

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for our hearing today, the Honorable Melissa Dalton, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense and Hemispheric Affairs, General Laura Richardson, U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), and General Glen VanHerck, U.S. Northern Command and Commander (NORTHCOM), North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD).

The defense of the homeland is at the center of the National Defense Strategy (NDS) and NORTHCOM and NORAD are directly tasked with that mission, which includes defending the United States from maritime, aerospace, missile, cyber, and other potential threats. When it comes to defense of the homeland in these various domains, the Department must be vigilant and adaptive, particularly through investments in innovation and modernization.

The tracking and shutdown of a People's Republic of China (PRC) surveillance balloon and three unknown objects over U.S. and Canadian airspace is just the most recent and most public example of this constant effort. These incidents not only highlight NORTHCOM and NORAD's roles, but potential improvements and investments that can be made to existing, aging systems, and how the Department works to meet threats in real time. In today's hearing, I look forward to General VanHerck's and Secretary Dalton's testimony on these issues and to gain a better understanding on the reviews that are ongoing regarding the shutdowns themselves, cooperation between the Department and the intelligence community in response to the incursion into our airspace, and how we can improve inter-agency processes should we face a similar threat in the future.

I'm also interested to hear about other threats to the homeland that NORTHCOM prioritizes, from cyber defense of critical infrastructure to strategic air defense and the ability of the Department to address the North Korean ballistic missile threat, which recently demonstrated the ability to reach the continental United States. How NORTHCOM does this within the United States as the lead for the Department's support to civilian authorities but also how it is accomplished with our partners and allies through our bilateral agreement with Canada, NORAD and security cooperation with other regional partners.

As part of this, we must look to increase the resilience of our networks, critical infrastructure, and defense industrial base, including through partnerships with federal, state, and local governments. We have seen that these systems are under active threat from foreign actors, and that cyberattacks on critical infrastructure in particular can have wide-reaching impacts to the United States. The Department has a key role as the Sector Risk Management Agency for the defense industrial base, but it also has unique dependencies and vulnerabilities across a much wider range of critical infrastructure. Continued effort and attention will be required in order to mitigate these risks.

Further, General VanHerck notes in his testimony that the effects of environmental changes will have significant impacts on accessibility, infrastructure, and competition in the Arctic. I am interested to hear our witnesses' thoughts on the activities of Russia and the PRC in the Arctic.

Secretary Dalton also raised transboundary challenges that do not respect borders or wait for other crises to resolve in her testimony. NORTHCOM has an essential role as the Department

lead for synchronizing Defense Support of Civilian authorities, a mission that supports civilian partners' responses to natural disasters. In SOUTHCOM too, the Department has a significant role to play. The Department works closely with the many partners that we have across the Caribbean and South and Central America, particularly when responding to disasters. Such support goes a long way when looking to made strides in strategic competition.

As we have seen via events around the world, our competitors are working to undermine the rules-based order we helped establish. The Department needs to move forward and become more agile and adaptive. With all our global commitments, which can often seem far away, we cannot forget our own hemisphere. Our strategic competitors are active in the region. Russia works to undermine democracy in the region, focusing on misinformation and disinformation and pursuing partnerships with Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba. The PRC, too, is investing across the region in relationships and economic projects. This raises the question - how do we continue to protect the homeland, continue to build our partnerships with the countries of the Western Hemisphere, and continue keep our eye on efforts that may undermine U.S. interests? I'd like to know more about these efforts and also get an update on how SOUTHCOM is investing in human rights and the Women, Peace, and Security Initiative.

At a time when demands on the budget are significant from elsewhere in the world, I look forward to hearing how the Department will maintain focus on important areas like counternarcotics, to ensuring that we are there for our partners when disasters emerge.

I thank the witnesses for being here today and I look forward to hearing their testimony.

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