

General (Ret.) Laura J. Richardson recently completed her tour as the thirty-second commander of United States Southern Command. Over her thirty-eight-year career, she commanded at every level from company to combatant command, the highest command level in the US Department of Defense, and became the US Army's first woman combat arms general officer. From 2021 to 2024, she served as commander of US Southern Command, reporting directly to the president of the United States and the secretary of defense. In this role, she was responsible for military operations, contingency planning, and security partnerships across South and Central America and the Caribbean, spanning thirty-one countries, with a focus on regional stability, governance, countering illicit trafficking, and disaster response and preparedness. Prior to that, she served as commanding general of US Army North (Fifth Army), the Army service component of US Northern Command. She also commanded an assault helicopter battalion during combat operations in the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) in Iraq (2003 to 2004), and later deployed to Afghanistan as deputy chief of staff for communications at NATO's International Security Assistance Force. Earlier in her career, she served as military aide to the vice president at the White House and as the US Army's legislative liaison to Congress. She is a native of Northglenn, Colorado, and a graduate of Metropolitan State University of Denver. She commissioned into the US Army and trained as an Army aviator. She also holds a Master of Science in national resource strategy from the National Defense University.