enable the violence and corruption that directly challenge our partners capabilities, driving irregular migration, and hemispheric insecurity. SOUTHCOM continues to see millions of intra- and inter-theatre migrants flee the tragic conditions in their respective homelands which has created a humanitarian crisis. Finally, SOUTHCOM must be ready to respond in the event of a mass migration due to the ongoing instability in Cuba and Haiti. The current Kenyan-led Multinational Security Support mission intended to curtail the gang-violence in Haiti will continue into the next fiscal year. If confirmed, I will also be responsible for continuing the detainee operations mission at Joint Task Force Guantanamo.

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

If confirmed, I will focus on SOUTHCOM's primary mission of securing the southern approaches and working with other USG agencies, as well as our Allies and partners to advance security, economic prosperity, and regional stability. I will ensure that SOUTHCOM continues to strengthen security cooperation and civil military engagement to address enduring challenges which range from disaster response to criminal threat networks and the flow of narcotics and other contraband to our shores. I will look to expand opportunities that reinforce and build on human rights engagements, enhance disaster response and climate resiliency, and elevate Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) initiatives. Our partners continue to ask for educational opportunities and we must increase support for professional military exchanges that provide a cornerstone for partner nation defense institution building. These efforts will ensure our partners across the region see us as enduring, trusted, and credible. Also, if confirmed, I will continue to ensure the safe, legal, and humane care and treatment of detainees at Joint Task Force Guantanamo.

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

If confirmed, I see three overall priorities that SOUTHCOM must work towards to define success in its core missions: (1) Strengthen Partnerships, (2) Counter Threats and (3) Building Our Team. These priorities are defined in the SOUTHCOM Campaign Plan and seek to build a secure, free and prosperous Western Hemisphere. First, SOUTHCOM Strengthens Security Partnerships which results in partner nations having the capability and capacity to respond with a credible force to ensure regional stability. We will leverage the opportunities presented by Allies, which are vital force multipliers to achieve integrated deterrence. Second,

SOUTHCOM builds regional resilience, which is an important key to countering all threats, including the malign influence of China, Russia, Iran, and Transnational Criminal Organizations. Regional security and stability improve partners' capacity to respond to crisis and assist in our ability to deter aggression and defeat threats to our homeland. Finally, SOUTHCOM, through a whole of government approach, enhances democratic values, rule of law and human rights which support the desire to build nations that uphold democratic values across the AOR. If confirmed, I will work to ensure the U.S. remains an engaged and trusted partner in the region, demonstrating our commitment through an enduring presence and serving as the example of a democratic way of life. Failure would be defined as SOUTHCOM's inability to (1) be the trusted Security Partner in the region, (2) build regional resilience, or (3) build Team Democracy by reinforcing democratic values. Defense of our homeland remains linked to the resiliency, security and stability in Latin America and the Caribbean. I intend to do everything within my power to ensure that SOUTHCOM succeeds as this region greatly influences the defense and security of our homeland.

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

If confirmed, I would seek to improve the robust relationship that SOUTHCOM currently utilizes across the whole-of-government to include USAID, the Departments of State, Homeland Security, Treasury, and other agencies. SOUTHCOM has 13 liaison officers from across the interagency embedded in its current staff and operations directorates. The Civilian Deputy to the Commander is a key enabler as well.

Influence of Countries Outside the Region in Latin America

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

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

In my time at SOUTHCOM, I have learned that we have to be credible, present, and engaged when it comes to delivering for our partners in the region. Current authorities are sufficient. If

confirmed, I will work across the DoD enterprise and with Congress to ensure that we can deliver for our partners in a timely manner to outcompete and disrupt malign actors in the region.

14. In your opinion, are countries in the region prepared to push back against Chinese and Russian influence efforts and what tools are required to make a difference?

Yes, leaders in the region are willing to push back, but they need clear alternatives. Not all leaders within this region view the PRC and Russia as nefarious actors. The PRC and Russia present economic options to address infrastructure or development needs that partners are willing to seize to provide for their people. While the U.S. continues to be a trusted partner in the region, we need to expand our efforts across the whole of government to offer competitive options in other arenas (e.g., economic, infrastructure, development, and communication solutions). SOUTHCOM is working with the U.S. government interagency and non-governmental entities to present alternatives that support our partner nations. For example, SOUTHCOM has facilitated engagement between NASA and Argentina; Export-Import Bank engagement with Trinidad and Tobago; and Department of Commerce engagement throughout the Theater.

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

China's regional strategy aims to expand economic engagement, as well as diplomatic and military influence, while eliminating political and economic support to Taiwan. Beijing uses its partners Cuba and Venezuela to expand its presence and participation in regional forums, and regularly exploits a nation's weakness and instability to advance its strategic goals. Russia prioritizes restoring its global prestige and influence, relying on its traditional partners, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela, to promote its regional lines of effort and provide platforms for consistent Russian presence. International condemnation of Russia's war in Ukraine has impeded some of Moscow's agenda; however, the deployment of multiple warships to the region this year demonstrated that the Russian military still has a global reach and remains a threat to democracy.

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

China maintains a regional military and security presence using its People's Liberation Army to support Beijing's goal of building strong all-around relationships with most nations in Latin America and the Caribbean. Over the last 20 years, Beijing has incrementally expanded its military relationships through arms sales, military exchanges, training programs, exercises, and out-of-area deployments. China's development of dual-use sites and facilities remains a concern (e.g., deep-water ports, space-enabling infrastructure, and 5G technology). Similarly, the Russian military primarily operates in Cuba, Nicaragua, and Venezuela to strengthen military ties and operations. This includes defense cooperation, intelligence collection, power projection, and information operations (e.g., cyber, disinformation, misinformation, etc.).

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

In my view, the potential for China, Russia, or Iran to collaborate with TCOs in Latin America and the Caribbean remains a concern. It is publicly documented that PRC and Russian enterprises and criminal elements operate in Latin America and the Caribbean; however, I am not aware of direct PRC or Russian government participation in TCO activities. China and other malign state actors contribute to and exploit TCO permissive environments. This very likely advances their respective strategic goals and meets market demands for commodities. For instance, we estimate that TCOs in Latin America generate tens of billions annually from illegal fishing, logging, and mining operations. China's demand for fish, lumber, and minerals supports these markets, and in exchange, TCOs leverage Chinese Money Laundering Organizations (CMLO), which exploit PRC banks to launder illicit proceeds.

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

In my view, applying all instruments of national power is necessary to counter malign influence and compete with adversaries in long-term strategic competition. We should engage and respond at the speed of relevance, with diplomacy as the lead. The military activities of the U.S. in the region should be integrated with diplomatic and economic efforts through consistent security cooperation and engagement with our partner militaries. This will enable us to expand our competitive space and maintain our strength as a trusted partner in the region. Additionally, ensuring SOUTHCOM is synchronized with Allies holding strategic interests in the AOR is critical in dissuading malign influence from our mutual global competitors.

19. In your view, has the United States appropriately postured its forces to best mitigate foreign intelligence collection in the region, particularly by that of: 1) Chinese intelligence collection sites on the Island of Cuba, and 2) Russian military cooperation with the government of Cuba?

While limited about what I can address in the document, I can confidently say we are aware of the efforts by the PRC and Russia to exploit their access to Cuba for malign intentions, and we are concerned about how these overtures could impact U.S. national security. If confirmed, I will work with other components across the DoD Enterprise, intergovernmental, interagency, and allies and partners to counter PRC and Russian malign efforts in the SOUTHCOM AOR. To do this, I will advocate for increased collection capabilities and look for innovative solutions, friendly maritime presence, and strengthened defenses and resilience throughout the AOR. Given the region's strategic importance, the threat's evolving nature, and geographic proximity to the United States, there is room for enhanced cooperation, particularly with the interagency and our Allies and partners, as well as more robust diplomatic engagement to fully address and counter

the challenges posed by foreign intelligence activities in the SOUTHCOM AOR.

DOD Counter-narcotics and Counter-Illicit Trafficking Activities

The unchecked threat from transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) and illegal trafficking in synthetic opioids, including fentanyl, is responsible for the majority of the more than 100,000 overdose deaths each year in the United States. DOD’s role in supporting law enforcement in their counternarcotic and counter-TCOs operations is not a main line of effort detailed in the 2022 NDS. However, DOD serves as the single lead agency for the detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime foreign shipments of drugs flowing toward the United States. On an annual basis, DOD’s counter-narcotics (CN) program expends over \$900 million to support the Department’s CN operations, including to build the capacity of U.S. federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies, and certain foreign governments, and provide intelligence support on CN-related matters and a variety of other unique enabling capabilities. Much of this funding is directed towards the SOUTHCOM AOR.

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

DOD has a statutory mission to detect and monitor the aerial and maritime domain for illicit drugs transiting to the United States. The task of identifying and targeting drug trafficking and other criminal activity is complex, requiring close coordination and information sharing among U.S. and partner nation intelligence, military, and law enforcement partners. SOUTHCOM provides intelligence and cueing support to enable law enforcement agencies and partner nations to disrupt TCOs and their illicit drug trafficking operations.

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

In my view, measures of effectiveness can be applied to three areas including (1) lowering number of lives lost within U.S.; (2) degrading TCO capability / capacity; and (3) decreasing drug flow to the U.S. If confirmed, I will re-examine our current detection and monitoring (D&M) mission and work with our interagency partners and allies to increase partner nation capacity to degrade TCOs and other malign actors supporting illicit drug trafficking.

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

DOD has a statutory mission to detect and monitor the aerial and maritime transit of U.S.-bound illegal drugs. Much of the cocaine produced in Colombia and Peru moves into Ecuador for onwards trafficking to Mexico, the United States, Europe, and Asia. The violence and insecurity that accompany TCO operations have driven hundreds of thousands of migrants to our borders, while TCO corruption threatens the democratic integrity of our partners. This problem is much bigger than the products being trafficked, or the crimes being committed. It is in USG interests, and those of our allies and partners to work together to counter illicit narcotics regardless of destination. In support of law enforcement and other U.S. agencies, we should leverage our unique capabilities to help identify, disrupt, and degrade TCOs that pose the greatest threats to U.S. national security. We should also enable partner nations by building their capacity to conduct independent and integrated operations against illicit drug trafficking and other forms of transnational organized crime. Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S), in conjunction with Partner nations, leverages all-domain capabilities to target, detect and monitor illicit drug trafficking in the air and maritime domains to prevent drugs from reaching the United States.

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

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

It is my understanding that 100% of the cocaine consumed across the world is produced in the SOUTHCOM AOR, and that cocaine production is at an all-time high due to falling prices. There is also a small amount of heroin produced in the region. I understand that 25% of all overdose deaths are caused by cocaine, and that the U.S. is now experiencing a “fourth wave” with the opioid crisis. This a phase characterized by overdose deaths caused by a combination of cocaine/methamphetamine mixed with fentanyl. China remains the leading source of precursor chemicals used by Mexican cartels to make fentanyl. As I understand it, fentanyl overdoses are currently the leading cause of American deaths between the ages of 18 and 45. These illicit substances and the criminal groups that make and move them represent an enduring threat to our citizens.

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

SOUTHCOM appreciates 10 U.S. Code § 284 authorities provided by the Congress to enable DOD to support other agencies efforts to counter not just drug trafficking, but other forms of transnational organized crime. The threat is complex and continues to evolve as new markets, products, and trafficking routes transform the global flow of drugs and money, new alliances are

forming between Latin American TCOs and extra-regional groups, including CMLOs. Many Latin American TCOs are now international criminal enterprises, which are more diversified and more deeply enmeshed in the global web of illicit activities and illicit actors than ever before. As TCOs evolve, so must USG and DoD. USG and DoD must have flexible authorities that enable a timely response.

25. What is your assessment of the threat posed by the flow of fentanyl and chemical precursors from China and elsewhere in Asia into Mexico and Central America, and from there into the United States? In addition, what do you see as SOUTHCOM's particular role in combatting this threat?

China remains the leading source of precursor chemicals used by Mexican cartels to make fentanyl that is killing thousands of American citizens every year. Synthetic opioids like fentanyl are the primary driver of overdose deaths in the U.S. As I understand it, the fentanyl trafficked within the SOUTHCOM AOR is medical-grade fentanyl, diverted or stolen from medical centers or hospitals, not produced illegally. This is a trend that bears watching as U.S. and global illegal drug demand evolves. There are indications that Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Guatemala may be potential hotspots for fentanyl supply manufacturing.

SOUTHCOM continues to provide intelligence and operational support to USG and partner nation efforts to target priority TCOs engaged in fentanyl and chemical precursor trafficking, and their enabling networks. If confirmed, I will prioritize SOUTHCOM to support these efforts to disrupt the fentanyl drug supply chain and target the enabling networks that are facilitating the synthetic drug epidemic.

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

SOUTHCOM coordinates closely with NORTHCOM in this effort. The JIATF-S joint operating area overlaps the NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM areas of responsibility. This enables JIATF-S to be a key integrator between both GCCs. If confirmed, I will continue this collaboration and look to expand cooperation with U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) to better illuminate the linkages between our three AORs. I will also deepen SOUTHCOM's support to Law Enforcement Agency efforts to target TCOs that have linkages to fentanyl trafficking.

Building Partner Capacity

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

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

I see the value of building partner capacity in the region as empowering our partners to better address their security challenges independently. This is critical to a sustainable regional approach to overcome global security challenges. By empowering our partners to address their security challenges, we also gain the credibility to deter and defeat external threats to the region alongside our partners in crises or conflict. Boosting interoperability with partners and integrating whole-of-government efforts are critical to capacity building. As we work closely with our partners in the region, SOUTHCOM increases access, basing and overflight, which are critical to operating effectively in our AOR.

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

SOUTHCOM will collaborate with the interagency, Allies, and like-minded partner nations to synchronize efforts and maximize our outcomes. These efforts are accomplished via military exchanges, regional conferences, key leader engagements, training, equipping, and exercises to build partner nation capabilities and capacities to advance interoperability and strengthen institutional development. My priorities in building partner capacity will be guided by the goal to enable our partners to develop individually while ensuring we work together to increase regional security. I will also continue initiatives to develop Centers of Excellence in select countries that will provide new and sustainable regional capacity building throughout the AOR. This will assist us in efforts to mitigate threats while countering PRC and Russian pressure. These efforts also ensure freedom of the Global Commons as we continue to counter the flow of illicit traffic which fuels TCOs and VEOs.

The U.S. must remain a leader in the Western Hemisphere. We share the same values and mutual interests as most countries in this region. We cannot afford to cede influence within our own neighborhood.

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

In my view, developing sustainable institutional capacity building must go hand-in-hand with tactical and operational level efforts. These BPC efforts must focus on interoperability, interdependence, and integration between the U.S. and partner nations. This includes administration and training, doctrine and policy, talent management, and maintaining readiness and life cycle of capabilities. This must be a whole of government approach to maximize our limited resources to optimize and achieve the greatest return on our investment.

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

Security cooperation and partner nation engagement is essential to SOUTHCOM mission accomplishment. In doing so, however, we must ensure the values we hold are maintained and shared in those relationships. If confirmed, I will ensure whenever SOUTHCOM has credible evidence of significant corruption at the institutional or ministerial level that it is taken into account in our plans and operations and will coordinate across the executive branch as needed.

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

SOUTHCOM approaches building partnership capacity in a deliberate fashion to support host nation militaries. In some cases, host nation militaries are required to perform law enforcement functions, in other cases, host nations have public security forces rather than a military, such as Panama and Costa Rica. It is imperative that SOUTHCOM continues to cooperate and synchronize efforts and resource expenditures with other USG institutions that are the lead federal agencies for providing security and policing support to regional partner nations. For example, we work closely with the State Department's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement (INL) to ensure our efforts are integrated and not duplicative. Finally, we will continue to synchronize Allied efforts with U.S. security cooperation activities to provide alternative solutions for partner nation requests for assistance instead of those offered by global competitors.

Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCO)

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

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

TCOs remain the primary obstacle to lasting security and stability in the region. They undermine the rule of law and disrupt government functions. TCO traffic arms, humans, drugs, engage in illegal mining and logging, and money laundering—estimated at billions of dollars annually. TCOs generated violence is also an important irregular migration push factor into the U.S. While cocaine remains a top concern, production has evolved with an increased influx of precursor chemicals from China, leading to illicit fentanyl, and shifting the trafficking and production environments. All these factors directly inhibit U.S. citizen health, safety, and security.

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

In my view, DOD should continue to serve as the lead federal agency for detecting and monitoring the aerial and maritime transit of illicit drugs into the U.S. and continue to share intelligence and domain awareness information with domestic and foreign law enforcement partners. DOD should also continue building the capacity of partner nation defense and security forces through training, equipping, and infrastructure support. At the same time, this capacity building should encourage partner nations to do more with us and with each other. I also believe we can increase our operational support to help law enforcement and other USG agencies identify, illuminate, and map the networks intersections between state and non-state actors in the areas of illicit finance and the use of proxies. If confirmed, I will work tirelessly within DOD and across the U.S. government to enable those operations that target priority threats to our homeland and to our interests.

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

In FY25, SOUTHCOM will receive 2 percent of the Department's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance allocation. Intelligence is critical to success in this region. A small investment provides a significant impact on regional stability and our national security. If confirmed, I will explore options for employing non-traditional ISR, and ways to improve the efficacy of D&M efforts, such as investing in new technology. Congress has been very supportive of SOUTHCOM's Pale Ale program, as well as our Ship Special Mission. If confirmed, I will advocate for adequate for air and maritime assets to bolster presence and our ability to interdict threats.

Northern Triangle

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

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

The Administration's plan in the Northern Triangle is a long-term effort designed to address the root causes of some of the most significant challenges causing irregular migration, corruption, and the looming humanitarian crisis in the area. It is my understanding that President Biden has pledged \$4 billion in additional assistance to the region to focus on these root causes and working with governments to ensure that the rule of law is encased in all activities.

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

SOUTHCOM supports whole-of-government efforts through traditional security cooperation and humanitarian assistance activities in the Northern Triangle. Beyond these traditional U.S. military efforts, we collaborate with other U.S. government agencies to advance partner nations' security and stability efforts. For example, within our headquarters we now have a Department of Commerce LNO, USAID senior advisor, and other interagency partners to help synchronize interagency programs.

SOUTHCOM's human rights initiative improves host nation security forces' respect for fundamental human rights. To date, fifteen partner countries within the SOUTHCOM AOR are signatories to this initiative. This framework promotes better governance, respect for the rule of law, and increased transparency and anti-corruption goals with military leadership. All of these efforts strengthen partner capacity, degrade the TCO threat networks, and advance and support U.S. national interests in the region.

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

Corruption among government and military leaders weakens public institutions, undermining the local population's trust in the government which impacts regional stability and security. DOD and SOUTHCOM provide training opportunities and emphasize the importance of respect for human rights, the rule of law, and democratic values.

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

SOUTHCOM should stand ready with the unique capabilities that exist within DOD to support civilian-led stabilization activities within the framework of the authorities provided by Congress.

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

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

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

SOUTHCOM provides unique assets and capabilities to U.S. law enforcement agencies and vetted units in the region while NORTHCOM works to strengthen Mexico's capacity to target illegal narcotics flow. JIATF-S serves as the key integrator between both GCCs. SOUTHCOM is

also providing complementary capacity efforts to enhance border security, improve domain awareness, and enable combined maritime counterdrug operations between Central American countries and Mexico. JIATF-S also works closely with Mexico, Central America and Colombia to enable combined maritime interdiction operations, which, when combined with capacity building efforts overland, have a cascading and positive effect. If confirmed, I would continue and deepen this collaboration.

Haiti

Between September 2023 and March of 2024, the Department of Defense notified Congress that the Multinational Stability Support (MSS) mission to Haiti had been designated as an operation for which support may be provided under 10 U.S.C. § 331 (section 331) and that the Department had authorized support up to \$200 million to provide logistics support, supplies, and services (LSSS) to security forces of specified friendly foreign countries participating in the MSS mission. On March 10, 2024, in response to deteriorating security conditions in Haiti, and at the request of the Department of State, DOD conducted an operation to assess and augment security at the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince and evacuate non-essential personnel.

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

We continue to execute our role as directed by the Secretary of Defense and the President in support of a more secure and prosperous Haiti. We have executed the first phase of our LSSS mission which included establishing the Logistics Support Areas and supporting the deployment of the initial two tranches of the MSS. As of August 2024, DOD support has included 125 sorties flown into Haiti delivering 3,500 short tons of cargo. We will continue this mission until relieved of the responsibilities.

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

The security situation in Haiti is complex. To date, we have not seen any significant regional impacts, such as a mass migration event (either maritime or overland to the Dominican Republic). However, the situation in Haiti is connected to the global illicit trafficking in throughout the AOR. This is exacerbated by criminality, violence, and insecurity. Although we are not currently working directly with Haitian security forces, we are working closely with our interagency partners in the Caribbean to improve the regional security environment.

42. What is your assessment to the impact, if any, to SOUTHCOM of DOD's decision to allocate an additional \$100 million in 10 U.S.C. § 331 funds?

DOD's decision to allocate an additional \$100 million in 10 U.S.C. § 331 funds has little direct impact on SOUTHCOM operations, activities and investments to date.

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

I assess minimal impact to previously planned engagements in the AOR. However, we are monitoring the situation closely and remained prepared to address emergent crises or requirements as directed by the Secretary of Defense.

Colombia

U.S. assistance and security cooperation programs operating through Plan Colombia contributed to enabling the Colombian government to engage in an intensive peace and reconciliation process with members of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and other paramilitary forces. Now implementation of the peace accord appears at risk as violence escalates even in spite of a recent ceasefire. Colombia's election of President Gustavo Petro, a former guerrilla fighter, raised questions about the future of the U.S.-Colombia bilateral relationship. Colombia has been an important security partner of the United States, including jointly training security forces of third countries in the region.

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

The current security situation in Colombia is fragile. While we have increased security over time, remnants of the FARC and others still threaten Colombian peace and security despite a formal peace agreement in 2016 between the Colombian government and the FARC. The instability emanating from Venezuela continues to have a negative impact on Colombia due to migration. However, our overall MIL-MIL relationship remains strong and if confirmed, I will continue to strengthen this relationship to remain a trusted partner.

45. What is your assessment of the strength of the U.S.-Colombian security relationship under President Petro?

The security relationship between the armed forces of Colombia and the U.S. remains strong under the current administration of President Petro. There has been no change to the MIL-MIL access and willingness of our Colombian military partners to aggressively address critical issues. We currently have a Colombian General officer on an exchange program who serves as a deputy director in our command. Additionally, we continue to partner on other areas of critical importance including countering irregular migration/human trafficking and countering TCOs. Furthermore, we have expanded our partnership on areas important to both the Colombian and U.S. administrations to include addressing climate change issues, environmental crimes and gender inclusion through our Women, Peace and Security Initiatives.

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

For over 20 years, the U.S. and Colombia have had a long-standing partnership. We continually assess and adjust our security cooperation programs as the environment evolves. For example, we are looking to increase our cooperation regarding UH-60 sustainment based out of Colombia to enhance their mobility against threats. In addition, we are working closely with the Department of State to ensure Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems are deployed to the region. Based on our enduring relationship, Colombia is a net exporter of security who trains other regional partners.

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

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

Support to Colombia is critical to its continued efforts to provide both regional and international security. Colombia leads multinational operations and exports security cooperation capacity which demonstrates shared values and alliance. Colombia is a Major Non-NATO Ally and NATO Global Partner who is postured to support international requirements which demonstrates their international leadership and global commitment. This is an example of a successful and enduring partnership, so we must continue to help Colombia's efforts regionally and globally.

Venezuela

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

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

Political unrest continues—the Maduro regime continues to leverage institutional control to consolidate power, and the Venezuela economy continues to suffer. Political oppression and human rights violations are commonplace. Since 2013, millions of Venezuelans have emigrated across the region in search of better opportunities. Venezuela's instability destabilizes the region by increasing security and economic pressure on U.S. and other partner nations, to include Brazil and Colombia.

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

The Department of State (DoS) leads all efforts to ensure a peaceful transition of power. The DoD supports whole of government efforts encouraging free and fair elections and a peaceful transition of power of Venezuela.

50. What is your view of President Maduro’s intentions in the region?

The Maduro regime seeks to undermine democracy, violating the will of the Venezuelan people. He will likely continue turning to the PRC, Russia, and Iran for partnerships that benefit his regime, not the interests of his people or his neighbors. While malign actors from outside the hemisphere congratulated Maduro on his supposed victory, the United States and our partners urged adherence to the Inter-American Democratic Charter, which underscores that free and fair elections are the true “expression of the sovereignty of the people.”

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

In my view, PRC, Russian, Cuban, and Iranian support has been critical for the Maduro regime to undermine the United States' and the international community's efforts to promote democracy within Venezuela. These malign state actors provide Caracas with the diplomatic, economic, and military support needed to supplant self-determination with authoritarianism. Their support enables Maduro to skirt diplomatic pressure, circumvent sanctions, equip heavy-handed counter-protest security forces, and train intelligence services that violate personal liberties. Ongoing support from these authoritarian governments could Maduro weather the current electoral storm and strengthen his effort to remain in power.

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

Senior members of the Venezuelan government have been sanctioned by the Department of Treasury for their involvement in illicit activity, to include the drug trade. Venezuelan government officials and military have been known to collaborate with drug trafficking organizations, despite publicized efforts to disrupt narcotics trafficking.

53. What posture should SOUTHCOM take in the ongoing and recently increasing territorial tensions between Venezuela and Guyana?

The U.S. has expressed unwavering support for Guyana's sovereignty and supports a peaceful resolution to the border dispute between Venezuela and Guyana. SOUTHCOM continues to monitor this issue and share information with our allies and key partners in South America and the Caribbean. We also value our engagement and security cooperation with the Guyanese military, and our shared commitment to democracy is a fundamental pillar of our relationship.

Cuba

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

The authoritarian dictatorship in Cuba has worked to destabilize the region, undermine U.S. authority, and support like-minded regimes in the SOUTHCOM AOR, to include the Maduro regime in Venezuela, the Ortega regime in Nicaragua, and others. Cuba supports these authoritarian governments with intelligence and security support, particularly advisors skilled in suppressing the political opposition and employing tactics to control the people as a means to maintain power. Cuba has also deepened their military cooperation with the PRC and Russia.

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

U.S. law prohibits security assistance to Cuba, and current policy prevents military-to-military engagement, including security cooperation activities. While the U.S. Coast Guard does maintain minimal communication with its Cuban counterparts on issues like trafficking and migration. The Department of Defense's only contact with the Cuban military is between the Commander of the U.S. Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay and the local Cuban military commander.

Detainee Matters

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

If confirmed, I expect that my role will be to oversee safe, humane, and legal detention operations for all detainees and prisoners at the detention facility, to include detainee healthcare delivery at Joint Task Force Guantanamo and logistical support to the Office of Military Commissions.

57. Do you support the standards for detainee treatment specified in the revised Army Field Manual on Interrogations, FM 2-22.3, issued in September 2006, and in DOD Directive 2310.01E, *The Department of Defense Detainee Program*, dated March 15, 2022, and required by section 1045 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 (Public Law 114-92)?

Yes. The standards provide the foundation for conducting safe, human, and legal detention operations.

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

There is a Chief Medical Officer (CMO) in place on the island who has an oversight role of the medical care being provided to the individuals detained at Guantanamo Bay. The CMO position is managed by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs. The JTF staff at Guantanamo Bay work closely with the CMO on these medical issues. In my view, the CMO has increased visibility of potential health concerns and facilitated timely care.

59. It is the committee's understanding that as many as 16 of the 30 detainees still at GTMO have been designated for transfer.

The Periodic Review Board has determined that 16 of the 30 detainees are eligible for transfer. Transfers are conducted when directed by the Secretary of Defense.

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

SOUTHCOM does not have a direct role in the Periodic Review Board, but SOUTHCOM supports the Periodic Review Board process with medical summaries and intelligence reports. If confirmed, I intend to ensure this support continues with my oversight and supervision.

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

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

SOUTHCOM Force Requirements

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

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

Strategic competitors are influencing the AOR in space, cyber, security cooperation, and information operations. These are the same areas where our partner nations require assistance including maritime

domain awareness and disrupt and detect. If confirmed, the staff and I will evaluate and assess the necessary personnel requirements to address these challenges / opportunities and, if required, I will ask for additional personnel and resources.

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

This region is the frontline of strategic competition, and without action we will continue to cede access and influence to the PRC, Russia, and other malign actors. I assess moderate risk to U.S. strategic interest in the region if we are unable to secure the necessary personnel to provide consistent engagement to ensure we maintain access, presence, and influence. As a posture-limited theater, security cooperation, military engagement and exercises are major levers to build regional resiliency, security and stability in direct support of homeland defense and our national interest.

Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation

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

64. What is the relationship between SOUTHCOM and WHINSEC?

The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation is a subordinate of the U.S. Army's Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC). WHINSEC's direct support responsibilities to SOUTHCOM are formalized and reviewed annually through the SOUTHCOM Commander's permanent position on the WHINSEC Board of Visitors. WHINSEC's campaign support plan is nested within SOUTHCOM campaign plans that focuses on education and training grounded in democratic values, including respect for human rights and the rule of law.

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

I strongly believe that WHINSEC promotes U.S. national security interests in the Western Hemisphere in two distinct but overlapping manners. First, it instills respect for human rights, the rule of law, due process, civilian control of the military, and the role of the military in a democratic society. Second, it creates a network of senior leaders with a shared experience. The institute's focus on enhancing partner capacity to meet challenges in a legal, moral, and ethical context equips graduates to spread U.S. values and ideals across the region. Furthermore, the relationships and loyalty built during the formation of future leaders endures decades and permeates the institutional culture of our partner nations' defense and security forces.

66. In your view, what more – if anything – does WHINSEC need to do to emphasize human rights in its curriculum and contribute to institutional capacity

building in the region?

WHINSEC has a Human Rights Center that provides human rights training to all its students and helps develop human rights capabilities in partner nation militaries and Ministries of Defense. If confirmed, I will actively participate in the WHINSEC Board of Visitors, including studying more closely the current curriculum and making any recommendations that I believe would strengthen its education and training program. Additionally, I will actively participate in the WPS program which has advanced human rights and equality as principles of U.S. law and policy.

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

Yes.

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief

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

Security cooperation is USSOUTHCOM's primary lever to strengthen partnerships and counter threats. In the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility, the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) programs are a critical security cooperation element. The programs enable us to meet our partner nations' needs to provide essential humanitarian services to their vulnerable populations and build civil society resilience to transboundary challenges. HA/DR promotes interoperability and produces a team of partners who are more resilient and capable of confronting shared transboundary challenges.

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

Many of the nations in the SOUTHCOM Area of Responsibility are very willing partners who, with just a little support, can step up to respond to either their own or a regional humanitarian crisis. SOUTHCOM plays a major role as a trusted partner in this function. However, SOUTHCOM is limited in what we can do to support partner nation military and security force disaster response capacity building. Department of Defense policy restricts partner nation capacity building to Title 10 § 333 (Foreign Security Force Capacity Building), which focuses on support to security forces in the types of operations listed, and Title 10 § 2561 (Humanitarian Assistance), which focuses on civil government agencies.

Specifically, Humanitarian Assistance enables DOD to build capacity of partner nation civil entities to meet the basic humanitarian needs of the civilian population in the event of an imminent disaster or emergency. In my view, SOUTHCOM's regular engagements with partners are critical to building their capabilities, as well as strengthening our partnerships and interoperability, which are key to success in any disaster or other humanitarian response.

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

In my time at SOUTHCOM, I have learned that we have to be credible, present and engaged when it comes to delivering for our partners in the region. The current NDAA Authorities under which we execute the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response/Relief program prohibit expending funding to build the capacity of Partner nation military or public security forces (no training or equipping). The HA/DR program only supports non-military capacity building. If Title 10 § 333 were amended, resources in the form of additional monies to provide specialized equipment and training would be required. If expanded, SOUTHCOM would be more effective in enhancing partner nation interoperability, and resiliency to counter PRC and Russian efforts to exploit this strategic engagement gap in DOD policy. If confirmed, I will work across the DoD enterprise and with Congress to ensure that we can deliver for our partners at the point of need.

Sexual Assault Prevention and Response

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

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

In my experience, I have found current sexual assault policies and procedures, including those on restricted reporting, to be sufficient. DoD possesses robust resources and programs to support victims of sexual assault with medical, psychological, advocacy, and legal assistance. Monthly sexual assault review boards thoroughly review every ongoing case to ensure victims receive all eligible assistance. DoD is committed to preventing sexual assault in the military and fostering a culture that promotes enduring force readiness. Foundational to our efforts is the Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce (IPPW), which seeks to reduce the incidence of harmful behaviors, such as sexual assault, domestic abuse, child abuse, harassment, retaliation, and suicide. The IPPW works closely with leaders to promote respectful workplaces, tailoring prevention activities to local needs through comprehensive planning, stakeholder collaboration, and strategy refinement. In addition, in May the DoD released the Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military. The report shows that the estimated prevalence of sexual assault and sexual harassment declined in the active force, compared to levels last measured in 2021. The next report with data on the prevalence of sexual assault and sexual harassment at the Military Service Academies will be released in 2025.

The recent establishment of the Offices of Special Trial Counsel and changes to the Uniform Code of Military Justice regarding moving the prosecution for sexual assault and other covered offenses to these offices is intended to promote fairness and greater confidence in the military justice system. If confirmed, I will ensure that military leaders at every echelon fully support and adhere to this new process to maximize the ability of the Department of Defense to fairly adjudicate all cases and hold offenders appropriately accountable.

There is no place in the Armed Forces for retaliation against individuals who report sexual assault and retaliation is an offense under the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Such retaliation not only has the potential to cause serious harm to the lives and careers of victims, but it also undermines readiness and weakens our culture of dignity and respect. I am confident in the current DoD policies and procedures to protect those who report sexual assault from retaliation.

This issue requires engaged leadership. If confirmed, I will continue to hold commanders and leaders accountable for the support they provide sexual assault victims in their formations.

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

If confirmed, it will be my responsibility to ensure that all personnel within the workforce are treated with dignity and respect. Every member of the command will be held accountable for fostering a climate that is free from harassment, supporting those who report harassment, and prohibiting retaliation and reprisal against any member of the command. I am committed to ensuring that victims will be provided information and access to all available support services, will be kept regularly informed on the progress of investigations, and that information pertaining to their allegations will be handled according to policy. In cases of substantiated harassment, leaders will be required to adhere with applicable law, policy, and regulation. Commanders, directors, managers and supervisors at every level will be evaluated on their performance fostering a workplace free from harassment and retaliation.

The new command climate assessment process and the IPPW involvement in creating Comprehensive Integrated Primary Prevention (CIPP) plans also provides a point of collaboration between prevention professionals and leadership. Leaders must work with their IPPW to assist them in better understanding the opportunities and challenges that exist within their installations to make informed strategic decisions.

73. Do you believe that you need additional authorities from Congress to improve upon existing programs to prevent sexual harassment and sexual assault?

Congress has provided the DoD with adequate authorities and resources to enable the Department to prevent incidents, to thoroughly investigate all allegations, and to hold offenders appropriately accountable. The recent establishment of the Offices of Special Trial Counsel and changes to the Uniform Code of Military Justice regarding moving the prosecution for sexual assault and other covered offenses to these offices is intended to promote fairness and greater

confidence in the military justice system.

If confirmed, I will continue to ensure that every member under my charge has the opportunity to thrive in a culture of dignity and respect.

Relations with Congress

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

If confirmed, I will ensure a productive and mutually beneficial relationship between SOUTHCOM and Congress remains a priority. As the Military Deputy Commander of SOUTHCOM, I have seen the importance of a strong, open, and collaborative relationship with Congress, and in particular with the defense oversight committees.

Congressional Oversight

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

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

Yes.

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

Yes.

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

Yes.

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

Yes.

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

Yes.

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

Yes.

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

Yes.