



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Counterterrorism, Law Enforcement & Intelligence Subcommittee Ranking Member Seth Magaziner (D-RI)

Countering Threats Posed by Nation-State Actors in Latin America to U.S. Homeland Security

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We find ourselves in a time when democratic nations, like the United States, are in a competition for hearts and minds in the developing world with autocratic competitors like the People's Republic of China, Iran, and Russia.

It is more important than ever that we develop strong relationships with our allies in Latin America, based on mutual respect, fair commerce, and a shared commitment to security and human rights. If we make the mistake of driving away our allies in the region, Russia, the CCP and our other competitors will gladly fill that void, at the expense of our own security.

In Latin America today, the CCP and Russia, are attempting to manipulate public discourse, discredit elections and the electoral system, influence policy development, and disrupt markets with the goal of undermining U.S. security and economic competitiveness. We cannot allow that to happen.

Over the past twenty years, the CCP has spent heavily in Latin America. Chinese state industry now reaches deep into Latin America's energy, infrastructure, and space industries. In fact, China has surpassed the United States as South America's biggest trading partner. China has free trade agreements in place with Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Peru; and twenty countries in Latin America and the Caribbean participate in the CCP's Belt and Road initiative. And the Chinese Communist Party is investing in soft power through cultural and educational programs in Latin America, which are building political goodwill and presenting China as a viable alternative partner to the United States and democracies.

This is why it is so important that last year President Biden launched a new economic cooperation initiative with Latin America aimed specifically at countering the CCP's growing clout in the region. Under Vladimir Putin, Russia cares less about competing with the United States economically and more about stoking chaos and political division to harm democracies like the United States. Russia has maintained decades-long, strong relationships with Latin American authoritarian regimes.

The Cuban, Venezuelan, and Nicaraguan regimes are heavily dependent on Moscow for political, economic, and security assistance. And Russia actively spreads propaganda in Latin America to undermine U.S. interests and the interests of democratic allies — as Russia did during the early days of its invasion of Ukraine, when Russia used its propaganda assets in Latin America to push conspiracy theories about Ukraine and the West to justify the invasion.

With the CCP, Russia and other autocratic regimes so determined to build their presence in Latin America, it is vital that the United States strengthen our relationships with our neighbors in the region.

The worst thing we could do for our own security, is drive our Latin American neighbors into the arms of our adversaries. That is why it is disturbing to hear former President Trump and some of my colleagues from across the aisle push reckless ideas like unilateral military action in Mexico, which would seriously endanger the strategic regional relationships we need to keep America secure.

It is also alarming that some House Republicans are calling for significant cuts to USAID, State Department and Commerce Department budgets that are crucial to building American influence in Latin America, at the same time that the CCP in particular continues to invest in aid and commerce to build their malign influence in the region. This is a time for engagement and partnership, not hyper-partisanship.

Today's hearing, I hope, is an opportunity for this subcommittee to examine the wider threat posed by autocratic nation-states that are setting up shop in the Western Hemisphere with a singular goal—to undermine U.S. leadership in our own backyard.

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