

**Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Kerri Hannan's Statement
Before the House Foreign Affairs Sub-committee on Western Hemisphere:
Communism on Our Doorstep: The Threat of China's Malign Influence in
Latin America**

Thursday, September 28, 2023, 2:00PM, 5 minutes

Chairwoman Salazar, Ranking Member Castro, distinguished members of the sub-committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Department's efforts related to People's Republic of China (PRC) engagement in the Western Hemisphere. As Secretary Blinken has said, our strategic competition with the PRC represents one of the defining challenges of the 21st Century. This challenge remains particularly important in our hemisphere. It requires close coordination with interagency colleagues, international organizations, and allies and partners around the world. Just as important, it requires strong cooperation between the Administration and Congress, so I welcome continued engagement on these issues with the Committee and the chance to be with you today.

Our strategic goal remains to promote a more democratic, inclusive, secure, prosperous, and climate-resilient Western Hemisphere, aligned with U.S. values and interests. We advance a positive agenda for the hemisphere, based on values we share with our partners – respect for human rights and diversity, democratic governance, inclusive economic growth and entrepreneurship, and the rule of law. Managing the strategic competition with the PRC in the Western Hemisphere requires long-term solutions, which include strengthening governance and democratic institutions, reducing corruption, and helping our partners build economies that attract more investment from U.S. businesses and trusted partners.

All U.S. embassies in the Western Hemisphere have staff that focus on tracking and reporting PRC activities and each country team seeks to advance a coherent interagency response to the challenges posed by the PRC. The Department has four Regional China Officers (RCO) based in the WHA region, each with deep expertise on the PRC, to support embassies and consulates in addressing this challenge. Our embassies and consulates

have developed country-specific strategies to counter problematic PRC activity in more than two-thirds of the countries in our hemisphere.

The United States works with democratic partners from outside the hemisphere as well. European partners, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan all promote stability and growth in the region. With seven of Taiwan's 13 official diplomatic partners located in WHA, we remain focused on countering the PRC's campaign to induce these countries to switch recognition and squeeze out Taiwan from multilateral organizations.

On the economic front, we focus on ensuring competitive and transparent investment environments that help level the playing field for U.S. companies. The United States remains by far the greatest source of investment and remittances for the region. We offer higher-standard and transparently procured infrastructure investment alternatives that uphold labor, environmental, and social safeguards. They also foster inclusive growth in line with international best practices, including through initiatives like the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment, Deal Teams, and the Blue Dot Network. We continue to respond to structural corruption problems by encouraging civil society, activists, and journalists to raise concerns with governments regarding opaque deals.

On security, the proliferation of PRC-linked telecommunications and surveillance equipment highlights risks to national security, human rights, and privacy. Many of our technical delegations and engagements have focused on ICT and cybersecurity, sectors for which an aggressive economic campaign by PRC-backed companies threatens free-market access. Our robust foreign military sales program far outpaces the PRC and demonstrates that regional partners prefer to work with the United States.

The Department also works to counter PRC propaganda and disinformation campaigns in the region. The Global Engagement Center (GEC) works specifically to address propaganda and disinformation. We build resilience through targeted support to independent civil society organizations and

journalists. And by funding independent third-party research, we help shine a spotlight on PRC information manipulation.

Public diplomacy remains key to our efforts to counter the PRC. The American Spaces network of 131 brick and mortar locations in the region are the U.S. government's primary in-country public-facing platforms to connect foreign audiences to the United States. Our American Spaces outnumber by a 3-to-1 ratio the 40 Confucius Institutes in the region. While American Spaces provide open access to accurate information reflecting American values, including the promotion of democratic and civic engagement, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights, Confucius Institutes expand PRC cultural influence in the hemisphere and aim to send thousands of young people to the PRC on academic and professional exchanges. Meanwhile, our American Spaces host English Language programs and exchanges and reinforce economic, commercial, cultural, and political engagement with the United States.

Exchange programs ensure the United States is seen as a steadfast partner to the region by promoting academic ties and professional development opportunities, as well as building institutional capacity. This includes programs such as the Young Leaders of the Americas Initiative (YLA) Fellowship, among others. Launched in 2015, YLA has since hosted over 1,500 young entrepreneurs (over half of them women) from 37 countries throughout the Western Hemisphere, collaborating with over 100 U.S. companies and organizations in 85 cities across 34 states. YLA promotes U.S. business models, increases trade, encourages job creation, and builds lasting and sustainable networks of young entrepreneurs and business and social leaders across the Western Hemisphere, including the United States.

To conclude, as we work to compete with and counter the challenges posed by the PRC in the region, we are intently focused on promoting a more democratic, inclusive, secure, prosperous, and climate-resilient Western Hemisphere, aligned with U.S. values and interests, so we can remain the region's preferred partner. That will remain our steadfast goal.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I look forward to your questions.