



Chairwoman Betty McCollum
Subcommittee on Defense
United States Southern Command
April 15, 2021

This morning, the Subcommittee will receive testimony from U.S. Southern Command.

Our witness is SOUTHCOM Commander, Admiral Craig Faller. Admiral Faller, welcome back to the Subcommittee. We look forward to your testimony.

Today's hearing is the first of several that the Subcommittee will hold with the geographic combatant commanders to discuss the national security challenges we face around the world, and to look at how each command is postured and resourced to meet these challenges.

The President's so-called skinny budget describes "the need to counter the pacing threat from China as the Department's top challenge." In the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility, Chinese influence has increased. China's belt and road initiative extends to most countries in the region, including areas critical to U.S. commerce and security. China has also taken advantage of the COVID-19 epidemic to gain influence. We want to hear from our witness about China's activities in the region and SOUTHCOM's response.

At the same time, we need to be mindful that many of the challenges we face may require a diplomatic or economic response, rather than a military one, and we need to be smart about using all of the tools that are at our disposal.

One of the things that makes the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility different from other combatant commands is its proximity to the United States. Events in the region can have a direct impact on the United States and on our friends and allies. There are numerous examples of this.

In Venezuela, a complete breakdown of that country's economic and political system has displaced millions and created instability in the region. Thousands of Venezuelans have also fled to the United States. Last month, the Biden administration recognized this humanitarian situation and extended temporary protected status to thousands residing here. The turmoil in Venezuela has created a haven for transnational criminal organizations, who thrive in areas that lack government and security.

Criminal organizations continue to traffic record numbers of drugs into the United States, while also engaging in human smuggling and trafficking.

In Central America, economic and security conditions, combined with extreme weather events made worse by climate change, continue to cause thousands to migrate north.

And we know that the region has been hit hard by COVID-19—straining health systems and economies and creating instability, particularly in Brazil.

We look forward to hearing today how SOUTHCOM is postured and resourced to play its part to address these issues. We also look forward to hearing how SOUTHCOM is working with partner countries to address our common challenges.

Finally, we will discuss the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. We know the Biden administration has launched a formal review of the detention facility with the aim of finally closing it before President Biden leaves office – something I strongly support.

With that, I want to thank everyone for participating in today's hearing, and I now recognize our distinguished ranking member, Mr. Calvert for his remarks.