

**BELJING'S AIR, SPACE, AND MARITIME SURVEIL-  
LANCE FROM CUBA: A GROWING THREAT  
TO THE HOMELAND**

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**HEARING**  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
TRANSPORTATION AND MARITIME  
SECURITY  
OF THE  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS  
FIRST SESSION  
MAY 6, 2025  
**Serial No. 119-13**

Printed for the use of the Committee on Homeland Security



Available via the World Wide Web: <http://www.govinfo.gov>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

61-305 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2025

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## BEIJING'S AIR, SPACE, AND MARITIME SURVEILLANCE FROM CUBA: A GROWING THREAT TO THE HOMELAND

Tuesday, May 6, 2025

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND  
MARITIME SECURITY,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10 a.m., in room 310, Cannon House Office building, Hon. Carlos A. Gimenez (Chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Gimenez, Garbarino, Crane, Biggs, McIver, Kennedy, and Carter.

Mr. GIMENEZ. The Committee on Homeland Security Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security will come to order.

Without objection, the Chair may declare the subcommittee in recess at any point. Today's hearing continues the important oversight work we began in February by taking a closer look at the Chinese Communist Party's growing footprint in Cuba and implications for U.S. homeland security.

But Beijing wrapping up its economic military and intelligence operations just 90 miles from our coastline, this is no longer a distant challenge. It is an immediate concern for the security of the American people. The United States must urgently understand the full extent of this threat, ensure that the Department of Homeland Security and its interagency partners are equipped to address it and take a hard look at our broader strategic partner throughout the Caribbean and Western Hemisphere.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes for an opening statement. Good morning, today's subcommittee convenes to examine an alarming threat developing just 90 miles off our coast. Mounting evidence suggests that the Chinese Communist Party is expanding its strategic partnership with a totalitarian communist regime in Cuba to build advance surveillance infrastructure capable of targeting the United States. This collaboration represents one of the most brazen intelligence operations ever attempted near the American mainland. And places our military operations, commercial activity, and communications squarely in the crosshairs of a hostile foreign power.

Recent satellite imagery and open-source analysis suggests the presence of several Chinese-funded signals and intelligence facili-

ties across Cuba. The possibility that these sites are capable of monitoring U.S. military operations, commercial shipping, space launches, and sensitive communications is deeply troubling.

The southeastern United States is home to some of the most critical assets in our Nation's infrastructure. From the space launch center at Cape Canaveral to the headquarters of U.S. Southern Command in Miami, this region plays a critical role in our defense posture.

This region includes my own district, which has long been on the front lines of threats emerging from the Cuban regime. If the Chinese government is in fact leveraging a growing partnership with Cuba to collect intelligence on our activities, that is a threat that we can no longer ignore.

Cuba's government has a long history of working with foreign adversaries to undermine the United States. What we are potentially witnessing today is a new and dangerous phase of that cooperation that is fueled by Havana's economic desperation and Beijing's strategic ambition.

The Cuban regime remains a state sponsor of terrorism, harbors fugitives from the U.S. justice system and relentlessly suppress the rights of its own people. Its growing reliance on foreign authoritarian powers like China only adds to the danger.

Over the past several months, I've taken steps to raise alarms about the malign activities of the communist government of Cuba. In March, I sent a letter to the Department of Homeland Security requesting an investigation into individuals in the United States suspected of links to Cuban intelligence and the Communist Party.

These networks have long operated on U.S. soil and may now be intersecting with China's activities in the region. Shortly after, in April I sent a letter to the Department of Treasury calling for full suspension of U.S.-Cuba travel and remittances, with appropriate humanitarian exceptions. It should not be funding a regime that turns around and opens its doors to our greatest adversaries. If reports of rising Chinese activity in Cuba are accurate, and it is no longer just a diplomatic issue, it is a direct security risk to the American people.

This hearing is the first step in understanding the scope of this threat. Today our witnesses will help us assess the potential scale of the threat and what measures the Federal Government should take to stay ahead of it. We need to be clear-eyed about the risk and both swift and unified in our responses.

The United States cannot afford to overlook the possibility that a hostile foreign power is working hand-in-hand with a Communist dictatorship in Cuba to employ advanced surveillance capabilities on our door step. It is our responsibility to ensure that the homeland remains secure and not just from what we can see, but from what may be gathering just out of sight.

I want to thank our witnesses for appearing before the subcommittee. I look forward to a productive discussion on how the United States can counter the Chinese Communist Party and their suspected surveillance efforts in Cuba and prevent our adversaries from gaining a strategic foothold so close to our homeland.

[The statement of Chairman Gimenez follows:]

## STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN CARLOS A. GIMENEZ

MAY 6, 2025

Good morning. Today, the subcommittee convenes to examine an alarming threat developing just 90 miles off our coast. Mounting evidence suggests that the Chinese Communist Party is expanding its strategic partnership with the totalitarian communist regime in Cuba to build advanced surveillance infrastructure capable of targeting the United States.

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I look forward to a productive discussion on how the United States can counter the Chinese Communist Party's suspected surveillance efforts in Cuba and prevent our adversaries from gaining a strategic foothold so close to the homeland.

Mr. GIMENEZ. I now recognize the Ranking Member, the gentlewoman from New Jersey, Mrs. McIver, for her opening statement.

Mrs. McIVER. Good morning, thank you, Chair. Thank you to our witnesses for joining us today.

The threats posed by the People's Republic of China toward the United States requires serious attention, as China works aggressively to gain foothold within the Caribbean.

In Cuba, China has provided almost \$8 billion in monetary incentives over the past 20 years seeking to strengthen ties with a country just 90 miles from U.S. shores. China has invested heavily in Cuba's infrastructure, technology, communications, and biotechnology. Within the transportation and maritime sectors, Cuba has benefited from China's partnership by gaining security equipment for airports, seaports, and customs facilities. Nuctech, a company, a Chinese state-owned company has provided inspection technology to be installed throughout much of Cuba's transportation networks.

The Department of Homeland Security has assessed that Nuctech's screening systems likely have deficiencies in detection capabilities and China—I'm sorry, excuse me. The Department of Homeland Security has assessed that Nuctech screening systems likely have deficiencies and detection capabilities and that China could potentially access the systems remotely to gather intelligence on shipping manifest and the passenger information.

In 2021, Cuba signed on to China's Belt and Road Initiative and now China is further developing sites in Cuba to collect intelligence on the United States through monitoring of ship movement, emails, phone calls, and radio and satellite transmissions.

The knowledge of these sites is not new, as U.S. security officials have confirmed awareness of their existence since at least the first Trump administration. The United States and our partners face tremendous challenges in responding to China's aggression. A solid partnership among the United States and Latin America allies aids in advancing U.S. interests in the region and strengthening our national security.

Unfortunately, the Trump administration is actively undermining those efforts by suspending foreign aid and dismantling USAID, the Trump administration has weakened our national security, allowing China to apply influence within Latin America without competition.

In year 2023, USAID dedicated \$1.8 billion in funding to the Western Hemisphere, including funding to support independent Cuba media organizations providing objective, uncensored journalism. The dismantling of foreign aid programs benefits authoritarian governments, like the Cuban regime, by undermining groups working to advance human rights and Democratic ideals. To make matters worse, President Trump has ceded significant power to an unelected billionaire in Elon Musk, whose deep ties to the PRC are cause for great concern. I am glad there is bipartisan agreement on the need to counter China's aggressive activity in Cuba and Latin America.

That said, I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in speaking out about how the Trump administration is actively undermining efforts to counter the PRC and advance U.S. interests around the globe.

Thank you again for our witnesses joining us here today. With that, I yield back.

[The statement of Ranking Member McIver follows:]

## STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER LAMONICA McIVER

MAY 6, 2025

The threats posed by the People's Republic of China toward the United States requires serious attention, as China works aggressively to gain a foothold within the Caribbean.

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I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in speaking out about how the Trump administration is actively undermining efforts to counter the PRC and advance U.S. interests around the globe.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you to the Ranking Member.

Other Members of the committee are reminded that opening statements may be submitted for the record.

[The statement of Ranking Member Thompson follows:]

## STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER BENNIE G. THOMPSON

MAY 6, 2025

Spy stations established in Cuba with Chinese support have the potential to collect valuable intelligence on the United States, as well as our allies in the region. Unfortunately, the Trump administration's reckless actions and idiotic policies are exacerbating the challenges posed by China and Cuba.

In just a short few months, Donald Trump and his Republican minions have done tremendous damage to the United States' reputation as a trusted ally and partner. Trump's cuts to foreign aid within Latin America and across the globe have decimated essential programs aimed at reducing hunger, corruption, poverty, and inequality. Trump's cuts have undermined efforts to support U.S. national security and assist non-governmental organizations that help counter autocratic regimes and advance democratic values.

Currently, the Cuban government is undergoing one of its most severe crises in decades, with increased repression and crackdowns against political dissent. Under

the Biden administration, the U.S. Agency for International Development provided funding to support independent media in Cuba, which is essential to pushing for democratic reforms. Now, the Trump administration has illegally canceled that funding.

Under the Biden administration, the “CHNV” parole program legally allowed over 110,000 Cubans to flee their authoritarian government and seek asylum in the United States. Now, the Trump administration has tried to terminate that program.

Cubans who legally migrated to the United States are now potentially facing orders of deportation and denial of asylum requests, which will place them in danger. Thankfully, the rule of law has so far prevailed, as a Federal district court has issued a nationwide temporary order halting the termination of this program. The Trump administration should focus on why these migrants are leaving Cuba instead of blocking them from coming to the United States. Cuba is facing its worst economic crisis since gaining independence in 1902.

It is high time for the United States to take a more surgical, humanitarian approach to relations to Cuba, rather than the Trump administration’s chainsaw tactics of cutting any and all programs that advance U.S. soft power in the region. The termination of humanitarian programs and other foreign aid allows China to fill the void through economic, diplomatic, and potential military support. The PRC is using Cuba in its geopolitical strategy against the United States and seeking to make inroads with other Latin American countries as well.

Trump’s tariff wars and foreign policies will cause many international partners to turn away from the United States and seek the possibility of a more stable partnership with China. I hope my colleagues across the aisle will open their eyes and recognize the Trump administration is placing America last.

Mr. GIMENEZ. I am pleased to hold a distinguished panel of witnesses before us today on this critical topic. I ask that our witnesses please rise and raise their right hand.

[Witnesses sworn.]

Mr. GIMENEZ. Let the record reflect that the witnesses have answered in the affirmative. Thank you and please be seated.

I would now like to formally introduce our witnesses. Dr. Ryan Berg is the director of the Americas program and the head of the future of Venezuela initiative at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Dr. Berg specializes in U.S. Latin America relations, strategic competition, defense policies, and transnational organized crime. Previously he was a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and a visiting fellow at Oxford’s changing character of war program. He holds a doctor of philosophy and master of philosophy in political science, a master of science in global governance from Oxford, as well as a bachelor of arts in government and theology from Georgetown.

Andrés Martínez-Fernández is the senior policy analyst for Latin America with the Heritage Foundation’s Allison Center for the National Security. In this role he leads the Heritage Foundation’s work on U.S. policy toward Latin America conducting research and engaging audiences on topics such as economic development, foreign aid, transnational organized crime, and the maligned activities of communist China and other extra regional actors.

Before joining Heritage, Andrés was a leading analyst at a leading global market intelligence firm where he advised top executives from multinational companies on political and macroeconomic risks in Latin America. He received his master’s degree in Latin American studies in international economics from Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and his bachelor degree is in history from Florida International University, a university which I represent.

Leland Lazarus serves as associate director of national security at Florida International University’s Jack D. Gordon’s Institute for

Public Policy. He's an expert on China-Latin America relations and manages a team of researchers and interns that collect data analysis on U.S. national security and governance in Latin America and the Caribbean.

From 2021 to 2022, Leland served as a special assistant and speech writer to the commander of U.S. Southern Command. Before that, Leland was a State Department Foreign Service officer serving as deputy public affairs officer at the U.S. Embassy Barbados and Eastern Caribbean. Council officer at the U.S. consulate general in Shenyang, China and Pickering fellow at U.S. Embassy Beijing and at the China desk in the District of Columbia. Fluent in both Mandarin and Spanish, he holds a master of arts in U.S.-China foreign policy from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and a bachelor of arts in international relations from Brown University.

I want to thank each of our distinguished witnesses for being here today. I now recognize Dr. Berg for 5 minutes to summarize his opening statements.

**STATEMENT OF RYAN C. BERG, DIRECTOR, AMERICAS PROGRAM, CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

Mr. BERG. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you Ranking Member McIver, distinguished Members of the subcommittee. I am honored to share my views with you on this important topic this morning.

Near 90 miles off our shores, the United States' most formidable 21st Century competitor, the People's Republic of China, has found fertile soil to deploy its arsenal of espionage, digital surveillance, and maritime competition. In many ways, a moribund socialist system in Havana is Beijing's perfect partner for threatening U.S. homeland, especially as a response to U.S. posture in the Indo-Pacific.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to focus my oral testimony on China's signals intelligence capabilities, while recognizing that the relationship between Beijing and Havana runs much deeper. I know my colleagues on this panel will cover other aspects of the relationship, maritime telecommunications and so on. I'm happy of course to discuss in our question period.

When Soviet influence diminished on the island following the end of the Cold War, eyes, ears and antennas stayed. In many ways, China filled the void. On June 8, 2023, the *Wall Street Journal* first reported that Cuba hosted secret Chinese spy bases in return for billions of dollars for the Cuban regime. That same day, the Biden administration's defense department denied the *Wall Street Journal's* reporting, characterizing the report as quote, "inaccurate." Three days later however the NSC spokesperson, John Kirby, reversed course and admitted that China's spy base is in Cuba, but said that its presence had existed since 2019 out of the first Trump administration, implying that the Biden admin had inherited this challenge. Around the same time reports surfaced that China was pursuing the construction of a military training base in Cuba. CSIS then published a groundbreaking report called *Secret Signals*, encoding China intelligence activities in Cuba. The CSIS

team scoured the island using commercially-available satellite imagery, identifying 4 likely sites for signals intelligence collection in that process. This was followed by a *Wall Street Journal* exclusive confirming its earlier reporting on the spy stations.

CSIS published another updated set of images in December 2, 2024 and has tracked China's progress at these 4 sites.

As part of this hearing, Mr. Chairman, we are pleased to release some updated imagery. I think we have a slide show for you to see. As you can see on this first slide, Mr. Chairman, CSIS has positively identified about 4 specific facilities as highly likely sites supporting Chinese intelligence operations targeting the United States. Three of these sites—Bejucal, Wajay, Calabazar—are located around Havana. The fourth site, El Salao, is a previously-unreported facility located on the opposite side of the island, just east of Santiago de Cuba. In response to reporting on the Cuba-China SIGINT nexus, high-level Cuban communist officials either outright denied any relationship or attempted to disarm our criticism with humor.

To coincide with this hearing, Mr. Chairman, we have some updated imagery we can show you. Next slide please. After the publication of our initial reports, construction progress at El Salao, the site by Santiago de Cuba seems to have ceased, according to the image captures dated April 18, 2025.

You can go to the next slide, please. The CDAA site appears to have been abandoned for the moment, as evidenced by hitherto well-trimmed and graded areas being taken over by grass.

On the next slide, the PRC appears to be enhancing its SIGINT at a previously-identified facility at Bejucal. On the next slide you can see an antenna field from the original CSIS image captures. On our last slide, Mr. Chairman, you can see the latest CSIS image capture shows those antennas have been removed to make way for a large CDAA site, very similar to the one that was originally visible at El Salao. The Bejucal facility is very, very active, as evidenced by multiple image captures in this process.

So as you can see, Mr. Chairman, our adversaries are at our doorstep. I want to use the rest of the time remaining to mention some brief recommendations for the committee to consider.

First, I think a Classified briefing to every Member of Congress should be given, given the significance of these developments to U.S. national security.

Second, the United States should consider strategic declassification of images in its possession, given that El Salao appears to have been abandoned after the CSIS publication of its report. You may reasonably believe that transparency efforts and public criticism do have the potential to derail some of the PRC's ambitions.

Third, develop and articulate red lines. It may be difficult to displace some of these existing facilities from the island. The United States should be crystal clear that the permanent installation of offensive military capabilities in Cuba, or the basing of PLA combat assets would be seen as a significant escalation and a red line for the United States. An inability to deter a SIGINT facility should not be interpreted by Havana as a green light for China.

Fourth, I think we need to harden sensitive infrastructure against SIGINT collection by China. The CISA should spearhead

an effort to review which companies and facilities in the area are most vulnerable to intelligence-gathering operations.

Last, Mr. Chairman, I think we need to enlist neighbors and allies. These facilities do not just snoop on the United States. CDAAs collect information omnidirectionally, meaning that other countries in the Caribbean, including those that Secretary of State Marco Rubio met on his recent successful trip to the Caribbean, are also implicated.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield. I look forward to the committee's questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Berg follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF RYAN C. BERG

TUESDAY, MAY 6, 2025

Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member McIver, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee, I am honored to share my views with you on this important topic. CSIS does not take policy positions, so the views represented in this testimony are my own and not those of my employer. In my testimony, I would like to reflect on the People's Republic of China's historical and burgeoning role in Cuba, the Cuban Communist Party's repressive tactics and China's role in regime security, as well as China's use of Cuba as a staging ground for espionage activities against the United States, including its signals intelligence.

"In my recent trip to Santiago, I heard reports from several sources of big military installations under construction in mountains of Oriente Province."—Graham Greene, *Our Man in Havana*.

#### PEERING INTO THE UNITED STATES

Cuba has long served as a perch for great power rivals to the United States. Indeed, the memory of those fateful days in October 1962 when the United States and Soviet Union came perilously close to a nuclear exchange over the latter's stationing of nuclear-tipped missiles in Cuba has tinged discourse about the island ever since. The question of Chinese bases in Cuba touches on some of the same sensitivities—that a rival of the United States might clandestinely exploit the strategic position of Cuba to build up a military presence directly under the nose of the United States, to the detriment of the entire Western Hemisphere's security. A brief history of the PRC's partnership with Cuba reveals worrying patterns.

When Soviet missiles left the island, eyes, ears, and antennas stayed. From bases across the island, Soviet and Cuban intelligence and military personnel worked together to gather information on the United States. Of particular note was the Lourdes Signal Intelligence Complex located near Havana. At its peak, the facility was reportedly home to an estimated 1,500 operatives and supplied the USSR with 75 percent of its military intelligence.<sup>1</sup> But Lourdes was one of many such facilities, all dedicated to gathering and processing the firehose of signals coming from the southeastern seaboard of the United States. It is telling that of the facilities identified and surveyed in CSIS's analysis, just one, the new Circular Disposed Antenna Array in El Salao, was not a preexisting signals intelligence (SIGINT) site left over from the Cold War.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, however, Cuba's strategic importance for Moscow diminished, and finally in 2002, Lourdes was shuttered as an intelligence facility and converted into the University of Informatic Sciences.<sup>2</sup> Along with a decrease in military presence, the Soviet collapse engendered economic turmoil for Cuba, known as the "special period," where a lack of subsidized fuel and economic aid brought about shortages of critical goods and near-economic collapse for the island. By the end of the 1990's, Cuba was desperately seeking new partners to fill the void its former communist ally had left.

Into this breach stepped, partially, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The CCP and the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) had enjoyed strong relations since the latter's inception, and as one of the few remaining communist parties at the turn of the century, fell into China's foreign policy category of both "good friend" and

<sup>1</sup> [https://irp.fas.org/congress/1996\\_hr/s960222d.htm](https://irp.fas.org/congress/1996_hr/s960222d.htm).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uci.cu/en/university/history>.

“good comrade.” While Cuba’s economic turmoil meant that it had little to offer by way of trade, its strategic geography remained unrivaled. In February 1999, China’s Minister of Defense, General Chi Haotian, visited Cuba, where he met with his counterpart, then-Defense Minister Raúl Castro. According to an article in *El Nuevo Herald*, the 2 reportedly signed an agreement granting China access to a number of former Soviet listening stations across the island, including the Bejucal base less than 10 miles from the old Lourdes station.<sup>3</sup> Coverage also cited a leaked Federal Communications Commission report claiming China had facilitated the transfer of jamming equipment to help block signals from Radio Martí reaching the island.

China-Cuba ties have continued to grow apace over the past decades. In 2005, Raúl Castro traveled to China to meet with President Hu Jintao, and President Xi Jinping toured Cuba in 2014 as part of his first official trip to Latin America as President of China and General Secretary of the CCP.<sup>4</sup> The PCC has been the No. 1 recipient in Latin America of International Liaison Department Engagements, the CCP’s organ for foreign party-to-party diplomacy, helping further cement ties between Cuban and Chinese leadership.<sup>5</sup> In the military domain, China and Cuba have continued to fortify their ties through high-level delegations and at times more active measures. Havana was home to a rare PLAN port call in the Western Hemisphere when 3 warships docked in November 2015 to commemorate 50 years of China-Cuba relations. As recently as April 2024, He Weidong, Vice Chairman of China’s Central Military Commission, and Cuban general Víctor Rojas Ramos, proclaimed an “unbreakable friendship” between the 2 nations. On January 1, 2025, Cuba officially joined the BRICS as an associate member, a major boost for Havana as the alliance’s efforts to weaken the hold of the U.S. dollar over the global financial system are a boon to the embargoed island.<sup>6</sup>

Cuba has received an estimated \$369 million in development finance from the PRC, but this pales in comparison to the island’s true financial needs.<sup>7</sup> Venezuela’s collapse has also made Cuba’s other historical partner unable to fill the void. Today, Cuba is in the midst of its worst economic crisis since the Special Period, registering 30 percent inflation and a 2 percent decline in GDP in 2023. Last fall, island-wide blackouts underscored the fragility of Cuba’s dilapidated energy infrastructure. Privately, Chinese officials have even reportedly expressed frustration that the Cuban government has not introduced more market-oriented reforms to ameliorate its deep economic woes.<sup>8</sup> Without much to offer China in terms of trade and raw materials, Cuba has played one of its only cards: its strategic location and relationships with senior CCP officials for support as the regime seeks to weather the present crisis.

#### CHINA AND CUBA’S REGIME SECURITY

In addition to general financial and development support for the Cuban regime, China has played a critical role in sharing authoritarian best practices and transplanting those tactics in a phenomenon known as “authoritarian export” or “authoritarian diffusion.” For instance, China built the island’s telecommunications infrastructure. The primary providers to Etecsa, Cuba’s sole internet provider, are exclusively Chinese: Huawei, TP-Link, and ZTE.<sup>9</sup> The Swedish organization Qurium discovered that Cuba uses Huawei network management software eSight to help filter web searches.<sup>10</sup> In doing so, China has built telecommunications infrastructure capable of surveillance and repression. This was visible in the July 2021 protests, when the Cuban regime shut off the internet and telephone services, blocking the island’s protestors from communicating with the outside world. This is just one example of how China supports the Cuban regime through the diffusion of authoritarian practices and tools.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-intelligence-footprint-cuba-new-evidence-and-implications-us-security>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://features.csis.org/hiddenreach/china-cuba-spy-sigint/>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/exporting-autocracy>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/why-are-latin-american-dictators-seeking-membership-brics>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://thediolog.org/china-latin-america-finance-databases>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/9ca0a495-d5d9-4cc5-acf5-43f42a9128b4>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/how-china-helps-the-cuban-regime-stay-a-float-and-shut-down-protests/>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.qurium.org/alerts/internet-blocking-in-cuba-silencing-dissent-in-the-name-of-moral-and-good-manners/>.

## STRATEGIC BATTLEGROUND

On June 8, 2023, the *Wall Street Journal* first reported that Cuba hosted secret Chinese spy bases in return for billions of dollars for the Cuban regime.<sup>11</sup> That same day, the Biden administration's Defense Department denied the *Wall Street Journal's* reporting, characterizing the report as "inaccurate."<sup>12</sup> Three days later, however, National Security Council spokesperson, John Kirby, reversed course and admitted to China's spy bases in Cuba, but insisted that its presence had existed since 2019 under the first Trump administration, implying the Biden administration had "inherited" the challenge.<sup>13</sup> Around the same time, reports surfaced that China was pursuing the construction of a military training base in Cuba.<sup>14</sup>

Subsequently, CSIS published a groundbreaking report, "Secret Signals: Decoding China's Intelligence Activities in Cuba." The CSIS team scoured the island using commercially-available satellite imagery, identifying 4 likely sites for signals intelligence collection in the process.<sup>15</sup> This was followed by a *Wall Street Journal* exclusive confirming its earlier reporting on the spy stations.<sup>16</sup> CSIS published another updated set of images in December 2024 as it tracked China's progress at these 4 sites.<sup>17</sup>

Although open-source research and satellite imagery have fueled speculation about nearly a dozen potential SIGINT sites in Cuba, CSIS positively identified 4 specific facilities as highly likely sites supporting Chinese intelligence operations targeting the United States. Three of these sites—Bejucal, Wajay, and Calabazar—are located around Havana.<sup>18</sup> A fourth site, El Salao, is a previously-unreported facility located on the opposite side of the island, just east of Santiago de Cuba.<sup>19</sup> In response to reporting on the Cuba-China SIGINT nexus, high-level PCC officials either outright denied any connection, or attempted to disarm criticism with humor (see appendix for the responses of Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez and President Miguel Díaz-Canel to CSIS's reports).

To coincide with this hearing, CSIS is releasing brand new imagery updates. First, after the publication of CSIS's initial reports, construction progress at El Salao appears to have ceased according to image captures dated April 18, 2025. Furthermore, the CDAA site appears to be abandoned for the moment, as evidenced by hitherto well-trimmed and graded areas being taken over by foliage. Second, the PRC appears to be enhancing its SIGINT at a previously-identified facility near Havana, Bejucal. On satellite imagery, a new area of the site, some antennas have been removed to make way for a large CDAA. The facility is also active, as evidenced by multiple image captures showing dishes moving positions to different angles and targets. Interestingly, the Soviets also operated a CDAA not far from this exact spot.

## MOTIVATION AND CAPABILITY

The CSIS open-source reports have brought unprecedented clarity to the scope and capabilities of several suspected Chinese SIGINT sites in Cuba, offering fresh insights into how they may be used to monitor sensitive military, commercial, and government activity across the region, but especially in the United States. Given its proximity to both the wider Caribbean and the southern United States, Cuba holds significant strategic value for signals intelligence collection in the region. The United States maintains critical military installations concentrated in States like Florida and Georgia, so Cuba's location just 93 miles from the Florida Keys gives adversaries such as China a prime vantage point to peer into the United States and intercept sensitive communications.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/world/cuba-to-host-secret-chinese-spy-base-focusing-on-u-s-b2fed0e0>; see also, <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/06/08/china-spy-on-us-cuba-00100990>.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/pentagon-dismisses-wsj-report-china-spy-station-cubap-2023-06-08/>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/politics/white-house-says-china-has-had-cuba-spy-base-since-at-least-2019-42145596>; see also, <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/06/12/kirby-nsc-china-balloon-cuba-00101575>.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/politics/beijing-plans-a-new-training-facility-in-cuba-raising-prospect-of-chinese-troops-on-americas-doorstep-e17fd5d1?mod=mhp>; see also, <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/06/20/china-negotiating-with-havana-about-joint-military-training-facility-in-cuba-00102636>.

<sup>15</sup> <https://features.csis.org/hiddenreach/china-cuba-spy-sigint/>.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/politics/national-security/china-cuba-suspected-spy-bases-da1d6ec9>.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-intelligence-footprint-cuba-new-evidence-and-implications-us-security>.

<sup>18</sup> <https://features.csis.org/hiddenreach/china-cuba-spy-sigint/>.

<sup>19</sup> <https://features.csis.org/hiddenreach/china-cuba-spy-sigint/>.

Both China and Cuba stand to gain significantly from this arrangement. Mired in a socialist nightmare, Cuba is currently facing its worst economic crisis in decades. Presently, the government presides over a moribund economy, daily power outages, and an exodus of over 10 percent of the island.<sup>20</sup> For Cuba, China's financial support represents an important lifeline. For China, the proximity to the United States and potential to access critical military and commercial intelligence strongly incentivizes the PRC to engage in this strategic arrangement with Cuba. Beyond the intelligence efforts, collaborating with Cuba in this domain expands China's military and intelligence footprint across the globe.<sup>21</sup> By pursuing these objectives in partnership with Cuba, China also reinforces the presence of a communist ally in close proximity to the United States.<sup>22</sup>

From a capability standpoint, SIGINT plays a pivotal role in contemporary spy craft and intelligence gathering.<sup>23</sup> Through the use of antennas and specialized equipment, actors can configure SIGINT systems for maximum effectiveness.<sup>24</sup> As the technology leverages antennas and gathers signals, distance and geography are essential. Depending on the objective and scope of the intelligence-gathering mission, facilities can be configured in various ways to maximize data collection and operational effectiveness.<sup>25</sup>

For optimal success, SIGINT systems rely on the beamforming technique to ensure the antennas are properly assembled for the mission efforts. The technique behind beamforming is used to enhance the effectiveness and precision of antenna arrays.<sup>26</sup> A single isotropic antenna radiates energy in all directions, resulting in limited range and greater vulnerability to interference. With just 2 antennas, signals can be synchronized to constructively interfere, producing a stronger, more focused beam. With more antennas, operators can fine-tune the phase and amplitude of signals for even greater directional control. When arranged in a grid, these arrays can steer the beam electronically without physically repositioning the antennas, allowing for flexible and efficient signals interception.<sup>27</sup> Because these antennas are gathering signals, it is imperative that SIGINT operations are within range of their target, meaning Cuba is an ideal partner for China's espionage efforts.<sup>28</sup>

Due to Cuba's proximity to Florida, these facilities grant China SIGINT coverage of around 20 key bases and installations on the peninsula.<sup>29</sup> The most significant military installations in and around Florida include Naval Air Station Pensacola, Tyndall Air Force Base, MacDill Air Force Base, Naval Air Station Key West, King's Bay Submarine Base, Cape Canaveral, and of course, the United States Southern Command.<sup>30</sup>

#### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

*Offer Classified Briefing to Every Member of Congress.*—This development is significant enough to national security to justify briefings for Members of Congress. All Members of Congress should be able to receive a Classified briefing on the topic of China's SIGINT operations in Cuba. Importantly, this should be made available to Members of Congress on an on-going basis, to ensure updates on imagery are also briefed.

*Consider Selective and Strategic Declassification of Images.*—Given that El Salao appears to have been abandoned since the publication of CSIS's reports, we may reasonably believe that transparency efforts and public criticism have the potential to derail China's ambitions. The United States should consider the strategic declassi-

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-intelligence-footprint-cuba-new-evidence-and-implications-us-security>.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-intelligence-footprint-cuba-new-evidence-and-implications-us-security>.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-intelligence-footprint-cuba-new-evidence-and-implications-us-security>.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-intelligence-footprint-cuba-new-evidence-and-implications-us-security>.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-intelligence-footprint-cuba-new-evidence-and-implications-us-security>.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-intelligence-footprint-cuba-new-evidence-and-implications-us-security>.

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-intelligence-footprint-cuba-new-evidence-and-implications-us-security>.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-intelligence-footprint-cuba-new-evidence-and-implications-us-security>.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.csis.org/analysis/chinas-intelligence-footprint-cuba-new-evidence-and-implications-us-security>.

<sup>29</sup> <https://features.csis.org/hiddenreach/china-cuba-spy-sigint/>.

<sup>30</sup> <https://features.csis.org/hiddenreach/china-cuba-spy-sigint/>.

sification of select images at moments that could derail China's operations and apply select pressure to these operations.

*Develop and Articulate Red Lines.*—Given Cuba's historically outsized role in U.S. national security calculations and its close cooperation with U.S. adversaries, ensuring clear communication is of the utmost importance to reduce potential misperceptions. If the United States believes China or Cuba to be credibly cooperating to share intelligence with one another, the United States should make this clear to both Havana and Beijing. Simultaneously, while it is difficult to displace existing facilities from the island, the United States should be crystal clear that the permanent installation of offensive military capabilities in Cuba (as was reported as a possibility by the *Wall Street Journal* around the same time as the original reporting on spy bases), or the basing of PLA combat assets, would be seen as a significant escalation and a redline for the United States. Passivity in the face of SIGINT facilities should not be interpreted by Havana as a green light to deepen Cuba-China cooperation.

*Harden Sensitive Civilian Infrastructure Against SIGINT.*—So long as China's SIGINT facilities operate in Cuba, the United States cannot be completely certain that no sensitive information will be obtained by an adversary. While modern military communications are encrypted and designed to prevent vital intelligence from leaking, civilian firms may lack the knowledge, means, or resources to safeguard their own infrastructure. Additionally, some private entities like SpaceX, which launch rockets from Cape Canaveral within theoretical range of some of the equipment observed in the CSIS reports, engage in highly strategic activities. The Chinese are top competitors of the United States in space. The U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency should spearhead an effort to review which companies operating in range of Cuban SIGINT sites are most vulnerable to this form of intelligence gathering and develop a plan to help these firms bolster their operational security. This could include training, basic encryption, or financing to help acquire necessary security equipment.

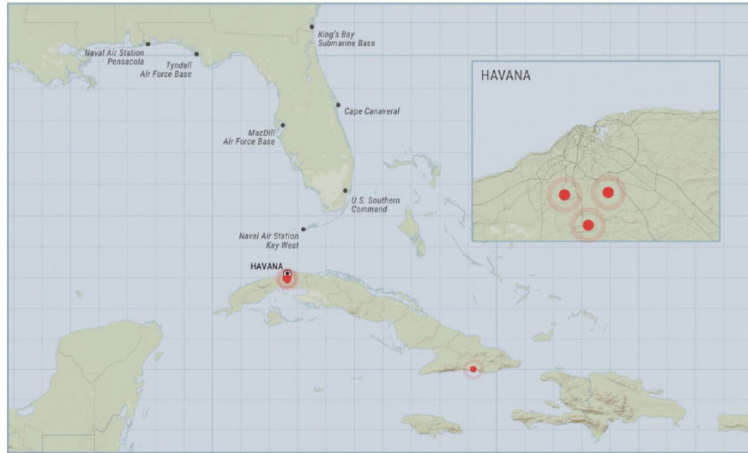
*Enlist Neighbors and Allies.*—The presence of SIGINT facilities in Cuba does not pose a risk to the United States alone. Tools like CDAAAs collect information omnidirectionally, meaning anything within range is liable to be picked up. Regional allies may be even more vulnerable, as they lack the same sophisticated encryption and stealth technology as the United States, possibly allowing Cuba and any of its partners a window into critical national security functions. As CISA works domestically with private-sector actors, the State Department should engage countries like the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica, to highlight risks and steps these countries can take to reduce their vulnerability to Cuba's SIGINT facilities.

#### APPENDIX OF IMAGES

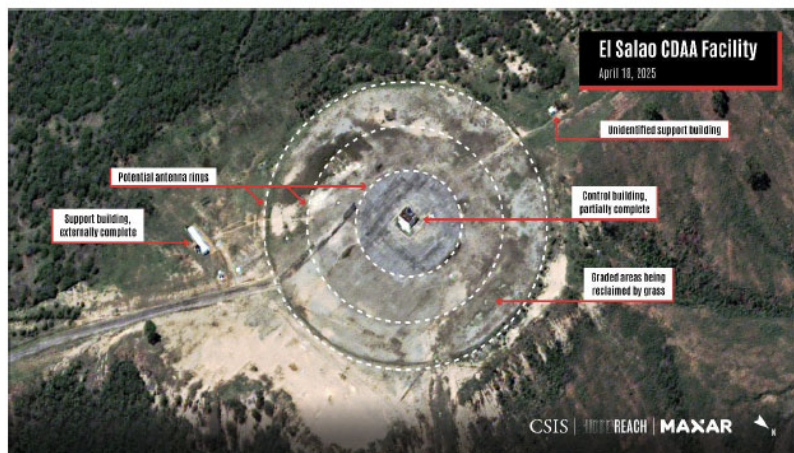
##### PUBLIC RESPONSE OF THE CUBAN PRESIDENT AND FOREIGN MINISTER TO INITIAL REVELATIONS



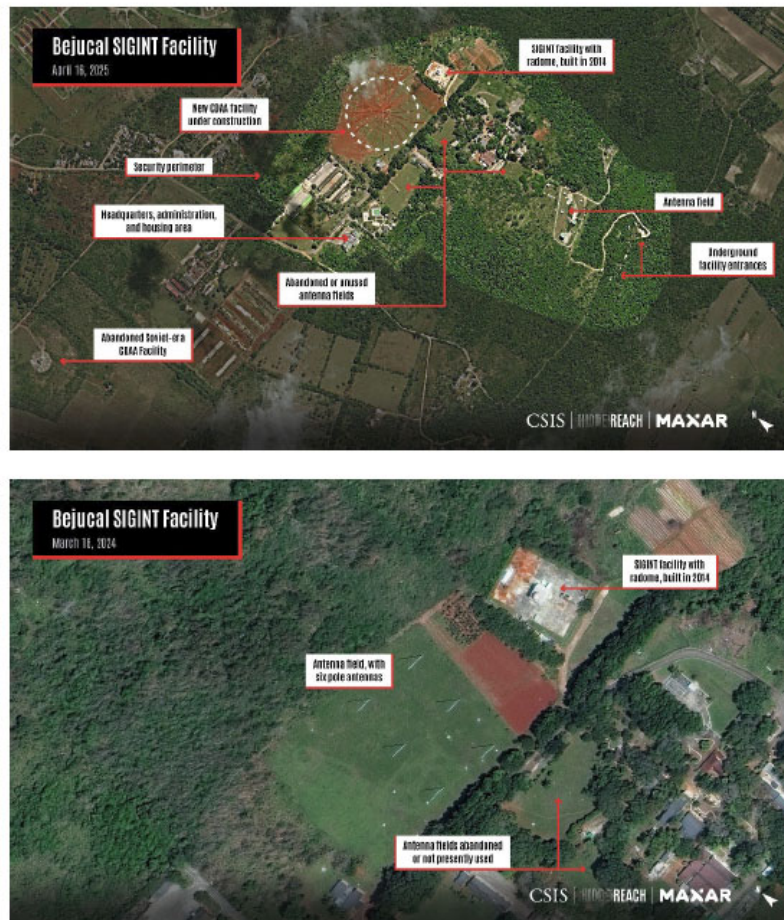
## US MILITARY AND SENSITIVE INSTALLATIONS WITHIN RANGE OF CHINA'S SIGINT IN CUBA



## IMAGERY UPDATES FROM THE EL SALAO SITE



## IMAGERY UPDATES FROM THE BEJUCAL SITE



Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you, Dr. Berg.

I recognize Mr. Martínez-Fernández for 5 minutes to summarize his opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF ANDRÉS MARTÍNEZ-FERNÁNDEZ, SENIOR POLICY ANALYST, LATIN AMERICA, ALLISON CENTER FOR NATIONAL SECURITY**

Mr. MARTÍNEZ-FERNÁNDEZ. Thank you, Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member McIver. I appreciate the invitation and apologize for my tardiness.

My name is Andrés Martínez. I run the Latin America portfolio at the Heritage Foundation. Since its inception, the Cuban dictatorship has repeatedly proven itself to be a willing partner and staging ground for anti-American extra-hemispheric powers. Today, Havana offers itself as a partner for a new patron, the Chinese

Communist Party. Reporting by CSIS and other organizations have once again unmasked the malignant nature of the Beijing-Havana nexus, particularly the growing footprint of Chinese intelligence-gathering facilities in Cuba.

China's accelerating espionage partnership with Cuba poses a major threat for U.S. and hemispheric security, bringing together Beijing's resources and technology with Havana's troubling capacity to penetrate U.S. agencies and security institutions.

The growth of China's spying footprint in Cuba is also indicative of Beijing's broader malignant presence in the Americas. While economic engagement has led the way for China's advance in much of Latin America and the Caribbean, Beijing's influence has spread quickly into the political, clandestine, and the military spheres.

China's broader influences also allowed it to expand its regional intelligence-gathering capacities beyond Cuba, including in Democratic nations. Indeed, Beijing has even secured unusually sprawling embassies in the Caribbean such as in Antigua, the Bahamas, and beyond with sites that are widely considered to be active intelligence centers for China.

In Argentina and elsewhere in South America, Beijing has also established deep-space monitoring facilities with worrying military implications. China's strategic focus around dual-use and critical infrastructure in the Americas highlights the intrinsic military and security nature of China's hemispheric encroachments. Chinese infrastructure projects across Latin America and the Caribbean offer Beijing crucial vectors for espionage and disruptive operations in and around the United States. Control over ports and other infrastructure can even be leveraged to impede the movement of U.S. warships, military resources, or directly target U.S. assets and supply chains.

Beijing's inroads in the Caribbean may be the most concerning aspect of its hemispheric encroachment. Geographic proximity to the United States and around crucial U.S. maritime routes make the Caribbean an outsized strategic importance for the United States. China appears to recognize the strategic importance, given the relative attention and engagement Beijing has given to the region, both economically and politically. As with specific islands, Beijing seeks to consolidate its influence over strategically important island chains in the Caribbean. The end goal of this effort is apparently counterbalancing the U.S. presence in Asia and empowering China to destabilize the United States through asymmetric means.

As Beijing grows increasingly belligerent against Taiwan and U.S. forces in the Indo-Pacific, the United States must assume that China will operationalize its presence and influence in Latin America and the Caribbean against the United States.

China's gains in the Caribbean and beyond pose an urgent challenge for U.S. national security. The Trump administration has clearly moved to confront the hemispheric vulnerability posed by China and its partnership with the communist dictatorship in Cuba, among other actors. Confronting these threats requires rallying pressure against Beijing and Havana while bolstering partnerships with regional democracies across economic, political, and security spheres. The United States should bolster its security op-

eration in capacities, in particular within Latin America and the Caribbean, prioritizing initiatives that mitigate risks posed to vital infrastructure and other vulnerabilities.

At the same time, the United States should leverage its underappreciated territorial presence in the Caribbean. U.S. territories, particularly including Puerto Rico can be better used to counterbalance Chinese and Cuban maligned activities in the Caribbean and across Latin America. Bolstering the U.S. Coast Guard presence capacities in Puerto Rico, for example, will support U.S. security in the broader Caribbean region amid these growing threats.

U.S. territories can also be used as force multipliers in bolstering broader U.S. economic engagements in Latin America and the Caribbean through targeted measures that offset regional dependence on China.

Thank you very much for the time. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Martínez-Fernández follows:]

#### PREPARED STATEMENT OF ANDRÉS MARTÍNEZ-FERNÁNDEZ

MAY 5, 2025

My name is Andrés Martínez-Fernández. I am the senior policy analyst for Latin America at The Heritage Foundation. The views I express in this testimony are my own and should not be construed as representing any official position of The Heritage Foundation.

#### HAVANA'S HOSTILITY

Since its inception, the Cuban dictatorship has repeatedly proven itself to be a willing partner and staging ground for anti-American, extra-hemispheric powers. During the Cold War, Cuba was an active partner for the Soviet Union, even hosting Soviet nuclear arms and military forces to target the United States. Much has changed in the United States since the end of the Cold War, however unfortunately the same cannot be said of Cuba.

The communist dictatorship in Havana remains as repressive as ever, controlling every major aspect of Cuba's economy and the lives of the Cuban people while denying their basic political freedoms and human rights. Cuba's dictatorship also remains actively hostile to the United States. Havana continues to launch clandestine operations and espionage against the United States in an effort to harm U.S. interests. Indeed, 2 of the most damaging spies in U.S. history both worked as agents of Havana and were both operating well after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Indeed, Manuel Rocha, who reached the top rungs of the U.S. State Department while acting as a Cuban agent, was only arrested in 2023.<sup>1</sup>

Today, Cuba's communist dictatorship also offers itself as a partner for a new extra-hemispheric patron, the China's Communist Party. Analysis of the Center for Strategic International Studies and others have revealed the growing footprint of Chinese intelligence-gathering facilities in Cuba to undermine U.S. security. Indeed, China's accelerating espionage partnership with Cuba poses a major threat for U.S. and hemispheric security, bringing together Beijing's resources and technology with Havana's unsurpassed experience in penetrating U.S. agencies and security institutions.

The growth of China's spying footprint in Cuba is indicative of Beijing's broader malign presence and operations in the Americas. Washington should take note and respond to the anti-American alliance between Havana and Beijing is consolidated just 90 miles off the U.S. coast.

#### CHINA IN THE AMERICAS

It is no secret that China has aggressively bolstered its presence and influence across the Western Hemisphere in recent years. The principal avenue for Chinese

<sup>1</sup>Martínez-Fernández, Andrés. "Cuba Spy Scandal Reveals U.S. Vulnerabilities." *The Heritage Foundation*, 9 Apr. 2024, <https://www.heritage.org/americas/commentary/cuba-spy-scandal-reveals-us-vulnerabilities>.

influence in Latin America is undoubtedly economic engagement. Through substantial infrastructure investments, offering market access, attractive financing offers, and more, China has displaced the United States as the primary economic partner in South America and increasingly Central America and the Caribbean.

While economic engagement has led the way for China's regional approach, Beijing's influence has spread quickly into the political and security spheres. Across the hemisphere, China's offering to the region erodes sovereignty and stability while empowering the Chinese government. Indeed, China's economic influence has secured for Beijing important levers of influence in the Western Hemisphere, including expanding strategic control of critical infrastructure while also allowing China to increasingly use its economic power to influence regional policies.

China's strategic focus around dual-use and critical infrastructure in the Americas highlights the intrinsic military and security nature of China's hemispheric encroachment. As Beijing grows increasingly belligerent against Taiwan and U.S. forces in the Indo Pacific, China's is likely to operationalize and militarize its presence and influence in Latin America and the Caribbean against the United States. This includes leveraging dual-use infrastructure such as ports for military purposes.

Chinese infrastructure projects across Latin America and the Caribbean offer Beijing crucial vectors for espionage and disruptive operations in and around the United States. Control over ports and other infrastructure can even be leveraged to impede the movement of U.S. warships and military resources or directly target U.S. assets.

While some downplay the security threats posed by China's economic presence, Beijing's own actions highlight the operational and even military dimensions of its approach to Latin America and the Caribbean. In Panama, for example, President Trump has highlighted the worrying presence of Chinese-controlled infrastructure, including 2 ports proximate to the Panama Canal. Given U.S. vulnerabilities to potential disruption of the Panama Canal, through which over a third of U.S. container traffic flows, the Trump administration has wisely sought to extract the Chinese presence there.

In March, the Chinese firm CK Hutchinson agreed to sell the ports to the U.S. firm Blackrock, however the Chinese Communist Party stepped in to halt the sale. While the Chinese firm CK Hutchinson determined that the sale of the ports was in its financial interests, Beijing decision to halt the sale shows the Chinese government is clearly has non-economic motivations to its presence in Latin America. Tellingly, Chinese state media had called the sale of the Chinese ports, "tantamount to handing a knife to an opponent."<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, these vulnerabilities for the United States are not limited to Panama. Elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean, China has leveraged its influence and investments to secure worrying control over dual-use infrastructure and vital trade arteries with little to no oversight by local governments.

#### BELJING'S CARIBBEAN STRATEGY

Beijing's inroads in the Caribbean and Central America may be the most concerning aspect of its hemispheric encroachment. Geographic proximity to the United States and around crucial U.S. maritime routes makes the Caribbean of outsized strategic importance for the United States. China appears to recognize this strategic importance given the relative attention and engagement Beijing has given to the region, both economically and politically. As with Pacific Island nations, Beijing appears to seek the consolidation of its influence and presence over strategically important island chains in the Caribbean with the goal of counterbalancing U.S. presence in Asia and empowering China to even destabilize the United States through asymmetric means.

In the Caribbean, China is also applying its ample experience at consolidating influence over small island nations with strategic importance for the United States. Indeed, China's Communist Party has been waging wars of influence in small island nations across the world for years, effectively leveraging a mix of economic engagement, corruption, and subversion to assert its control.<sup>3</sup>

Weak institutions and small and stagnant economies in the Caribbean offer easy geopolitical gains for Beijing's influence, an opportunity which the Chinese government has seized upon. In 2018, Trinidad and Tobago opened a new path for Beijing

<sup>2</sup> Jackson, Lewis, and Jenny Su. "Chinese State Media Blasts CK Hutchison's Panama Port Deal in Soon-Deleted Post." *Reuters*, 29 Mar. 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/deals/chinese-state-media-likens-ck-hutchison-panama-port-deal-handing-knife-opponent-2025-03-29/>.

<sup>3</sup> Harding, Andrew. "Time to Act: Strategic Benefits of Funding the Compacts of Free Association (COFA)." *The Heritage Foundation*, 2024, <https://www.heritage.org/china/report/time-act-strategic-benefits-funding-the-compacts-free-association-cofa>.

in the Caribbean, becoming the first island country in the world to join China's Belt and Road Initiative. Today, over half of CARICOM member states are signatories to the Belt and Road Initiative and China's economic engagement with the Caribbean has seen dramatic growth.

As of 2023, Chinese investments in the Caribbean have surpassed \$30 billion, with a broad presence across multiple industries, particularly infrastructure.<sup>4</sup> In some parts of the Caribbean, Chinese investments come to dominate sectors, reflecting Beijing's long-term predatory approach. Indeed, much of China's investments in the Caribbean are dubious business propositions for any traditional lender or firm.<sup>5</sup> However, Beijing's political impetus pushes these investments forward, again revealing their geopolitical and strategic nature.

While returns on investment may be lacking for China's Caribbean investments, they have bought important influence for Beijing, as well as control over infrastructure such as maritime ports and special economic zones with little to no local oversight.

China's broader influence has also allowed it to expand its regional intelligence-gathering capacities beyond Cuba, including in the democratic Caribbean nations. Indeed, Beijing's has even secured unusually sprawling embassies in the Caribbean, such as in Antigua, the Bahamas, and elsewhere, with cites that are widely considered to be active intelligence centers for China.<sup>6</sup>

#### A PATH FORWARD FOR THE UNITED STATES

The approach of China in the Americas highlights a set of worry strategic goals that regional governments fail to recognize and that even the United States has failed to fully appreciate. The Trump administration has clearly prioritized addressing these hemispheric vulnerabilities posed by China and its partnership with the Cuban dictatorship, among other actors. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has wisely prioritized engagement with the Caribbean, traveling twice already to the region. Concerted political and economic engagement such as this is a crucial element of confronting the hemispheric threat posed by Beijing and Havana.

Conditioning economic engagement and investment on regional cooperation to limit malign Chinese influence, for examples, should help guide this renewed hemispheric engagement. At the same time, the United States can and should bolster its security partnerships and capacities in the Caribbean and more broadly across the Americas in order to mitigate risks posed to vital infrastructure and other vulnerabilities. To this end, Department of Homeland Security partnerships that increase local oversight capacities and oversight over port facilities and similar infrastructure should be prioritized.

At the same time, the United States should leverage its underappreciated territorial presence in the Caribbean. U.S. territories, particularly including Puerto Rico, can be better used to counterbalance Chinese and Cuban malign activities in the Caribbean. Bolstering the U.S. Coast Guard presence and capacities in Puerto Rico, for example, will support U.S. security in the broader Caribbean region amid these growing threats. At the same time, U.S. territories can be force multipliers in bolstering economic engagement in the Caribbean through targeted measures that offset regional dependence on China.

Confronting China's hemispheric encroachment poses a substantial challenge for the United States. However, by recognizing the importance of U.S. engagement and defending U.S. interests, the Trump administration is already making substantial shift toward protecting U.S. national security in our hemisphere.

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<sup>4</sup>Hernández, Carlos. "China in the Caribbean: A Two-Faced Dragon." *Diálogo Americas*, 4 Apr. 2025, <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/china-in-the-caribbean-two-faced-dragon8/>.

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Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you, Mr. Martínez-Fernández.

I now recognize Mr. Lazarus for 5 minutes to summarize his opening statements.

**STATEMENT OF LELAND LAZARUS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL SECURITY PROGRAM, GORDON INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY, FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

Mr. LAZARUS. Thank you, Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member McIver, and distinguished Members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the privilege to speak today. My name is Leland Lazarus. I'm the associate director of Florida International University's Gordon Institute for Public Policy and nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council's global China hub.

I come to you today not just as a researcher, but as someone who has observed this threat to evolve first-hand. First, from my time as a Fulbright scholar, studying the Chinese Diaspora in Panama, to serving as the State Department Foreign Service officer in China and the Caribbean, to serving as a special assistant and speech writer to 2 combat commanders at U.S. Southern Command.

So let me be clear, Cuba is not just an outpost of Chinese influence, it's a strategic beach head. As my colleagues have said time and time again, just 90 miles off Florida where I live, where I reside, the Chinese Communist Party is executing a 21st Century playbook of espionage, port infrastructure, space surveillance, and digital authoritarianism. Havana is the perfect laboratory for China. China has built signals intelligence outposts aimed at Florida, as the CSIS report has shown, but it has also installed airport scanners and surveillance equipment using Chinese firms like Nuctech, as Ranking Member McIver had mentioned. It's a state-owned company, sanctioned by the United States for ties to the Chinese military.

Nuctech systems are deployed across Cuban airports, seaports, and customs facilities, giving Beijing privilege access to sensitive data flows right on our doorstep. But what's happening in Cuba is just one chapter in a much larger story. Next week on May 13, Beijing will host the China CELAC summit with nearly every country in Latin America and the Caribbean represented in Beijing. It is a reminder that China has a long-term strategy for this hemisphere, built on patient investment, diplomatic cultivation, and evolving security ties. The United States unfortunately by contrast still too often operates from a crisis-to-crisis mindset in this region and has yet to provide an affirmative long-term agenda for the region at large.

The Chinese military and military scholars call countries like Cuba strategic support points or Zhan lue Zhi dian in Mandarin to sustain their far seas naval posture. They don't need permanent

basis, they need leverage. Cuba gives them exactly that. It's close, politically reliable, and already outfitted with Chinese tech.

When the United States sends warships through the Taiwan Straits, Chinese academics now reply with references to their own right to operate near Florida. That's strategic reciprocity Beijing style. You touch our waters, we have the right to touch yours.

China also aspires to build its Sittian space program to expand its global space domain awareness. But space is also crucial for signals intelligence and Cuba is a prime location for China to target the United States. That's why we at Florida International University have created the Chinese activities in Latin America dashboard in order to track and expose China's moves in almost real time. It maps everything, and I mean everything from dual-use ports and signals intelligence listening stations to companies like Nuctech that quietly expand China's operational footprint across the region.

Our dashboard that we built is really built for you all, U.S. policy makers, to make the best decisions about our greatest strategic competitor. But it's also a warning. China's not just coming to Latin America and the Caribbean—it's already here and it's here to stay.

Members of the subcommittee, we cannot win a global competition with China if we lose sight of our own hemisphere. Strategic neglect is not just dangerous, it is a gift we give to Beijing. We must meet this challenge together with our allies and partners to make America and the Americas safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

Thank you, I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Lazarus follows:]



**Jack D. Gordon  
Institute for Public Policy**

**“Beijing’s Air, Space, and Maritime Surveillance from Cuba: A Growing Threat to the  
Homeland”**

**Written Testimony of Leland Lazarus**

*Associate Director, National Security Program – Jack D. Gordon Institute for Public Policy,  
Florida International University,*

*Non-Resident Fellow, Global China Hub, Atlantic Council*

**House Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security  
U.S. House of Representatives – May 6, 2025**

**Introduction**

Chairman Gimenez, Ranking Member McIver, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Leland Lazarus, and I serve as the Associate Director of the National Security Program at Florida International University (FIU)’s Jack D. Gordon Institute for Public Policy, and Non-Resident Fellow at the Atlantic Council’s Global China Hub. Throughout my career as a Fulbright Scholar studying the Chinese diaspora in Panama, a State Department Foreign Service Officer in China and the Caribbean, and the Special Assistant to two Commanders of U.S. Southern Command, I have seen firsthand China’s growing strategic engagement in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), especially in the area of national security.

As we gather here for today’s hearing, Xi Jinping is preparing to host various regional leaders—including Cuba—in Beijing next week for the China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) Summit on May 13th. They will most likely announce the next three-year Joint Action Plan including more Chinese investments in electric vehicles, solar panels, and renewable energy. But the Summit is also an example of the robust strategic presence China has steadily built in our own neighborhood over the past two decades. Cuba, in particular, is

emerging as a centerpiece of China's efforts to challenge the United States near its shores, echoing Cold War dynamics but with 21st-century tools.

China's presence in Cuba is a microcosm of how the PRC approaches the entire LAC region. In Cuba, we see every dimension of Chinese strategy on display: commercial port investments by sanctioned Chinese state-owned enterprises; dual-use telecommunications infrastructure provided by firms like Huawei and Nuctech; signals intelligence (SIGINT) sites likely supporting Chinese military and space goals; and academic and military exchanges that further embed the Chinese Communist Party's influence within Cuban institutions. Chinese journals describe Cuba and other key LAC countries as "strategic support points" (战略支点) serving commercial and security purposes. Chinese sources frame the PRC's engagement in Cuba as a legitimate counterweight to U.S. activities in Asia. The logic is clear: if the U.S. insists on maintaining freedom of navigation operations near Chinese waters, Beijing reserves the right to operate near Florida. That form of "strategic reciprocity" is evident in everything from China's cyber footprint on the island to reported upgrades at Chinese SIGINT facilities.

This testimony draws on open-source information, Chinese-language sources, and cutting-edge research—especially from our FIU Chinese Activities in Latin America Dashboard, a tool we have built to aggregate and visualize all of China's regional activities and projects. I will also offer a set of concrete, actionable recommendations for U.S. policymakers to mitigate these risks, strengthen our regional posture, and support transparency and resilience across the Americas.

The U.S. cannot afford to treat the Western Hemisphere as an afterthought in our global competition with China. If Beijing is willing to establish listening posts, upgrade ports, and export authoritarian technologies to a country just 90 miles from Florida, then we must treat this challenge with the urgency and strategic clarity it deserves.

#### **Ports as "Strategic Support Points"**

China's global ambition is to seek "national rejuvenation" by 2049, which includes transforming the People's Liberation Army into a world-class military with global reach.<sup>i</sup> Since the late 2000s, China's expanding global maritime strategy has increasingly incorporated Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) as part of its "far seas" vision. In Chinese strategic discourse, analysts use the term "战略支点" (zhànlüè zhīdiǎn) – sometimes also "战略支撑点" (zhànlüè zhīchēngdiǎn) – meaning strategic support point or strategic fulcrum, to describe key overseas locations that can support China's military and economic operations.<sup>ii</sup> PLA naval strategist Captain Zhang Wei wrote in a 2018 China Military Science article that PLA presence on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of the Americas would "improve the PLA's far-oceans strategic disposition" (完善我军远洋战略布势) by providing more options for deployments and supply in a contingency.<sup>iii</sup>

Unlike traditional foreign “bases,” these strategic strongpoints would provide logistical support and economic benefits without constituting offensive military garrisons.<sup>iv</sup>

Just as Chinese private and state-owned enterprises have invested in port facilities from Panama to Peru, they have also helped expand Cuba’s port terminals. China Communication Construction Company—a state-owned enterprise sanctioned for directly supporting China’s military-industrial complex<sup>v</sup>—expanded Santiago de Cuba’s port, Cuba’s second-largest.<sup>vi</sup> This mirrors Chinese port projects in the Bahamas, Panama, and across the Caribbean, aiming to secure logistical hubs and footholds astride vital sea lanes. Control or influence over ports gives China dual-use benefits – commercial leverage and potential naval access. Cuba’s location at the gateway of the Gulf of Mexico means that Chinese involvement in its ports could position Beijing to monitor or, in a crisis, disrupt shipping routes that lead to U.S. ports like Miami, New Orleans, and Houston.



*Snapshot of Chinese port projects in the FIU Chinese Activities in LAC Dashboard<sup>vii</sup>*

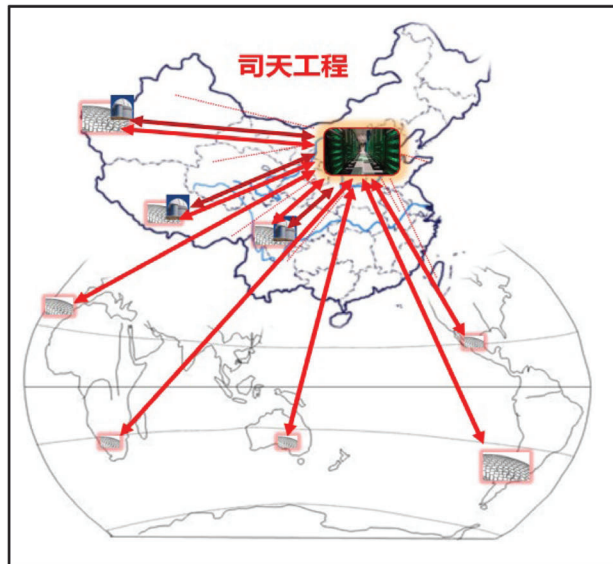
Moreover, regular visits by Chinese commercial shipping lines to Cuban ports increase Chinese visibility into maritime traffic. Havana’s deepening dependency on Chinese trade (China is now Cuba’s #1 or #2 trading partner) ensures Chinese firms have a major role in port operations and customs. This raises security concerns that Chinese entities could collect data on U.S.-bound cargo or even facilitate intelligence collection under commercial cover.

Strategic support points could also encompass airports. Chinese company Nuctech—which creates scanners at ports and airports—is expanding its business throughout the region, particularly in Cuba. At Havana’s José Martí International Airport and the Port of Havana, modern Nuctech

radiographic scanners inspect cargo containers and luggage.<sup>viii</sup> Cuba was reportedly the first Caribbean nation to use some of Nuctech's newest scanning technology. While such equipment can help interdict drugs or contraband, it also can be a source of intelligence. Western security agencies have warned that Nuctech scanners could covertly transmit information about customs inspections back to Beijing.<sup>ix</sup> In an era where tracking supply chains is strategic, knowing what goods pass through Cuba is valuable. The EU recently raided Nuctech's offices for security concerns;<sup>x</sup> having their hardware in Cuba could similarly threaten U.S. interests if, for example, it were used to surveil diplomatic cargo of the U.S. Interests Section (the de facto U.S. embassy in Havana).

#### **China's Sitian Space Program and Signals Intelligence Outpost**

Space has similarly emerged as a strategic domain in China-LAC relations. In recent years, China has built space infrastructure in the region – most notably a satellite tracking station in Argentina's Neuquén province. According to Newsweek, China's space facilities in Latin America are part of the Sitian (司天) Project, a plan by the National Astronomical Observatory of China (NAOC) to create a global space monitoring system that will help “meet national strategic needs.”<sup>xi</sup> The needs listed were “space fragment monitoring and cataloging; medium and high orbit satellite monitoring; and detection and early warning of near-Earth objects to prevent civilization disasters.”<sup>xii</sup> A global map of the Sitian sites includes Mexico and Southern America (ostensibly Argentina and/or Chile).



*A map from a 2022 NOAC presentation about the Sitian space program. Arrows point to Mexico and southern America (ostensibly Argentina and/or Chile).*

The space domain is also critical for signals intelligence (SIGINT), and Cuba is a prime location for China to target the United States. Southern U.S. states host key military installations – including U.S. Southern Command in Miami, various Navy and Air Force bases, and NASA’s Kennedy Space Center. Having listening posts in Cuba puts these within China’s earshot. Indeed, Voice of America’s Chinese service reported that PLA intelligence values Cuba because it “places the U.S. East Coast under coverage, including Florida’s military and civilian space launches and several large Army and Navy bases.”<sup>xiii</sup> Satellite imagery analysis from the Center for Strategic and International Studies indicates that China has built or upgraded at least four SIGINT sites in Cuba aimed at intercepting sensitive communications.<sup>xiv</sup> Some Chinese scholars suggest that this is simply retaliation for what they see as U.S. meddling in the Indo-Pacific. In a 2024 Global Times article responding to the CSIS report, Fudan University professor Shen Yi

said: “If the US does not want to see China strengthen its intelligence operations near the US, then Washington should not do the same thing near China, or the US will have to gradually adapt to a new reality of other countries’ countermeasures against it.”<sup>xv</sup>

#### **Enabling Digital Authoritarianism**

In the past decade, Chinese strategic commentary has increasingly highlighted emerging security domains – notably cyberspace – in the context of Latin America. Beijing sees these high-tech arenas as critical to the future security architecture. Chinese officials have sought Cuban and other Latin American support at the U.N. for principles like cyber sovereignty and a global treaty on cybercrime. They frequently warn against the use of cyber tools to “undermine another nation’s stability”<sup>xvi</sup> – a thinly veiled reference to U.S. intelligence operations and support for opposition groups via social media. This reflects China’s concern over “color revolution” risks in developing countries, and Latin American governments similarly wary of online destabilization–like Cuba–have shown interest in China’s approach.

Across Latin America, Huawei and ZTE have become the dominant suppliers of telecom gear, from 3G/4G cellular networks to fiber-optic cables. Cuba is no exception. The Cuban government’s telecom monopoly ETECSA relies almost entirely on Chinese technology. Huawei, ZTE, and TP-Link are the primary providers of Cuba’s internet and mobile infrastructure. As early as 2000, Cuba contracted Huawei to lay fiber-optic cables nationwide. Chinese tech now underpins everything from the Wi-Fi hotspots in Cuban parks to the routers in Cuban homes. A 2017 network analysis found traces of Chinese code in the login portals for Cuba’s public Wi-Fi, revealing how deeply embedded Chinese software is in Cuban systems. Moreover, the Cuban regime utilizes Huawei’s eSight network management software to filter and block internet content, essentially importing China’s Great Firewall tactics to the island. This Chinese-built digital ecosystem in Cuba grants Beijing extraordinary access and influence. It not only secures China a long-term telecommunications client, but also provides the PLA and Chinese intelligence potential backdoors into communications transiting Cuban networks. Notably, U.S. officials suspect that Chinese telecom technicians have assisted Cuban authorities in setting up systems for signals intelligence – monitoring both Cuban citizens and communications in the surrounding region. In short, Cuba’s telecom sector exemplifies China’s “Digital Silk Road” strategy: export critical tech infrastructure and gain a strategic listening post in return.

Hand in hand with telecom dominance, China exports surveillance tools and know-how to sympathetic regimes in LAC. In Cuba, the Chinese have helped build what can be termed a digital police state in miniature. The same Cuban internet that Chinese companies helped stand up can be shut down on demand – and indeed was, during Cuba’s historic July 11, 2021 protests. When thousands of Cubans took to the streets in rare anti-regime demonstrations, the government cut off internet and mobile service across the island. How could an already

connectivity-poor country so effectively “pull the plug”? The key was Chinese technology and expertise. As I wrote at the time, Beijing’s telecom companies played a “fundamental role” in enabling the Cuban regime to control and choke its communications network.<sup>xvii</sup> Then-Senator Marco Rubio noted that Cuba’s blackout was achieved using “technology from China” specifically for controlling internet access.<sup>xviii</sup> Research by the Open Observatory of Network Interference and others later confirmed this: Cuba’s networking equipment is Chinese, its traffic filtering tools are Chinese, and its entire internet architecture is configured in a way reminiscent of China’s own censorship regime.<sup>xix</sup>

#### Recommendations for U.S. Policymakers

Confronting the challenge of Beijing’s investments in dual-use ports, space and SIGINT capabilities and digital authoritarian tools in Cuba will require a multifaceted strategy. The goal is to protect U.S. homeland security, help Cubans gain a freer and more secure digital future, and rally regional support – all without pushing Cuba entirely into China’s strategic embrace. Below are clear, actionable recommendations.

- 1) **Enhance Technical Countermeasures in Florida and Gulf States:** The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of Defense should deploy advanced counter-SIGINT and counter-surveillance technologies in the Southeast U.S. This could include encryption upgrades for all communications emanating from South Florida military installations (to thwart Chinese interception from Cuba) and spectrum monitoring to detect any unusual signals interference originating from Cuba. The U.S. Air Force and Space Force, for instance, could adjust flight telemetry and communication protocols for launches at Cape Canaveral – using directional antennas or frequency-hopping techniques to minimize interceptable leakage toward Cuba. Similarly, U.S. Navy exercises in the Gulf might use secured datalinks and practice emissions control when near Cuban waters. Essentially, we must “spy-proof” our sensitive activities in the Southeast. This also means hardening Guantanamo Bay base’s communications and monitoring any electronic probing from nearby Cuban territory.
- 2) **Deploy Aerial and Undersea Surveillance:** To better understand what China is doing in Cuba, the U.S. intelligence community should increase surveillance of the relevant sites. This could involve deploying high-altitude drones or aircraft to periodically overfly (from international airspace) areas like Bejucal and El Salao to collect signals and imagery – tracking changes in antenna arrays or unusual transmissions. Undersea, the U.S. Navy should monitor waters between Cuba and Florida for any Chinese deployment of sonar or oceanographic devices that could threaten U.S. submarines. We might also quietly work with allies who have satellite imagery capabilities to keep Cuban sites under watch.
- 3) **Expand Internet Access Initiatives for the Cuban People:** As recommended by experts, the U.S. can provide the Cuban public with greater connectivity independent of

state-controlled networks. This might involve supporting satellite internet services (like Starlink) for Cuba through third-party arrangements, or enabling mesh network devices to be smuggled in that create peer-to-peer communications even when Havana shuts down the web. Congress recently authorized funding for promoting internet freedom in closed societies; a portion should target Cuba specifically. By reducing the Cuban population's reliance on ETECSA (and thus Huawei-run systems), we diminish China's grip and give Cubans a taste of uncensored information.

- 4) **Promote Alternatives to Chinese Telecom in Latin America and Caribbean:** The U.S. should coordinate with allies (Japan, Europe, etc.) to offer competitively priced alternatives to Huawei/ZTE for countries upgrading telecom networks. While we can't change the Cuban regime's choices easily, we can ensure its Caribbean neighbors have options. This reduces regional Chinese telecom dominance and indirectly pressures Cuba if it becomes the sole Huawei-dependent network (Cuba might worry about isolation or vulnerabilities). The U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) could finance projects to roll out Nokia or Ericsson equipment in nearby nations, showing that non-Chinese 5G is viable in developing markets. Over time, if Cuba ever opens its market, those alternatives would be more attractive.
- 5) **Improve Regional Cyber Defense Collaboration:** Work with Western Hemisphere partners to create an early warning system for cyber threats emanating from Cuba or involving Chinese tech. For instance, if unusual traffic patterns suggest a Cuban network is being used as a launchpad for cyber intrusions (perhaps by Chinese hackers), having sensors in regional internet service providers could catch it. The U.S. Cyber Command and DHS could quietly assist willing nations (even possibly friendly telecoms in Latin America that connect to Cuba) to install monitoring that flags suspicious activity, without violating any sovereignty. Essentially, if China tries to use Cuba as a base for cyber operations against us or allies, we want to know and block it. Enhanced information sharing through the Organization of American States (OAS) cyber committee could include warnings about hardware like Nuctech or Hikvision which might harbor vulnerabilities.
- 6) **Scrutinize Undersea Cables and Infrastructure:** There is an initiative to build new undersea cables in the Caribbean.<sup>xx</sup> The U.S. should support secure cable projects and oppose any that have Chinese contractors laying the cable near U.S. waters. If China proposes linking Cuba to other cables (for redundancy beyond ALBA-1), we should rally partners to prevent Chinese firms from getting those contracts. Also, consider agreements with the Bahamas to allow U.S. inspection of cable segments near Cuba for tampering. While technical, this kind of infrastructure security is paramount since cables carry bulk communications that China may seek to tap from Cuba.
- 7) **Coordinate with Allies (Canada, EU, Japan) on Cuba Strategy:** The United States should consult closely with Canada and European partners who have diplomatic relations with Cuba. Many of these countries are also wary of China's global surveillance

activities. A coordinated message from multiple nations to Cuba – expressing concern about the Chinese spy installations – would be harder for Havana to ignore than just U.S. protests. For instance, Canada and select EU states could quietly let Cuba know that Chinese military bases on the island would adversely affect their relations and investment prospects. Such behind-the-scenes diplomatic leveraging might give Cuba pause about becoming too dependent on Beijing.

- 8) **Leverage Latin American Partners to Engage Cuba:** Countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico have closer ties with Cuba and might serve as intermediaries. The U.S. can share its concerns about the Chinese bases with these partners and encourage them to raise it in their bilateral talks with Cuba. For instance, Mexico (which values strategic autonomy) might tell Cuba that a Chinese signals base so close to the U.S. could increase tensions in the region – not desirable for anyone. If Cuba hears this not just from Washington, but from fellow Latin Americans, it might carry weight.
- 9) **Leverage U.S. Academic Institutions to Illuminate China's Strategy in Latin America and the Caribbean:** Policymakers should invest in and partner with U.S. academic institutions to produce publicly accessible, data-driven research that exposes the breadth of China's strategic activities in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Universities and think tanks—especially those with regional and language expertise—are uniquely positioned to monitor and analyze China's evolving presence in the Western Hemisphere. Their research can help fill critical intelligence gaps, shape interagency awareness, and support strategic communications to allies and the general public. One strong model is the Florida International University (FIU) Chinese Activities in Latin America Dashboard, an interactive geospatial platform that aggregates and visualizes all known Chinese investments, infrastructure projects, diplomatic exchanges, and military engagements in the LAC region.<sup>xxi</sup> The dashboard provides near-real-time data and mapping of critical assets, including potential dual-use deepwater ports, Chinese-built telecom nodes, Confucius Institutes, and space-enabling infrastructure such as satellite ground stations and tracking facilities. It will soon leverage AI to add risk indicators—such as port locations near chokepoints or known Chinese state-owned enterprise involvement—that help flag projects with possible national security implications.

### Conclusion

Cuba is not just an outpost of Chinese influence—it is a warning. China is strategically embedding itself in the Western Hemisphere not just through trade and investment but also through ports, space, and espionage. Havana offers Beijing a “strategic support point” from which it can enhance its maritime power projection and space/SIGINT capabilities to challenge the United States—strategically and economically.

This is part of a deliberate, long-term campaign by the Chinese Communist Party to erode U.S. influence globally. The same playbook being used in Cuba—state-backed investments, dual-use infrastructure, diplomatic denial, and strategic ambiguity—is unfolding across Latin America and the Caribbean.

The United States must respond with resolve and creativity. That means investing in regional partnerships, leveraging academic research to expose malign influence, and signaling clearly that America will defend its interests in this hemisphere. Strategic neglect of our region—our shared neighborhood—is no longer an option.

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Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you, Mr. Lazarus.

Members will be recognized by order of seniority for their 5 minutes of questioning and I will recognize myself for 5 minutes of questioning. I'll start out with a comment in that the United States for far too long, both Republican and Democrat administrations have not paid close enough attention to what's happening in our own hemisphere. It's allowed China to make the inroads that it has and now we're just waking up to the fact. So this hearing is part of that to try to awaken the American people and the administration to the fact that we need to pay close attention to what's happening in our own neighborhood.

So with that, this is an open question. It's my estimation that the Cuban regime itself is actually in one of the most weakest positions that it has been in the past 60 years. Do any of you share that opinion or do you disagree with that opinion? I'll start with you Dr. Berg.

Mr. BERG. Thanks for the question, Chairman. I do share that opinion. I think the Cuban regime is incredibly weak at this point in time. We've seen that not just in protests from the island but in rolling blackouts that occur seemingly on a monthly basis, sometimes weekly basis, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Mr. Fernandez.

Mr. MARTÍNEZ-FERNÁNDEZ. Yes, I agree. I think economically, politically as well the regime is in a period of vulnerability. I think also increasingly hemispheric as well as U.S. political consensus is moving toward a recognition of the malignant nature of the Cuban dictatorship as past attempts however poorly conceived at engagements as we have seen from the United States have fallen flatly and been rebuffed. The Cuban dictatorship has at the same time again as we have discussed acted as an active partner for enemies of the United States within our hemisphere.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Mr. Lazarus, do you share that opinion that the Cuban regime is at one of the weakest points in the last 6 years?

Mr. LAZARUS. Sir, I would absolutely agree. Inflation is over 30 percent for of the Cuban regime. There has been an increased outflow of refugees coming out of Cuba and there has been an increase in Cuban officials traveling to Beijing trying to get more investment. I understand that now China is Cuba's either largest or second-largest trading partner, counting from roughly 30 percent of Cuba's imports and exports.

I think that Cuba's decreasing economic situation is allowing it to become even more and more dependent economically, increasingly security and political standpoint on China.

Mr. GIMENEZ. I would like to discuss with the 3 of you off-line and how we can accelerate Cuba's dictatorship their demise so we can turn Cuba from a platform and a base for China and make it actually a friend of the United States. I think we are close to that. I also think that Cuba is the head of the snake. When we talk about all the unrest that's happening in our hemisphere in Venezuela and Nicaragua, Cuba is the head of the snake and we need to do everything in our power to set the Cuban people free but also turn Cuba from an enemy into friend.

Now lets talk about Cuba and the threat and the Chinese threat in Cuba. The Russians have been operating there for years, decades. Are the Chinese supplanting the Russians or are they adding to the Russian threat?

Mr. BERG. I'm happy to take that, Mr. Chairman. I think that they are both supplanting but also adding to. There is still a residual Russian presence of course in Cuba. We saw last year at the tail end of the Biden administration how the Russians sailed a vessel through the Florida strait, ported both in Cuba and in Havana. Importantly before porting in Cuba displayed one of the Zircon hypersonic missiles in the Atlantic.

But I would say in terms of the presence, Mr. Chairman, the Chinese have supplanted them in terms of the more important

partner and quite literally some of these sites that we showed were former Russian sites but are now occupied we believe by the Chinese.

Mr. GIMENEZ. They have added to the capability, a new more modern infrastructure, et cetera.

Mr. BERG. That's correct.

Mr. GIMENEZ. OK. So maybe some of my colleagues would be, you know, surprised to know that not only is it Russia and China but also Iran is here and North Korea is also here. So we need to also stand up to those threats.

The training range that's just outside of Florida, it's the largest training range that we have. It's the only training range that actually can simulate battling the Taiwan Straits. What kind of a threat do these facilities pose to those ranges and what kind of intelligence could the Chinese get from surveying those ranges in relation to our tactics, et cetera, of how we may operate in the Taiwan Straits?

Mr. BERG. Mr. Chairman, the first slide that I showed in my presentation showed just the number of facilities in your home State that are easily within range of these facilities. It's my understanding that military communications is of course encrypted and protected in certain ways. But it is scooped up by some of this equipment then it is available for the Chinese to try to crack that communication. So that's why one of my recommendations is doing an exercise to harden facilities and figure out what our vulnerabilities are so that we can make sure that we protect those very vulnerable secrets, both on the commercial side and on the military side, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GIMENEZ. Thank you. My 5 minutes are up.

I recognize the Ranking Member, the gentlewoman from New Jersey Ms. McIver, for 5 minutes.

Mrs. McIVER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Lazarus, thank you once again for joining us today. In your testimony, you discussed how China will be hosting a summit with Latin America and Caribbean states next week. China and Cuba also both belong to the BRICS group along with Brazil, Russia, India and a total of 23 countries. BRICS has become a serious political force as the nations belonging to BRICS now account for almost 30 percent of the world's GDP, 40 percent of the oil production and almost half the world's population. We have seen what Trump's repeated tariff threats are doing to the economy both at home and globally while eroding trust in the U.S. dollar.

Trump's foreign policies are only making groups like the BRICS more powerful as our geopolitical rivals work to fill the void that President Trump has created with his America last policies.

Mr. Lazarus, as America recedes from the world's stage, how are BRICS and other multinational groups exerting power and influence?

Mr. LAZARUS. Ranking Member, thank you so much for the question. You're absolutely right, Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa when taken together they represent more than 30 percent of the global GDP. They have really been using that multilateral institution in order to create alternative financial institutions to the Western-built ones, built right after World War II. So you think

the New Development Bank or the BRICS bank that could fund various projects in the developing world.

There is talk about them creating a BRICS currency that could mean that they could settle trade accounts, not using the U.S. dollars, which could potentially weaken the U.S. dollar's dominance in the globe. But it goes to a larger narrative that the Chinese and our other adversaries try to use in the global south which is that the United States doesn't necessarily care about the global south. All they care about is realist ideology, especially in this region in Latin America and the Caribbean there is this narrative that the Chinese try to say that the United States only wants to impose the Monroe Doctrine 2.0. I am concerned that certain things, certain policies could really allow the Chinese to continue to spread that narrative in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Mrs. McIVER. Thank you for that. Just to follow up, in your opinion, do you think China ultimately stands to benefit from the pause in foreign aid underneath the Trump administration?

Mr. LAZARUS. Well, we are seeing already on a global scale that China has already stepped up its foreign aid in countries like Cambodia, Nepal. As I mentioned, next week they are going to be hosting the fourth ministerial of the China-CELAC summit. I expect that after that summit there's going to be a joint action plan between China and CELAC on China increasing exports of renewable energy and electric vehicles and solar panels. Again, it is another way for China to project itself as a reliable partner at a time where other countries are perceiving potentially the United States' tariffing other countries. It's also a way for China to project itself as the defender of globalization and free trade going forward, that is a concern.

Ms. McIVER. Thank you so much, Mr. Lazarus.

With that, I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. GIMENEZ. The gentlewoman yields.

I now recognize the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Crane, for 5 minutes.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you guys for coming today to talk about this very, very important topic. So just to get this straight, we have the Chinese partnering with Cuba, both Communist countries and Cuba's roughly 90 miles from the United States. Are we able to discern through these satellite imagery, human intel, and signal intel what the capabilities of this technology located on Cuba, the island of Cuba? Dr. Berg.

Mr. BERG. Chairman, we are able to speculate about it, but again, this was used—discovered using commercially-available satellite technology that we have the capability of using. I'm sure and this is why I recommended a Classified briefing for you all. On the high side, my guess is that there is a lot more analysis available on capabilities and vulnerabilities.

Mr. CRANE. Do we have the ability to jam and block the surveillance technologies located on the island of Cuba, Dr. Berg?

Mr. BERG. Congressman, it's my understanding that we do have some of that capability. I'm not sure if it is being deployed. Also as I mentioned some of the communications that are sensitive in nature are also encrypted, but I'm happy to talk to you off-line or

answer questions further after this hearing about those types' capabilities.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you. Mr. Lazarus, you mentioned that the Chinese could use these basis to project digital authoritarianism, I believe that was the word you used. Can you expand on that?

Mr. LAZARUS. Absolutely, Congressman. Well, first and foremost, Huawei and ZTE provide the digital backbone for Etecsa, the Cuban telecommunications company. We saw in July 2021 when there was the large massive protests in Cuba against the regime that the regime was able to really shut down the protesters' communications so that they couldn't necessarily collaborate with each other as easily as they otherwise would. Our assessment was that they were able to rely on technology of Huawei and ZTE or to shut that down. There's also again the idea of Nuctech being in various seaports, airports in Cuba. Nuctech is a state-owned enterprise. It is a subsidiary of Tsinghua University's Tongfang.

China's national nuclear corporation has a 21 percent stake in Nuctech and it provides all kinds of port scanning equipment and the concern is that all the kind of information, whether it be biometric, whether it be commercial, whether it be sensitive data about supply chain roots and cargo flows, all that information can go back to Beijing and that would constitute a national security threat for the United States.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you.

Dr. Berg, is it true that a Chinese national was arrested in January of this year in Miami's airport for conducting espionage activities?

Mr. BERG. Congressman, I'll have to get back to you on that. I'm not aware of that particular—

Mr. CRANE. Yes, I'd like to enter this into the record, Mr. Chairman. This is an article, "Chinese National Targeted in Federal Spy Investigation Arrested At Miami International Airport". According to the article, he had transmitted 47 pages that were schematics, graphs, diagrams related to nuclear weapons.

Mr. Lazarus, I want to come back to—

Mr. GIMENEZ. Without objection.  
[The information follows:]

#### ARTICLE FROM THE FLORIDA CENTER FOR GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

#### CHINESE NATIONAL TARGETED IN FEDERAL SPY INVESTIGATION ARRESTED AT MIAMI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

*By Izzy Kapnick*

*January 17, 2025 at 4:54 PM ET*

A Chinese traveler targeted in an FBI investigation of alleged high-level industrial espionage in the United States was detained Tuesday at Miami International Airport and charged with lying to customs agents.

Chengzhe Wang, 29, is in Federal custody after allegedly making false statements to Customs and Border Protection about his connection to the Chinese government and the nature of a past trip to the U.S., according to an FBI affidavit obtained by the Florida Trident.

When a search of his electronic devices found he'd shared a nuclear weapons research document on a Chinese app, Wang told agents he sent it because he "thought it contained porn pictures," according to the arrest affidavit.

Customs and Border Protection (CBP) intercepted the Chinese national when he flew from Mexico City to Miami on January 14. He was scheduled to board another flight, headed for Nicaragua, later that day, according to the affidavit.

Customs agents detained Wang on the basis of a June 2023 tip to Federal law enforcement that alleged operatives from Xugong Group, a large-scale Chinese construction-equipment firm, were entering the United States to “conduct illegal activities,” including “spying on intelligence” and “obtaining confidential technology in the same industry.” The tipster claimed those involved in the espionage “received training from China’s Security Intelligence Agency on how to provide false information to deceive U.S. customs to enter the country, and how to obtain intelligence in the U.S.”

Wang’s name and passport number were included in the tip, which specified he was an overseas product manager for a firm associated with the Xugong Group called XCMG Construction Machinery Co., according to the FBI. The Trident sent emails to both companies requesting comment prior to publishing and will update with any response.

Though the tipster—who wasn’t identified but is known by Federal agents—detailed extensive spying activity, Wang is not currently charged with espionage. The criminal complaint centers on the FBI’s claim that he concealed from customs agents that his firm is owned by the People’s Republic of China and that he’s a member of the Chinese Communist Youth League.

“When asked why Wang initially lied to CBP officers, Wang stated that he initially denied any current association with the Youth League because officials at XCMG advised him not to disclose membership to U.S. authorities,” FBI special agent Nolan Gallow wrote in the affidavit.

The affidavit alleges that during a search of Wang’s electronics and cellphone, customs agents found that a document he shared in the Chinese messaging app WeChat “contained 47 pages of schematics, graphs, and diagrams related to nuclear weapons research,” with text in Mandarin.

“An initial translation of the PDF document revealed the title as ‘Atomic Bomb,’” Gallow wrote.

When customs officers asked him to explain the document, Wang claimed he was under the impression he was sharing a file with pornography images, the FBI says. But a search of the document by the FBI found no such material and Wang later admitted there was none, according to the affidavit.

The search also turned up a photograph of a badge or credential with Mandarin wording for “Administrative Law Enforcement,” according to the affidavit.

“Based on my training and experience, this photograph appears to depict an official credential or badge case likely for use by [People’s Republic of China] law enforcement or some other PRC government agency,” Gallow wrote.

Wang further claimed he was on vacation during a visit to Dallas in September 2023. However, customs records showed he told agents at the time that he was in the United States for business purposes that included a visit to XCMG’s warehouses in Houston, the FBI says.

“Wang’s statements about his connection to a foreign government, affiliation with the CCP, and purpose of his 2023 trip to Dallas were materially false,” wrote the FBI’s Gallow.

The charge brought against Wang carries a maximum sentence of 5 years in prison for the base count, with an 8-year maximum if convicted with aggravating factors.

*About the author: Izzy Kapnick is reporter and editor based in South Florida. He has worked as a journalist in the Miami metro area for more than 15 years, covering crime, high-profile litigation, environmental torts, politics, and public health.*

Mr. CRANE. Thank you, sir.

Mr. LAZARUS, I want to come back to you. Do you believe the Chinese are engaged in unrestricted warfare with the United States, i.e. economic warfare attacks on critical infrastructure, espionage, theft, et cetera?

Mr. LAZARUS. Congressman, the—we’ve seen evidence time and time again, whether it be the FBI under former director Christopher Wray talking about how China-based hackers, whether it be Salt Typhoon, Volt Typhoon has infiltrated critical infrastructure throughout the United States. That would of course be a national security concern and that they are potentially prepositioning if there is ever a conflict with the United States, say over the straits of Taiwan or the South China Sea, that the Chinese could retaliate by shutting down some of that critical infrastructure. The concern

is that many of the same tactics, some of the same companies that are concerned here in the United States are also operating in Latin America and the in the Caribbean.

Mr. CRANE. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. GIMENEZ. The gentleman yields back.

I recognize the gentleman from New York, Mr. Kennedy.

Sorry, he left.

OK. I recognize the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Carter.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank our witnesses for being here today.

I'm deeply concerned about the long-term consequences of the Trump-Musk administration's systemic dismantling of USAID, foreign aid, and other international development programs. Actions that have significantly weakened America's global influence, especially on our own hemisphere.

In the past several months, critical U.S. investments in diplomacy and development have been slashed, frozen, or redirected to serve narrow political goals. This isn't just bad policy, it was a strategic mistake that has had real consequences on a national security and regional stability.

In Latin America, these decisions have been nothing short of a gift to authoritarian regimes in Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua. By retreating from our role as a champion of democracy and development we left a vacuum that autocrats have rushed to fill. We are tired of taking the lead instead of supporting reformers and pro-Democratic movements; we left them under-resourced and isolated, while despots like Nicholas Maduro tightened their grip. Foreign aid is not a charity. It a wise investment in stability, security, and American values.

When we help communities thrive and support Democratic institutions, we make it harder for authoritarianism, corruption, and extremism to take root. Cutting these programs undermines regional security and contributes to the very conditions violence, poverty, and political repression that drive migration to our Southern Border.

Rebuilding USAID and reaffirming our commitment to global development is not just morally right, it is strategically necessary. America must lead again, not just with the might of our military or the strength of our values and the reach of our engagement.

Dr. Berg, given that maritime shipping is heavily dominated by Chinese vessels, including those coming in and out of U.S. ports, what kind of insight does that give the Chinese into maritime traffic in the United States? How could China use this information to our detriment?

Mr. BERG. Thanks for the question, Congressman. I think we've seen multiple instances in which the Chinese have used ports as infrastructure, not just to have the PLA navy make port calls in some of the deep water ports, but all of that data, that information that is contained in a port is important for the Chinese. The comings and goings of ships, cargo manifest, with what frequency, this is all very important if we're talking about building safe and secure supply chains as well.

I had the privilege of being before this committee in February when we were talking about the very issue of ports. This issue also

came up then, specifically with reference to the Panama Canal, that drew Hong Kong-based ports that are at the strategic approaches to the canal. Also a critical issue, Congressman.

Mr. CARTER. In your testimony, you recommended enlisting neighbors like Bahamas, Dominican Republic, and Jamaica to combat intelligence gathering from China and Cuba. How can Federal international development system programs help achieve this goal?

Mr. BERG. Congressman, I would advocate that we build on Secretary of State Rubio's very successful visit to the Caribbean in recent weeks. I think it is important that the Secretary of State has already taken 2 trips to the region. In just over 2.5 months of his time in office. I think those countries once made aware of extent of Cuba's espionage activities and therefore their vulnerabilities would be quite willing to partner with us. It is in their interest just as it is in ours not to have Cuba snooping on their signal intelligence.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you.

Mr. LAZARUS, how can China use its investments in Cuba to disrupt shipping routes that lead to major U.S. ports? Like the Port of New Orleans or the Port of South Louisiana in my home State.

Mr. LAZARUS. Well, I understand that those 2 ports in the United States represent about 20 percent—more than 20 percent of cargo entering the United States, and the concern is that whether it be a Nuctech, whether it be a China Harbor Engineering Company, because China Harbor and China Communication construction corporation also have key projects in Cuba.

Those companies that have direct ties to the People's Liberation Army can gather information about U.S. port operations, cargo flows, potentially see our supply chain vulnerabilities. They can also use those areas a way to issue cyber attacks or cyber disruptions in and around the port operations. They could of course create plausible deniability which is of course an MO that they've been doing for quite sometimes as well.

Mr. CARTER. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. GIMENEZ. The gentleman yields.

I recognize the gentlewoman from South Carolina, Mrs. Biggs.

Mrs. BIGGS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to our guests today for highlighting these important aspects of our topic today.

So I have personally been to Key West and involved in military training there so this topic really does catch my attention. Also I would like to say that I'm excited about our current administration, the idea of increasing our innovation and rebuilding our military and strengthening our defense, our very purpose of this.

U.S. intelligence officials, military strategists, and regional experts have drawn parallels between China's current activity and the Cold War-era use of Cuba by the Soviet Union as a forward surveillance outpost. Yet the tools of today, especially in digital surveillance, constitute a sophisticated threat of a different order.

So my first question is for Mr. Martínez-Fernández. Are China's activities in Cuba more reminiscent of Cold War-style strategic encirclement or are they more aligned with a new model of digital influence and persistent surveillance?

Mr. MARTÍNEZ-FERNÁNDEZ. Thank you for the question, Congresswoman. I think that there are many aspects of China's engagement that are reminiscent of the Cold War-era engagement by the Soviet Union. They align primarily with or often with military and geo-strategic aims for those reasons.

I think certainly we're seeing an increased leveraging of biotechnologies, as well as the more deep economic ties that China has globally as compared to the Soviet Union. As part of what's being leveraged in Latin America and the Caribbean and with Cuba to create this broader surveillance and operational infrastructure for China.

That raises any concerns because obviously we saw the consequences and the risks during the Cold War of this presence from hostile extra-hemispheric actors just 90 miles off—on our shores. We're seeing that I think at a new level as I said because of these new and in some ways expanded capacities that the Chinese governments can employ because of its resources, because of its capacities.

Mrs. BIGGS. Thank you.

So my next question is for Dr. Berg. Could China's posture in Cuba serve as a springboard for influencing or disrupting U.S. diplomatic or military efforts outside the region such as in the Indo-Pacific?

Mr. BERG. Congresswoman, thank you for the question. I think it's critical. We hope this never happens, but if there is conflict in a different theater of the world, let's say there is a conflict in the Indo-Pacific, the United States if it is to come for example to Taiwan's aid, will need to shift forces from the Atlantic to the Pacific. China's ability to disrupt that process could be done through its activities in Cuba or as we heard at the February hearing at this very committee through some of those controls of the ports of the strategic approach to the Panama Canal.

There are multiple important critical choke points in this hemisphere that would be a part of that surge, that transition of forces from the Atlantic to the Pacific theaters where China's presence in the Caribbean, as my colleagues have pointed out, would be incredibly important. So they would have the ability in my opinion to attempt at least to block some of that shifting of force from the Atlantic to the Pacific, Congresswoman.

Mrs. BIGGS. Thank you so much. I yield back.

Mr. GIMENEZ. The gentlewoman yields.

I now recognize the gentleman from New York, Mr. Garbarino.

Mr. GARBARINO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Berg, China's state-owned tech companies like Huawei and ZTE have played a key role in building Cuba's digital infrastructure. These companies are known to have deep ties to China's military intelligence services and their equipment has been flagged globally for creating back doors enabling surveillance. How likely is it that these Chinese-built networks are enabling Beijing to conduct the same cyber operations or espionage targeting U.S. Government or commercial entities, either directly or by proxy through Cuban servers?

Mr. BERG. Congresswoman, I think it's—Congressman, excuse me—I think it's very likely that that's what they are attempting. Excuse me.

Mr. GARBARINO. That's OK. I've been called worse.

Mr. BERG. Excuse me again. Congressman, I think it is very likely that that is what's happening that Cuba is offering China some of the best real estate that it can possibly have, 90 miles off, off U.S. shores. We've seen in multiple other instances how Chinese state-owned enterprises like Huawei and ZTE have provided a back door in other contexts such on the African Union and other organizations. So I see no reason to believe why we shouldn't believe that they are trying to do the same against the United States, their principle competitor in the 21st Century.

Mr. GARBARINO. Has there been credible analysis of confirmation that Chinese intelligence has used Huawei- or ZTE-connected infrastructure in Cuba to intercept sensitive U.S. communications or conduct cyber—I mean, we believe they are, but has there been any analysis or confirmation?

Mr. BERG. Congressman, not on the open-source side. What we've collected here is the facilities that we think are likely the Chinese are using and we've done this in conjunction with some of the public reporting that's been done.

In fact, going back to your previous question on Huawei and ZTE, *Politico* and the *Wall Street Journal* are the 2 who are first to report on this and felt that there was a high degree of confidence that some of the facilities were in fact being used by the PRC because our intelligence agencies, you know, this is reported in the open source, were tracking individuals from Huawei and ZTE coming and going at some of these facilities.

But I think the answer to your question is more likely to be found on the high side, which is again why I've recommended in my testimony that all Members of Congress should be able to get access to a Classified briefing on this topic.

Mr. GARBARINO. Thank you very much.

Mr. MARTÍNEZ-FERNÁNDEZ. the deeper China's tech infrastructure is embedded in Cuban society, the harder it becomes on-line. I mean, true for anywhere just look at London, Huawei technology is all over London.

So this creates a long-term dependency that goes far beyond hardware itself. What strategic leverage does China gain over Cuba by controlling the architecture of its digital ecosystem.

Mr. MARTÍNEZ-FERNÁNDEZ. Thank you for the question. I think it's crucial. It's a central part of China's strategy, you know. In Cuba, there's the more willing partner that doesn't necessarily acquire this same level of active pressuring or maligned influence, but certainly building up capacities over critical infrastructure such as telecommunications for China puts countries like Cuba and Democratic nations across the Americas at a significant dependence on the Chinese Communist Party.

That's the kind of thing that I think is a significant vulnerability, particularly in the case of conflict, but as we move, we've seen elsewhere the realm of economic and infrastructure capacities and influence being leveraged beyond that sphere going into the political and into the military where this capacity is then used to push gov-

ernments to make decisions that are more favorable to the Chinese Communist Party.

So it does create significant questions, particularly for the longer term. If we are blessed with seeing a shift in Cuba as far as a return to democracy, these would be challenges that a future Cuban government would have to confront.

Mr. GARBARINO. You mentioned actually in your answer about how this could be in conflict. How could they leverage these vulnerabilities in a regional conflict or confrontation involving the United States?

Mr. MARTÍNEZ-FERNÁNDEZ. I think as far as telecommunications this feeds into the present telecommunication infrastructure, and this feeds into a broader intelligence capacity for China which is substantial as we've discussed as going into signals intelligence, even to deep fake monitoring.

We also see a worrying build-up around critical infrastructure, maritime routes where the capacity for disruptive action and submersion is substantial and could frankly cripple the U.S. economy in aspects of U.S. military planning, even limiting the capacity for example of transit for U.S. military resources and warships across for example, the Panama Canal or other key points. So it's substantial.

Mr. GARBARINO. I ran out of time so I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. GIMENEZ. The gentleman yields back.

This hearing kind-of whets our appetite and I think we're going to take Dr. Berg's advice and we need to go into a Classified setting to look at the depth of this issue and how serious it is to American security and get us some folks that can give it to us in a Classified setting.

So I want to thank the witnesses for your time and testimony. Members of the subcommittee may have additional questions for the witnesses and we would ask the witnesses to respond to these in writing. Pursuant to committee rule VII(E) the hearing report will be open for 10 days.

Without objection, this subcommittee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:58 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

